

“Virtue” Ethics

VIRTUE explained. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle etc. Aristotle, for example, defined five character types, from the great-souled man to the moral monster. They focused mainly on virtues (character traits) as the subjects of ethics, esp. the cardinal virtues of courage, temperance, justice, wisdom, etc.. ***

In the thirteenth century Aquinas added faith, hope, and charity to these” in order to synthesize Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman. The most important for ethics is “CHARITY.” What did Aquinas mean by “charity”? The second of Jesus’s two commandments is "Love thy neighbor as thyself." Love here is closest to the Greek sense of agape. It is the opposite of fear as in “Perfect LOVE casteth out fear.” Related virtues are COMPASSION, SYMPATHY, and EMPATHY and an obvious related skill is THE SYMPATHETIC IMAGINATION.

Jainism: Of the five vows, "AHIMSA" is the foundational vow: non-harming of sentient beings, i.e. uncompromising reverence for all life, surpassing in this respect the Ahimsa vows of the Hindus and Buddhists. Ahimsa is based on extending knowledge/experience of one’s own pain to others’ experience of pain.

Hinduism: In the Upanishads, the three virtues are "self-restraint," giving or SELF-SACRIFICE, and COMPASSION (Basically, setting aside the ego and its own narrow self-interests). In the Gita AHIMSA is strongly recommended (16.2, 17.14) as well as concern for the ‘welfare of all’ and ‘desiring the good of every living creature’ (3.20, 5.25). For Krishna an ethical person is one who is “without hatred of any creature, friendly and compassionate without possessiveness and self-pride” (12:13) .

Buddhism: Benevolence is central, especially as expressed in the four sublime virtues of "LOVINGKINDNESS, COMPASSION, sympathetic joy, and equanimity." There are also virtues related to conscientiousness and self-restraint. In Mahayana Buddhism the highest ideal is the Bodhisatva who has infinite commitment to others and is an expression of the widest limits of altruism.

Do you want any of these traits to define your ethics?

LOVE (AGAPE), LOVINGKINDNESS, COMPASSION, SYMPATHY, EMPATHY, THE SYMPATHETIC IMAGINATION, AHIMSA, or SELF-SACRIFICE.

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Studying your role model may help you advance your awareness and practice of this virtue in everyday life, especially in the kind of leadership, social situations that the framers of the ethics requirement had in mind. By trying to increase your capacity for a specific virtue, presumably you will be raising consciousness of the many ethical issues that arise daily, as well as your options for responding. You will be trying to create a new self, maybe daily, maybe even minute by minute.

THE EXAMPLE OF COMPASSION. Recognizing that “There is a long line of thought that finds the source of ethics in the attitudes of benevolence and sympathy for others that most people have,” an obvious example would be “COMPASSION,” a key virtue in four of the five ethical traditions cited above.

EXAMPLE 1. In a Christian context, perhaps your motto would be “Perfect love casteth out fear.” Your daily practice then would be to become aware that you have a choice between love and fear almost every minute, and then trying to shift from fear to love in that moment, especially in leadership, social situations. Most of your essay would be writing about those experiences and what you learned from them about practical ethics, especially in leadership, social situations.

EXAMPLE 2. What would it be like to try to increase your capacity for compassion in your daily life? An obvious example of how pursuit of this virtue could occupy you daily is compassion for animals. As you go about your day, you will be making many decisions involving treatment of pets, use of animals for food, clothing, entertainment, etc. Describe this experience, especially in leadership, social situations.

BOOK REVIEW

CHRISTOPHER FREIMAN

Environmental Virtue Ethics, edited by Ronald Sandler and Philip Cafaro. New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005, pp. 240. ISBN 0-7425-3389-1 (hardback) , \$75.00; ISBN 0-7425-3390-5 (paperback) \$28.95.

For most of its life, environmental ethics has been the province of consequentialism and deontology. But a growing number of environmental ethicists have found these act-centered theories too thin and limited to attend to the complexity of ecological problems. Some see virtue ethics as promising a richer and more muscular approach to environmental ethics. The new anthology *Environmental Virtue Ethics* delivers on this promise.

The book, edited by Ronald Sandler and Philip Cafaro, features fourteen selections—ten original contributions and four reprints of classic papers. The basic theme of environmental virtue ethics as a theory and *Environmental Virtue Ethics* as a volume is not that the environment is a bearer of rights or source of intrinsic value, but that an appreciation of nature is an ingredient in a happy and flourishing life. Virtue ethics considers character to be a central ethical concern and a critical part of living well. Rather than ask, as deontologists and utilitarians might, “What should I do?,” virtue ethicists ask, “What should I be?”

According to the first section of the book, environmental ethicists have implicitly been asking themselves this question for years. The first

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two articles form a virtual genealogy of environmental virtue ethics, as Louke van Wensveen and Philip Cafaro examine virtue ethics' hidden role in the development of modern environmental ethics. Cafaro presents an account of historical exemplars of environmental virtue. Wensveen argues that the seeming poverty of "ecological virtue language" is partly due to environmental ethics' evolution within a specific cultural niche. Environmental ethics traditionally grappled with questions of practical political and legal import. As a result, the discipline adapted to the problems of rights and costs and benefits rather than character and human flourishing. Wensveen quips, "I imagine that appealing to a chemical company's love of nature in a court of law would be as effective as appealing to an ex-spouse's love of his or her children in a child custody case" (17). Nonetheless, Wensveen chronicles how virtue language has crept, largely unnoticed, into the environmental ethical dialogue.

The second part focuses on the theoretical dimensions of environmental virtue ethics. The authors explore the ways in which virtue ethics can offer a fresh perspective on perennial environmental ethical questions. Thomas Hill's seminal "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments" is a welcome inclusion. Hill inspires the movement to environmental virtue theorizing when he advises us to ask not simply, "What interests or rights are at stake when one destroys the natural environment?" but also, "What sort of person would do such a thing?" Indeed, we might view this entire volume as an extended attempt to answer to Hill's question.

The next part of the book investigates the problems of defining environmental virtue and distinguishing it from anthropocentric virtue. The fourth and final section applies environmental virtue theory to specific ecological problems. The two articles, written by Peter Wenz and Ronald Sandler, use the virtue ethical framework to interrogate the morality of consumerism and genetically modified crops, respectively. This final section helps to allay an enduring criticism of virtue ethics as a whole: that it cannot be applied to real world problems. Sandler's piece in particular profitably uses the tools of virtue ethics to critically reflect upon both the moral problems raised by genetically modified crops and their proposed resolutions.

The role of enlightened self-interest in environmental ethics is a recurrent theme. Against a public dialogue that pits human interests and

ecological interests in conflict, this book is a refreshing reminder that human flourishing and ecological flourishing are not enemies. Human interests, properly understood, are in harmony with the interests of the environment. We ought to view our relationship with nature as positive-sum.

This positive-sum outlook permeates Philip Cafaro's piece, "Gluttony, Arrogance, Greed, and Apathy: An Exploration of Environmental Vice." Cafaro forcefully argues that the vices that hinder human flourishing also hinder ecological flourishing. Gluttony warps an agent's character such that she values feeding her belly more than her mind. This is bad for her—a person with such corrupted priorities will not experience deep happiness. But gluttony is also bad for the environment—an increased demand for food causes an increased demand for agriculture, which in turn causes habitat degradation and possibly extinction for certain species.

The glutton's failing is her ignorance of what truly matters. Vice twists our judgment of value, which is evident in popular attitudes toward the environment. Vice, as Cafaro notes, leads us to "crude views of the good life" (146). He who never looks up from his television or his off-road vehicle to witness the splendor of nature surrenders a priceless value for the sake of a cheap one. Nature offers us endless possibilities for wonder, understanding, and self-realization. The life of the person too arrogant or apathetic to appreciate such values is impoverished. As Cafaro puts it, we harm nature "because we do not understand our obligations to others or our own self-interest. We falsely assume that we can separate harms to nature and harms to humanity, harms to others and harms to ourselves. We do not see that environmental vices do not just harm nature; they harm us and the people around us" (153). We should examine, and ultimately transform, our attitudes toward nature. Both humanity and nature will be better off as a result. But how are we to do this?

Cafaro's other article, "Thoreau, Leopold, and Carson: Toward an Environmental Virtue Ethics," suggests that role models can guide our moral maturation. Virtue ethicists have long emphasized the importance of exemplars in moral education. It is not enough to counsel aspiring moral agents to treat the environment as the virtuous person would. We need to know how the virtuous person actually treats the environment.

To this end, we can look to the lives of actual people who epitomize environmental virtue.

Through his analysis of Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, and Rachel Carson, Cafaro crafts a compelling piece of moral biography. He describes, for instance, Thoreau's impassioned relationship with Walden Pond. We see how Thoreau achieved peace and happiness and meaning through a life of simplicity; we also see how Thoreau's devotion to the environment was borne not from a begrudging concern for duties or a calculation of costs and benefits, but from a sense of joy in living in nature. By describing Thoreau's own character, Cafaro crystallizes the Thoreauvian virtues of curiosity, imagination, and dedication and, in doing so, stokes the reader's aspiration to achieve something similar in his own life. Cafaro's papers will be of interest to virtue ethicists generally, not only environmental ethicists. *Environmental Virtue Ethics'* ability to capture the symbiotic relationship between virtue ethics and environmental ethics is one of its cardinal values.

No article embodies such reciprocity better than "Virtue Ethics and Repugnant Conclusions" by Matt Zwolinski and David Schmidtz [their names are reversed in print due to a typesetting error to be corrected in future editions]. Zwolinski and Schmidtz argue that both utilitarianism and deontology are incomplete ways of moral theorizing. Adapting an argument from Derek Parfit, they present a challenge to all act-centered moral theories. As Zwolinski and Schmidtz note, a "total utilitarian" is committed to the principle that an act is right if and only if it maximizes the world's aggregate happiness. Yet this view commits the utilitarian to the "repugnant conclusion" that for any population in which all people have a very high quality of life, there is some much larger population whose existence is judged better even though its members have a far lower quality of life. They argue further that the "repugnant conclusion" also presents a problem for average utilitarians—theorists who claim that an act is right if and only if it maximizes average utility.

Zwolinski and Schmidtz, however, go one step further and declare the "repugnant conclusion" to be a problem for *all* act-centered theories, including deontology. Assuming that consequences play *some* role in evaluating states of affairs and that no rights are violated in the population increase, the deontologist is unable to offer any countervailing moral considerations against the superiority of a massive population with a low quality of life to a smaller population with a much higher quality of life.

The repugnant conclusions problem has obvious relevance for an environmental issue like overpopulation. Zwolinski and Schmidtz contend that utilitarianism and deontology are incomplete, not because they formulate bad answers, but because they ask the wrong question. Inspired by Thomas Hill (although Hill does not go so far as to claim that deontology is asking the wrong question), Zwolinski and Schmidtz assert that we ought to ask ourselves, “What sort of person would prefer a huge but fairly miserable population to a smaller but happier one?” They conclude that the sort of person who prefers a massive and miserable population “does not possess the humility that would lead a more virtuous person to see value in human society playing an appropriately limited role in the biotic community, for nonanthropocentric as well as anthropocentric reasons” (112). To combat the repugnant conclusions problem, we need to add agent-centered considerations to our moral toolkit. In a world in which ecological considerations are becoming increasingly morally salient, both utilitarianism and deontology are unsatisfactory. “Virtue Ethics and Repugnant Conclusions” presents a challenge both for environmental ethics and for ethical theory as a whole.

While *Environmental Virtue Ethics* demonstrates the possibilities for a mutually beneficial exchange between virtue ethics and environmental ethics, the fecundity of the exchange varies across the selections. For instance, Holmes Rolston III dissents from virtue ethics, arguing that virtue and human flourishing are important considerations in environmental ethics, but are only “half the truth.” If we value nature only as fodder for virtuous activity, we miss the point of valuing nature. We ought to value nature for its own sake, not simply as a means to human flourishing.

Rolston’s argument is an environmentally informed version of an argument familiar to virtue ethicists. On the one hand, virtue ethicists claim that the ultimate aim of living virtuously is to flourish. On the other hand, if we help another simply to perfect our own characters, something is wrong. The very motive is itself a character flaw.

Readers of this volume might reformulate Hill’s question and ask, “What sort of person values the environment as a mere means to perfecting his virtue?” The answer seems to be, not a virtuous person. Narcissism is not virtuous. A benevolent agent values other people’s welfare for their own sake, not for the sake of perfecting his or her own virtue. Similarly, the environmentally virtuous agent values nature for its own sake, not for the sake of perfecting his or her own virtue.

In his article, "Synergistic Environmental Virtues: Consumerism and Human Flourishing," Peter Wenz investigates the virtue theoretical implications of consumerism. Virtue ethics seems uniquely well-suited to frame questions of consumption. However, his piece would likely be of more interest to readers of this book if his critique of a market economy came from a more virtue-based perspective. Wenz does indeed discuss vice and its manifestation in consumer culture. But while he offers an interesting analysis of consumerism's relationship to traditional virtues and vices, one wishes he devoted more space to this virtue theoretical critique and less to his generalized critique of a market economy.

Overall, as both an addition to the literature of virtue ethics and a signpost for a new direction in environmental ethics, this volume is a value. There is no guarantee that virtue ethics will transform environmental ethics as it has ethical theory as a whole. However, *Environmental Virtue Ethics* is a promising step toward a viable environmental virtue ethic.

Environmental Virtue Ethics

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Introduction: Environmental Virtue Ethics

Ronald Sandler

It is a wholesome and necessary thing for us to turn again to the earth and in the contemplation of her beauties to know of wonder and humility.

—Rachel Carson

When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.

—Aldo Leopold

All the wild world is beautiful, and it matters but little where we go . . . everywhere and always we are in God's eternal beauty and love.

—John Muir

Those things of real worth in life are worth going to any length in love and respect to safeguard.

—Julia Butterfly Hill

There is at least one certainty regarding the human relationship with nature: there is no getting away from it. One simply cannot opt out of a relationship with the natural world. On some accounts this is because humans are themselves a part of nature. On others it is because we must breathe, eat, drink, and decompose, each of which involves an exchange with the natural world. But whereas a relationship with nature is given, the nature of that relationship is not. Both human history and the contemporary world are replete with diverse and contradictory ways of conceiving of and interacting with the natural environment. Environmental ethics as a field of inquiry is the attempt to understand the human relationship with the environment (including natural ecosystems, agricultural ecosystems, urban ecosystems, and the individuals that populate and constitute those systems) and determine the norms that should govern our interactions with it. These norms can be either norms of action or norms of character. The project

of specifying the latter is *environmental virtue ethics*, and a particular account of the character dispositions that we ought to have regarding the environment is an *environmental virtue ethic*.

Why Is There a Need for an Environmental Virtue Ethic?

The central ethical question is, "How should one live?" Answering this question of course requires providing an account of what actions we ought and ought not to perform. But an account of right action—whether a set of rules, a general principle, or a decision-making procedure—does not answer it entirely. A complete answer will inform not only what we ought to do but also what kind of person we ought to be. An adequate ethical theory must provide an ethic of character, and our lived ethical experience belies the claim that one's character is merely the sum of one's actions. Environmental ethics is simply ethics as it pertains to human-environment interactions and relationships. So an adequate environmental ethic likewise requires not only an ethic of action—one that provides guidance regarding what we ought and ought not to do to the environment—but also an ethic of character—one that provides guidance on what attitudes and dispositions we ought and ought not to have regarding the environment.

Consider the four widely regarded environmental heroes quoted above: Rachel Carson (naturalist and author of *Silent Spring*), John Muir (naturalist and founder of the Sierra Club), Aldo Leopold (wildlife ecologist and author of *A Sand County Almanac*), and Julia Butterfly Hill (activist who lived two years atop a threatened redwood). Why do we admire these individuals? Is it their accomplishments in defense of the environment? Yes. The sacrifices they made for those accomplishments? Of course. Their capacity to motivate others to take action? To be sure. But it is not only what they have done and the legacy they have left that we admire. It is also them—the individuals who managed those accomplishments, made those sacrifices, and have left those legacies. That is, we admire them also for their character—their fortitude, compassion, wonder, sensitivity, respectfulness, courage, love, appreciation, tenacity, and gratitude.

It is not always easy to keep this dimension of environmentalism in mind. Public discourse regarding the environment tends to be framed almost exclusively in legislative and legal terms, so it is tempting to become fixated on what activities and behaviors regarding the environment are or ought to be legal. After all, we might restrict the use of off-road vehicles in an ecologically sensitive area and take legal action against those who fail to adhere to that boundary; but we will not legislate against ecological insensitivity or indifference itself, and no one will be called to court merely for possessing those attitudes. We legislate regarding behavior, not character; policy concerns actions, not attitudes; and the courts apply the standards accordingly.

But as our environmental heroes remind us—both by example and by word—we must not take so narrow a perspective of our relationship with the environment. It is

always *people*—with character traits, attitudes, and dispositions—who perform actions, promote policies, and lobby for laws. So while we decry removing mountaintops, filling wetlands, and poisoning wolves and we make our case against these practices before lawmakers, the courts, and the public, we must also consider the character of persons responsible for them. Indeed, how one interacts with the environment is largely determined by one's disposition toward it, and it seems to many that the enabling cause of reckless environmental exploitation is the attitude that nature is merely a boundless resource for satisfying human wants and needs. In Muir's words, "No dogma taught by the present civilization seems to form so insuperable an obstacle in the way of a right understanding of the relations which culture sustains to wildness as that which regards the world as made especially for the uses of man." So it would seem that any significant change in our environmental practices and policies is going to require a substantial shift in our dispositions toward the environment. In this way proper character is indispensable for facilitating right action and behavior.

But as our environmental heroes also remind us—again, by example and by word—environmental virtue is not merely instrumentally valuable as the disposition to identify and then perform proper actions; it is also valuable in itself. It is life-affirming and life-enhancing. Those who possess it are better off than those who do not, for they are able to find reward, satisfaction, and comfort from their relationship with nature; and it is their character—their capacity to appreciate, respect, and love nature—that opens them to these benefits. "Those who dwell, as scientists or laymen, among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life," writes Carson; and according to Muir, "Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul alike." To those who are receptive to it, nature is a source of joy, peace, renewal, and self-knowledge.

Once the need for an environmental virtue ethic is recognized two questions immediately present themselves. First, what are the attitudes and dispositions that constitute environmental virtue? Second, what is the proper role of an ethic of character in an environmental ethic? These two issues—specifying environmental virtue and identifying the appropriate role of virtue in an environmental ethic—are central to environmental virtue ethics and largely orient the philosophical work that appears in this collection. The remainder of this introduction is intended to serve as a primer on these issues and to locate the contributions in this collection within these philosophical themes.

Specifying Environmental Virtue

The environmental virtues are the proper dispositions or character traits for human beings to have regarding their interactions and relationships with the environment. The environmentally virtuous person is disposed to respond—both emotionally and through action—to the environment and the nonhuman individuals (whether inanimate, living, or conscious) that populate it in an excellent or fine way. But although this formal account may be accurate, it does not provide any substantive description of what the environmentally virtuous person will actually be like. So how

does one establish which dispositions regarding the environment are constitutive of virtue and which are constitutive of vice (and which are neither)? That is, how does one go about providing a substantive account of the environmental virtues and vices?

Perhaps the most common strategy for specifying environmental virtue is to argue by extension from standard interpersonal virtues, that is, from virtues that are typically applied to relationships among humans. Each interpersonal virtue is normative for a particular range of items, activities, or interactions, and that range is its sphere or field of applicability. For example, the field of honesty is the revealing or withholding of truth; the field of temperance is bodily pleasures and pains; and the field of generosity is the giving and withholding of material goods. Extensionists attempt to expand the range of certain interpersonal virtues to include nonhuman entities by arguing that the features that characterize their fields in interpersonal interaction or relationships also obtain in (at least some) environmental contexts. The virtues, they conclude, should therefore be normative in those environmental contexts as well. For example, if compassion is the appropriate disposition to have toward the suffering of other human beings and there is no relevant moral difference between human suffering and the suffering of nonhuman animals, then one should be compassionate toward the suffering of nonhuman animals. Or if gratitude is the appropriate disposition toward other human beings from whom one has benefited and one has similarly benefited from the natural environment, then gratitude is also an appropriate disposition to have toward the natural environment. Extension from the substance of the interpersonal virtues is thus one strategy for specifying the environmentally virtuous person.

A second strategy is to appeal to agent benefit. On this approach, what establishes a particular character trait as constitutive of environmental virtue is that it typically benefits its possessor. This is a wide-ranging approach bounded only by the limit to the ways in which the environment benefits moral agents. The environment provides not only material goods—such as clean water and air—but also aesthetic goods, recreational goods, and a location to exercise and develop physically, intellectually, morally, and aesthetically. That the environment can benefit individuals in such ways straightforwardly justifies a disposition to preserve these opportunities and goods. But it does not only justify a disposition toward conservation and preservation. It justifies cultivating the kind of character traits that allow one to enjoy those goods. The natural environment provides the opportunity for aesthetic experience, but that benefit accrues only to those who possess the disposition to appreciate the natural environment in that way. It provides the opportunity for intellectual challenge and reward, but those benefits come only to those who are disposed first to wonder and then to try to understand nature. The natural environment provides plentiful opportunities for meaningful relationships with its denizens, but those relationships are only possible for those who are open to having them. So considerations of which environmental dispositions benefit their possessor (and allow their possessor to be benefited by the natural environment) are relevant to the substantive specification of environmental virtue. In this way environmental virtue ethics emphasizes the role that enlightened self-interest can play in promoting or motivating environmental consciousness and its corresponding

behavior in a way that reinforces rather than undermines the other-regarding aspects of environmental ethics. It allows for environmental ethics to be self-interested without being egoistic.

A third strategy for the specification of environmental virtue is to argue from considerations of human excellence. On this approach what establishes a particular character trait as constitutive of environmental virtue is that it makes its possessor a good human being. What it means to be a good human being—to flourish as a human being—is typically understood naturalistically. That is, it is understood in terms of the characteristic features of the life of members of the human species. Human beings are, for example, social beings. Excellence as a human being therefore involves character dispositions that promote the good functioning of social groups and encourage one to maintain healthy relationships with members in the group. A human being who is disposed to undermine social cohesion, disrupt the conditions that make cooperation among individuals possible, and sour relationships with others is properly described as deviant. Such a person fails to be a good human being precisely in virtue of his or her antisocial disposition. Many environmental philosophers have argued that a proper naturalistic understanding of human beings will locate them not only socially (as members of the human community) but also ecologically (as members of the broader biotic community). If this is correct, then excellence as a human being would include dispositions to maintain and promote the well-being of the larger ecological community. Given that the well-being of the ecological community is threatened by further habitat fragmentation and biodiversity loss, a disposition to oppose these would thereby be constitutive of environmental virtue. A human being who lacked these dispositions would, from the perspective of human beings as members of the biotic community, be properly described as deviant. Considerations of human excellence need not, however, be confined to secular or naturalistic accounts of environmental virtue. Human excellence is often understood by religious traditions in a way that transcends the natural by connecting it with divine or cosmic purposes. For example, if it is the divinely proscribed role of human beings that they be stewards of the land, then the environmental virtues will be those character traits or dispositions that make human beings reliable and effective stewards.

A fourth strategy for specifying environmental virtue is to study the character traits of individuals who are recognized as environmental role models. By examining the life, work, and character of exemplars of environmental excellence we may be able to identify particular traits that are conducive to, or constitutive of, that excellence. The lives of John Muir, Rachel Carson, and Aldo Leopold, for example, are not just compelling narratives; they also instruct us on how to improve ourselves and our approach to the natural world. Environmental role models of course need not be such public or renowned figures as Carson, Muir, and Leopold. Exemplars of environmental excellence can be found in local communities and in many organizations working for environmental protection and improvement. No doubt many of us have been benefited by such people, not only by their accomplishments but also by the guidance, inspiration, and example they provide.

These four approaches to the specification of environmental virtue—extensionism, considerations of benefit to agent, considerations of human excellence, and the study of

role models—are not mutually exclusive. A particular disposition might draw support from all four approaches. Indeed, in the contributions in this collection one often finds them working in concert. Collectively they provide a rich variety of resources for thinking about the substance of environmental virtue.

The Role of Environmental Virtue in Environmental Ethics

A complete environmental ethic will include both an account of how one ought to interact with the natural environment and an account of the character dispositions that one ought to have regarding the natural environment. But what is the proper relationship between these two? This is an instance of the more general (and very much live) question in moral philosophy: What is the appropriate role of virtue in ethical theory?

Some moral philosophers believe that the virtues are simply dispositions to do the right thing. In the context of environmental ethics this would imply that environmental virtue is merely the disposition to act according to the rules, principles, or norms of action of the correct environmental ethic. On this account the environmental virtues are strictly instrumental and subordinate to right action. First one determines what the right ways to act or behave regarding the environment are, and then one determines which character dispositions tend to produce that behavior. Those dispositions are the environmental virtues.

I argued earlier that environmental virtue is instrumental to promoting proper action. The environmentally virtuous person—precisely because of his or her virtue—will be disposed both to recognize the right thing and to do it for the right reasons. However, there is more to how one ought to be in the world than the rules, principles, or guidelines of moral action. For example, it might not be morally required that one appreciate the beauty or complexity of the natural environment, but those who are disposed to do so are benefited and so better off than those who are not. So although it is undoubtedly true that the environmental virtues are dispositions to act well regarding the environment, they are not only that. As we have seen, they can be excellences or beneficial to their possessor in their own right, not merely insofar as they tend to produce right action.

Moreover, environmental virtue might provide the sensitivity or wisdom necessary for the application of action-guiding rules and principles to concrete situations. At a minimum, this sensitivity is required to determine which rules or principles are applicable to which situations, as well as for determining what course of action they recommend in those situations where they are operative. But it may also be indispensable in adjudicating between conflicting demands of morality or resolving moral dilemmas that arise from a plurality of sources of value and justification. Indeed, many moral philosophers have argued that it is implausible and unreasonable to believe that there is some finite set of rules or principles that can be applied by any human moral agent in any situation to determine what the proper course of action is in that situation. If

they are correct—if action guidance cannot always be accomplished by moral rules and principles alone—then the wisdom and sensitivity that are part of virtue (including environmental virtue) are in some situations indispensable for determining or identifying right action (including environmentally right action).

Some moral philosophers believe that virtue should play an even more prominent or fundamental role within ethical theory than it is afforded in the previous account. These virtue ethicists consider an ethic of character to be theoretically prior to an ethic of action. On this approach to moral philosophy an action is right if and only if it is the virtuous thing to do, it hits the target of virtue, or it is what the virtuous person would do under the circumstances. So a substantive account of the virtues and the virtuous person informs what actions one ought or ought not to perform. In the context of environmental ethics this would imply that reflections on the content of the virtues and studying the character traits and behavior of environmentally virtuous people are what ultimately inform how we ought to behave regarding the environment.

There is thus a range of roles—from instrumental to foundational—that environmental virtue might play within a complete environmental ethic. This is not, however, to claim that each position is equally defensible. I have, for example, argued that a merely instrumental role for environmental virtue is too narrow. But those arguments notwithstanding, it is very much an unsettled issue what the proper role (or roles) of virtue is in an adequate environmental ethic, and the reader will find a sampling of the range of possibilities in the selections in this collection.

The Selections

The selections—which consist of ten original contributions written specifically for this collection, as well as reprints of four key previously published works on the topic—are divided into four sections. In this first section, “Recognizing Environmental Virtue Ethics,” Louke van Wensveen and Philip Cafaro reflect on the roles that considerations of virtue and character have traditionally played in environmental discourse. In “The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Language” Wensveen tracks this history by reviewing the language that environmentalists and environmental ethicists, both secular and religious, have used to characterize their environmental ethics. She finds virtue language ubiquitous in these articulations. Indeed, she writes that she is “yet to come across a piece of ecologically sensitive philosophy, theology, or ethics that does not in some way incorporate virtue language.” Moreover, she finds the discourse to be integral, diverse, dialectic, dynamic, and visionary. Virtue language is not only everywhere in the discourse, it is indispensable to the discourse. Virtue language, Wensveen concludes, puts us in touch with a rich set of evaluative concepts and perspectives, and if afforded sufficient attention, it can expand and enhance our capacity to respond to environmental issues. As she says, “One more language is one more chance.”

In “Thoreau, Leopold, and Carson: Toward an Environmental Virtue Ethics,” Cafaro tracks the role of virtue and character in environmental discourse by reflecting on the lives and writings of three widely influential and respected environmental figures: Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, and Rachel Carson. Although these models of

environmental excellence lived very different lives and expressed their virtue in diverse ways, we nonetheless find among them certain commonalities. These commonalities, Cafaro argues, are characteristic of environmental excellence and must be embraced by any environmental virtue ethic worth the name. They include putting economic life in its proper place, cultivating scientific knowledge, extending moral considerability beyond human beings, promoting wilderness protection, and believing in the goodness of life (both human and nonhuman). Cafaro also emphasizes the importance of these environmental heroes as examples of individuals who live well with nature. Their lives suggest that "greater attention to our true happiness would do as much to protect the environment as the acceptance of the intrinsic value of wild nature."

In the second section of the collection, "Environmental Virtue Ethics Theory," Thomas Hill Jr., Holmes Rolston III, Laura Westra, Bill Shaw, and David Schmidtz and Matt Zwolinski consider the proper role for environmental virtue ethics within environmental ethics. In "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments" Hill argues that there are cases of environmental behavior that are intuitively improper—for example, needlessly paving over a patch of natural landscape—whose impropriety is best understood in the context of an account of human excellence and the dispositions that we ought to express in our environmental interactions. Hill argues that such behavior, or "even [seeing nature's] value solely in cost/benefit terms," betrays the absence of traits that are the natural facilitators for developing proper humility and appreciation. If he is correct, then sometimes the answer to the question "What is wrong with treating the environment that way?" is intelligible only against the background of an answer to the question, "What is wrong with the kind of person who would do that?"

However, in "Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole," Rolston warns against casting environmental virtue in too fundamental a role in environmental ethics. Although environmental virtue is an intrinsically good state, valuable to its possessor, and enables attunement to "the flow of nature," we must not identify human virtue or excellence as the source of natural value. Natural entities do not derive their value from their relationship to human virtue and flourishing; nature and natural entities have value in themselves. Indeed, environmental virtue is only intelligible as a responsiveness to the independent value of nature. After all, "it is hard to gain much excellence of character from appreciating an otherwise worthless thing." Rolston thus finds environmental virtue ethics dangerous to the extent that its focus on human flourishing distracts us from the intrinsic value of natural entities that makes environmental virtue possible. "Our deeper ethical achievement," he writes, "needs to focus on values as intrinsic achievements in wild nature. These virtues within us need to attend to values without us."

Westra, like Rolston, believes that natural value is not derived from the value of humans or human flourishing. However, in "Virtue Ethics as Foundational for a Global Ethic" she argues that virtue ethics has a foundational role nonetheless. It provides an account of flourishing—for humans, nonhumans, and natural systems—which it is the goal of a global ethic to promote. This foundation justifies the need for both ecological integrity and environmental or ecological rights because all individuals (human and nonhuman) depend on ecosystem services for their survival, health, and

optimum functioning. This is true (in regard to humans) not only for Aristotelian accounts of human excellence but also for Kantian accounts that identify human functioning with moral agency, for the cultivation and exercise of moral agency depend on the capacity of natural ecosystems to provide their preconditions (e.g., food, clear air, and clean water). So both ecosystem integrity and human rights are supported by virtue ethics. But because international discourse is largely framed in terms of human rights, Westra urges that "we must emphasize the human rights dimension of this ethic and its implication for international law."

In "A Virtue Ethics Approach to Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic," Shaw examines Leopold's land ethic—that one ought to promote the integrity, beauty, and stability of the biotic community—from a virtue ethics perspective. He argues that operationalizing or enacting the land ethic requires cultivating certain virtues, which he calls "land virtues," that not only dispose individuals to act in ways that promote the integrity, stability, and beauty of natural systems but also mitigate some of the difficulties that arise when the land ethic is treated strictly as an account of right action. Shaw suggests three land virtues—respect (or ecological sensitivity), prudence, and practical judgment—each of which he considers to be an adaptation of a conventional interpersonal virtue. However, any character trait that contributes to an attitude of community with the land and promotes its integrity, stability, and beauty is properly a land virtue.

In the final contribution of this section, "Virtue Ethics and Repugnant Conclusions," Schmidtz and Zwolinski argue that virtue ethics offers indispensable resources for addressing Derek Parfit's "repugnant conclusions," the most notorious of which is that for any number of persons, all with lives well worth living, there is some much larger human population whose existence would be better, even though the lives of its members are only barely worth living. The repugnant conclusions have typically been thought to arise from (and thereby indict) only certain forms of utilitarianism, but Schmidtz and Zwolinski argue that they are considerably more insidious and "suggest problems for the whole idea that moral theorizing should culminate in a simple formula for right action." An appropriate response to the repugnant conclusions will therefore not be found by merely reformulating traditional principles of right action but, instead, must involve considerations of character and human excellence. In so arguing they both embrace and expand on Hill's claims that the impropriety of some environmental behaviors is best understood by reflecting on the kind of person who would do such a thing. One implication of this for moral theory is that no principle of right action is a replacement for moral wisdom, sensitivity, and experience. "The proper lesson," they write, "is not that act-centered theories are useless . . . but, rather, that we are better off treating act-centered theory as the sort of thing from which wise persons can gain insight that is useful, even if limited."

The third section of the collection, "Environmental Virtues and Vices," contains discussions of the substantive content of environmental virtue and vice by Geoffrey Frasz, Philip Cafaro, Charles Taliaferro, and Louke van Wensveen. Rather than focusing on a detailed account of any specific environmental virtue or vice, the authors aim to provide a general account or typology of environmental virtue and vice from which future work can proceed. In "Benevolence as an Environmental Virtue" Frasz employs an extensionist approach to articulate and defend benevolence as an environmental

virtue. He considers benevolence to be a genus under which fall specific other-regarding environmental virtues such as compassion, friendship, kindness, and gratitude. Among the vices counter to benevolence he considers jealousy, selfishness, greed, and profligacy. Central to benevolence, in both interpersonal and environmental contexts, is a genuine concern for the welfare of another. This concern is made possible by what Frasz calls "an imaginative dwelling on the condition of the other," which requires understanding the interests of the other. There is thus "an important role for the biological and ecological sciences, for nature writing, and for personal accounts of encounters with wild creatures" in the cultivation and maintenance of environmental benevolence. Frasz concludes with a discussion of the ways in which environmental benevolence benefits its possessor. He argues that "in cultivating the environmental virtue of benevolence we can discover who we really are and what it will take to live in a joyous way with the nonhuman world of which we are a part."

If, as Frasz argues, environmental virtue benefits both its possessor and the natural environment, then perhaps the concept of environmental vice is best understood in terms of the frustration of human and environmental flourishing, as well as the connections between them. In "Gluttony, Arrogance, Greed, and Apathy: An Exploration of Environmental Vice," Cafaro develops such an account. According to Cafaro, "A vice harms the vicious person, those around him or her, or both." Judgments about the vices are thus derivative on particular conceptions of the "goods" that make up a good human life, a well-functioning society, and a healthy natural environment. Establishing that a particular disposition regarding the environment is a vice thus requires showing how the disposition is detrimental to its possessor, those around him or her, and nonhuman nature. Cafaro applies this standard in the course of elucidating four key environmental vices—gluttony, arrogance, greed, and apathy—each of which, he argues, harms its possessor, other people, and nature.

In "Vices and Virtues in Religious Environmental Ethics," Taliaferro discusses virtues and vices in both theistic (Jewish, Christian, and Islamic) and Buddhist environmental ethics. Taliaferro begins apologetically, arguing that there are several reasons why environmental ethicists should be attentive to religious ethical traditions, not least of which are that at least one religious tradition may be true. Moreover, the majority of the world's population subscribes to some religious tradition, so to be relevant to the actual world an environmental ethic must be able to engage those traditions. Taliaferro then demonstrates how environmental virtues such as gratitude, respect, solidarity, and caring (and the corresponding vices of ingratitude, vanity, and exploitiveness) emerge from the central tenets of theistic environmental ethics: creation, divine ownership, and the identification of natural goods with God's presence. Regarding the Buddhist traditions, Taliaferro focuses on the emergence of mindfulness and compassion as environmental virtues as part of the Buddhist goal of detachment. He concludes by examining how these religious virtues function both explicitly and implicitly in environmental contexts such as agriculture.

In the final contribution of this section, "Cardinal Environmental Virtues: A Neurobiological Perspective," Wensveen considers whether the traditional cardinal virtues—practical wisdom, justice, temperance, and courage—are sufficient for providing guidance in this age of ecological crises. She argues that we ought to neither cling to the

traditional account of these virtues nor jettison them entirely. We should instead take a "middle course" and revamp them in light of our improved biological, ecological, and neurological vantage point. After all, we are "now in a better position than the ancients ever were to judge how well the traditional cardinals shape our emotions, allowing us to pursue the goals of our lives in ways that are appropriate within our particular environments." Wensveen thus advocates putting a contemporary ecological spin on the venerable tradition of the cardinal virtues. She argues that we should consider a particular virtue cardinal "if its cultivation consists of conditioning a particular type of neurobiological system that plays a pivotal role in processes of emotional fine-tuning by which agents are enabled to flourish and let flourish under changing circumstances." Using this definition she argues for several environmental virtues that are themselves cardinal (for example, sensitivity and tenacity), related to cardinals as constituents (for example, humility, respect, gratitude, benevolence, attentiveness, and loyalty), or particular instantiations of cardinals (for example, friendship, love, frugality, and simplicity).

In the final section of the collection, "The Application of Environmental Virtue," Peter Wenz and I apply environmental virtue ethics to concrete environmental issues and problems. These contributions belie the criticism that environmental virtue ethics is unable to provide guidance regarding actual environmental issues or decisions. In "Synergistic Environmental Virtues: Consumerism and Human Flourishing" Wenz considers the relationship among traditional anthropocentric virtues and vices, nonanthropocentric environmental ethics, and consumerism. He argues that for people in industrialized nations the traditional virtues foster both human and environmental flourishing, whereas the traditional vices diminish both. Anthropocentric and nonanthropocentric accounts of virtue and flourishing are thus synergistic—"each is stronger in combination with the other than alone." The key to this synergism is a shared repugnance to consumerism, which as practiced in industrialized countries is harmful to both humans and nature. Wenz therefore suggests that individuals in industrialized countries ought to adopt what he calls "the principle of anticipatory cooperation" when making consumer decisions. This principle "calls for actions that deviate from the social norm in the direction of the ideal that virtuous people aspire to for themselves and others but which do not deviate so much that virtue impairs instead of fosters flourishing."

In "A Virtue Ethics Perspective on Genetically Modified Crops," I propose a virtue ethics approach for assessing the acceptability of the use of genetically modified crops in agriculture. From a virtue ethics perspective, an environmental assessment of a particular genetically modified crop involves determining whether the technology will compromise the capacity of the environment to produce the goods essential to the development and maintenance of human virtue, as well as determining if the technology is contrary to any of the virtues applicable to human interactions with the natural environment. Using these criteria I defend a limited endorsement position regarding genetically modified crops. There is, I argue, a presumption, justified by humility, against the use of genetically modified crops in agriculture. However, if the external goods criterion is met, this presumption can be overcome by other virtue-based considerations. For example, in the case of golden rice (rice genetically modified to produce the precursor to vitamin A), the external goods criterion is met, and the presumption against

the use of genetically modified crops is overcome by compassion for those suffering from vitamin A deficiency.

Although work on environmental virtue has become increasingly visible in recent years, environmental virtue ethics remains a relatively underappreciated and underdeveloped aspect of environmental ethics. Philip Cafaro and I hope that the work collected here will not only help establish the indispensability of this area of environmental ethics but also enhance the breadth and quality of the ongoing discussion of environmental virtue and vice and the role they should play in an adequate environmental ethic. This collection is thus not intended to settle the central issues of environmental virtue ethics but, rather, to provide an impetus and orientation for further work on them. We very much look forward to those discussions.

PART 1

RECOGNIZING
ENVIRONMENTAL
VIRTUE ETHICS

CHAPTER 8

Benevolence as an Environmental Virtue

Geoffrey Frasz

In 1988 the most prominent story in Alaska was not the attempt to open the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve to oil drilling, or the problems salmon fisheries faced, or the general economic downturn in Alaska but, rather, the attempts to rescue three gray whales trapped in the ice near Barrow, Alaska.¹ The episode demonstrated the way important traits of character can be extended from the world of interhuman relations to the nonhuman realm. That so many people with such seemingly diverse environmental views could be motivated to contribute time, money, and effort by a sense of benevolence, a concern for the suffering and possible death of three whales, indicates a need to explore the nature of benevolence as a central environmental virtue.

In this chapter I will present a general account of benevolence and then show how this virtue can be understood as an environmental virtue. After addressing some possible objections I develop an account of the environmental vices that hinder the development and expression of benevolence. I conclude with a discussion of why such a virtue should be cultivated by environmentally minded persons. I recognize that providing a full account of benevolence (a project that I reserve for a later time) will involve a detailed discussion of the specific environmental virtues (such as the environmental versions of compassion, friendship, kindness, and gratitude) that fall under the general category of environmental benevolence. Nonetheless, the discussion of environmental benevolence presented here will provide both an account of the common features such virtues will have and an account of why we ought to cultivate them.²

The Possibility of Benevolence as an Environmental Virtue

Writers on ecotheology have often acknowledged the role of benevolence in shaping environmentally desirable attitudes.³ Donald Hughes, for instance, has argued that the influence of St. Francis plays an important, positive role in shaping Christian attitudes toward nature.⁴ In addition to recognizing the goodness of all of God's creation, including the animals, St. Francis held that the fact of biodiversity in creation and the

delight God takes in this diversity represent God's benevolent presence. From this Hughes argues that we have a duty not just to abstain from harming God's creations but also to adopt an attitude of respect for them.

Also writing on issues of Christianity and the environment, Holmes Rolston III points out that biblically based faith is founded on the belief that the covenanted Promised Land is sacred and good, separate from any instrumental value it might have for humans.⁵ But the intrinsic goodness of the created world notwithstanding, Rolston worries that a Christian ethic that advocates virtuous treatment of humans may not easily be expanded into virtuous treatment of the nonhuman world and its inhabitants. He argues, however, that central tenets of Christian faith, including the promise of redemption, can be found in an ecological understanding of the land.

Although these accounts suggest that it is possible to cultivate a benevolent relationship with nature, they leave undeveloped the actual nature of benevolence as an environmental virtue, as well as the justification for why we would want to cultivate it. More helpful is Jennifer Welchman's account in which she argues that benevolence and loyalty are necessary features of good stewardship for the land.⁶ One could, she argues, voluntarily act as a good steward for the land even if motivated by an enlightened anthropocentrism. Acts motivated by enlightened self-interest can include preservation of resources, biodiversity, and natural beauty. After all, benevolence toward our own descendents is a strong motivator for action. But what about motivation for the well-being of nonhuman others? Welchman argues that compassion alone is not enough to provide such a motivation. She concludes that benevolence, in the form of compassion for sentient beings, must be coupled with loyalty, in the sense of loyalty to one's moral integrity, in order to complete the necessary virtues of stewardship of nature. Unfortunately for the project at hand, she focuses all her attention on providing a well-developed case for this loyalty to one's moral integrity, leaving the notion of environmental benevolence underdeveloped.

Still more helpful to our project is the work of Frank Schalow, who takes the position that, from a Heideggerian perspective, the differences rather than the similarities between humans and animals provide an obligation for us to act in benevolent ways toward animals.⁷ Schalow argues against those who take an egalitarian view based on recognized similarities between humans and animals and instead stresses two distinctive features of human life—freedom and language—to develop a notion of obligation to the welfare of animals. It is, he argues, these differences between humans and animals that make possible benevolent actions by humans toward animals. Providing support for Welchman's call for stewardship for the nonhuman world, Schalow argues for a nonanthropocentric perspective that emphasizes that "the abilities that distinguish us most from other creatures are precisely those with which we are endowed (rather than possess), and hence their exercise extends beyond the satisfaction of exclusively human interests."⁸ Freedom is here viewed as a gift that allows for the possibility to simply let animals be instead of treating them as mere property for the satisfaction of human interests, and our capacity to use language makes it possible for humans to speak for animals, who cannot articulate directly what is in their own interests.

Schalow gives further support to Welchman's call for stewardship when he claims that "we are most fully human or 'authentic' when engaged in acts of stewardship rather

than in exploitive pursuits. In becoming guardians, we display the 'care' (*Sorge*) that situates us within nature as a whole and fosters the possibility of a harmonious relation to those domestic animals dependent on us."⁹ Such care is possible also regarding wild creatures because of our capacity to use language to disclose what is there, what is outside of us. Through my use of language to provide a word to a thing, I indicate it as something other than the "me" who does the naming. And through the process of acquiring, rather than simply using, language it is possible for us to "acquire it in harmony with an 'attunement' (*Stimmung*) that disposes [humans] to foster the manifestness of things, nature, and welfare of their animal counterparts."¹⁰ By recognizing the significance of the difference between humans and animals it is possible to develop what I have elsewhere called a "proper humility" toward animals and the natural world. With such humility we can then truly speak for those who might suffer because of our actions.

Welchman and Schalow make the case for benevolent treatment of nonhuman entities as a necessary attitude for good stewards of the land. But they have not spelled out in detail what the characteristics of a benevolent steward are; nor have they shown why we should be such good stewards and cultivate this virtue. In what follows I first present an account of benevolence in interpersonal contexts and then expand the notion to include human-nature relationships, thereby showing how benevolence can be considered an *environmental* virtue. We will find that what is generally the case for interpersonal benevolence can be extended to the human-natural world relationship. An account of the vices associated with the absence of green benevolence is then presented. I finish by making the case that an environmental form of benevolence is needed for a person to be environmentally good and that the cultivation of benevolence makes it possible to live an environmentally good life.

The Virtue of Benevolence as Such

Benevolence as such is a genus or family of virtues that involve a direct concern for the happiness and well-being of others.¹¹ Virtues of benevolence include compassion, friendliness, kindness, and generosity. Feelings of affection need not be present for there to be benevolence, though the two traits are often found together.

The related vices of benevolence include jealousy, selfishness, greed, and profligacy, for these are traits that compete with the tendencies to promote the good of others. A lack of concern for the welfare of others can be expressed in hateful emotions or in grasping and self-centered behaviors that ignore or turn a blind eye to their welfare. What we find objectionable in such cases is that one's own good is sought without a concern or care for how one's actions may impact others. A greedy, selfish, or profligate person is one who is willing to expend irreplaceable resources to further one's own good without any real concern for how one's actions might impact the ability of others to further their own good. A jealous person may go so far as to hope for others to fail in their attempts to promote their own good because one believes that their success would frustrate one's own goals. Thus, the jealous person is not merely envious of the flourishing of others but, in fact, often actively seeks to harm the other or to keep the other from flourishing.¹²

Benevolence virtues are not forms of conscientiousness (which involves a commitment to social action), but the same action may be done out of sense of benevolence and conscientiousness. Someone who takes an active role in civic life, giving generously of her or his time and energy to help needy members of the community, may be motivated out of a sense of concern for the needy and out of a sense that such help makes for better communities.

The benevolent person does not merely seek to avoid wrong actions but, rather, seeks to promote the good of others. It is not enough to refrain from being jealous, or greedy, or self-indulgent, admirable as such restraint may be. What the virtuous person seeks is to be open to the concerns, interests, goals, and needs of others and to actively pursue plans that would help others in these respects. Benevolence therefore calls on us first to cultivate in our character an imaginative dwelling on the condition of the other. It involves discovering what the other, given his or her character, beliefs, and values, needs in order to flourish. Acting on this concern, in turn, improves the life of the benevolent person him- or herself directly, through the satisfaction of acting morally, and indirectly, through helping to create a better society for all.

In order to truly determine what is in the best interest of the other, one needs to gather information about the life and concerns of the other. This may involve something as simple as asking the other person what makes him or her happy or being open and sensitive to how persons' actions reveal what they seek in order to live flourishing lives. It also includes gathering insights provided by the human and social sciences regarding what is good for people and the communities of which they are a part. Because of a shared humanity, I can reason analogously from knowledge of my own self and what I need generally to be healthy, be productive, and flourish as a human being to what others may need (bearing in mind the dangers of confusing what is in my personal self-interest with what is in that of others).

Benevolence further involves a motivation to act on the knowledge of the other gained through this imaginative indwelling. This benevolent motivation to act may be expressed in different ways, reflecting the different virtues within the benevolent family of virtues, as well as the particular circumstances of the agent. A friendly person acts in ways that reflect the desire to do what will make the friend happy. Actions motivated by friendship can include gift giving, spending time with a friend (even if one would rather be elsewhere), or simply listening to what the friend wishes to say. Acts motivated by friendship may even involve not doing or not permitting something that the friend wants because we recognize that it would not truly promote the welfare of the other (friends don't let friends drive drunk, as the saying goes). A generous person is willing to give of her or his time, effort, money, and material goods to promote the welfare of others. A kind person is quick to see how one could help another and is prone to act in kind ways. A compassionate person is motivated by the suffering of others and acts in ways to relieve that suffering.

We judge the actions done from these different manifestations of benevolence as good actions. Their goodness comes from the attempt to move beyond acts of immediate self-interest to acts for the interests of others. This is why we consider benevolent persons to be praiseworthy and celebrate their actions. We hold that benevolent acts are good because they tend to foster good feelings based on mutual goodwill. This is a

useful and satisfying result for a community. Such a concern is often recognized by other community members (though such a recognition is not necessary for benevolence to occur), and it gives rise to goodwill on their part. A community in which benevolence is a character trait in many of its members is more likely to be a place where the community itself and community members can flourish.

Benevolent virtues tend to support the self-esteem of those who are beneficiaries of the action, for they acknowledge that the other person is valuable and important, so much so that one is willing to expend resources promoting the other's flourishing. Such benevolent actions promote a sense of equality in the community by exemplifying that the flourishing of others and the community as a whole is just as important as one's own pursuits. The relationships based on virtues such as friendship and kindness are more satisfying relationships, ones that bring delight to one's own life as well as to one's friend's.

When others recognize that someone else is genuinely interested in their welfare and wishes to help promote it, sources of hostility and confrontation are less likely to provoke destructive or harmful reactions. Confrontations can be better avoided when community members are aware that others are not acting solely out of selfish or self-promoting concerns. When those shared concerns are recognized, it is more likely that community members can find common goals and solutions to community problems that are acceptable to all.

From these general reflections on benevolence we can indicate the central features of a benevolent act:

1. The agent engages in an imaginative reconstruction of the life of the other.
2. The agent attempts to determine what is in the best interest of the other.
3. The agent is motivated to act with the best interest of the other in mind.

The different species of benevolence—friendship, compassion, kindness, and so on—will reflect these characteristics in different ways and to different degrees and have as their focus different kinds of relations.

Actions that are fully characteristic of benevolence foster mutual goodwill, create satisfying relationships, forestall antagonism, and create an atmosphere where people can work out differences and achieve common personal and community goals. I will now show how considering benevolence as an *environmental virtue* enriches and expands our understanding of this family of virtues and provides insights into what characterizes an environmentally good person.

Benevolence as an Environmental Virtue and Its Corresponding Vices

If benevolence is an environmental virtue, then an environmentally good person has an active and consistent concern for the happiness, flourishing, health, interests, or well-being of both human and nonhuman others. An environmentally good person

takes an active interest in promoting the flourishing of all the other members that make up the land. This expansion of the sphere of concern to nonhuman others makes up the first characteristic of environmental benevolence.

Through their actions many people already show a concern for individual living beings such as pets and household plants. Such a concern is praiseworthy, as are the efforts of people to rescue abandoned pets or feral cats and dogs and provide shelter to them. We recognize in the generous, compassionate actions of such people a genuine benevolent concern for the well-being of all such animals. But the expansion of the sphere of "others" must move beyond domesticated animals and cultivated plants: the fully environmentally benevolent person is concerned for nondomesticated life as well.

The expansion of the sphere of concern must include members of wild species—and not just individual members of those species that we find charismatic, fascinating, or enough like humans to evoke empathy. Benevolence of action must extend to all living creatures, even those we might find disturbing, distasteful, or uninteresting to us and our own concerns. It is one thing to act in benevolent ways to preserve those members of species that have high value to us, such as bald eagles or grizzly bears, but it is much harder to show concern for stinging flies, poisonous plants, and biting reptiles.

However, the expansion of concern should not be solely individualistic. What characterizes an environmentally benevolent person is also an active concern for whole species and particular places, biogeographic zones, ecosystems, and watersheds.¹³ We are apt to praise sustained efforts on the part of individuals to preserve and protect an entire area. What makes their actions virtuous in part is a concern for the entire land, not just a concern for individual living things that make up that land. We see this concern reflected in support for wilderness areas and also for natural parks, forests, and grasslands.

As environmental benevolence has such an expanded sense of the other, the range of actions that may be done by the environmentally virtuous person will be varied and extensive. What can make the extension of concern to nonhuman others more likely is the realization that the flourishing of one's self and that of others occurs in, and is made possible by, an extended environmental community. This, in turn, requires the recognition that the notion of community must be expanded to include nonhuman entities, both living and nonliving. This expansion of community to include "the land" in Leopold's sense means that we must broaden our moral horizon to the point that we recognize that there are other citizens in our community besides present and future humans and that the interests of these citizens are also proper objects of our concern. Furthermore, this community requires an extensive abiotic structure to make the flourishing of all its citizens possible. Thus, an environmentally benevolent life involves "an excellence or relationships among the parts of the self and with the outside world."¹⁴ In this way a flourishing land also provides the conditions for a flourishing human life.

I have argued elsewhere that the project of environmental virtue ethics in general has as its ontological basis human nature as flourishing in an expanded, mixed community of biotic and abiotic features.¹⁵ The development of the environmental virtue of benevolence is a trait that makes such flourishing possible and provides for a bond of kinship with the land. An excellent human being is also an excellent environmental

citizen, living an environmentally good life that maintains fidelity with the natural world and rejects human chauvinism and notions of human superiority.¹⁶ The cultivation of environmental benevolence, along with the cultivation of what I have called a "proper humility," and the rejection of arrogance are part of the makeup of an environmentally good citizen of the land.¹⁷ The flourishing as an ecological citizen that benevolence makes possible is good not only for the person but for the land as well.

The task facing an environmentally virtuous person is how to determine what is in the best interest of nonhuman others. This involves a further expansion of the capacity of imaginative dwelling on the condition of the other. We want to imaginatively enter into the life of the other, to see how the other lives, understand what the goals of this nonhuman other are. Because we cannot use spoken language to communicate with most animals and ask them what they need to live a good life, we must adopt other strategies for accumulating this knowledge. One way is to simply watch them over time as their life activities reveal to us goal-driven activities that reflect their needs. This can be done through sustained nature watching and observation of animals in their wild habitats. It can also be done indirectly through active study of accounts of animal behaviors. Thus, there is an important role for the biological and ecological sciences, for nature writing, and for personal accounts of encounters with wild creatures to help us better learn what is in their own best interests and what they need to live healthy, flourishing lives. In order to better learn this it will be necessary to cultivate those intellectual skills that improve our perceptive ability, as well as the moral traits to improve our willingness to expend the time and effort to let natural entities reveal themselves to us. We must cultivate what Linda Zagzebski calls "a sensitivity to detail" that involves refining our abilities to make fine distinctions among related kinds of natural entities and to develop and use a vocabulary that lets us express these distinctions.¹⁸

Coupled with this sensitivity are the hardy traits of character that are required for sustained involvement in the natural world on its own terms. Philip Cafaro points out that virtues such as persistence, patience, thoroughness, and continuous attentiveness (even when it involves personal discomfort on our part) make it more likely that a person will be able to learn what nature can teach.¹⁹ Also needed are moral qualities such as openness to the other and humility in the face of limited or continually developing understanding of the diverse features of the natural world. We must cultivate an openness that heightens our sensitivity to the concerns, behaviors, subtle features, and goal-directed activities of nonhuman entities. Openness will prime us to what can be revealed. Humility will keep us open to novelty and new experiences as we recognize that we can continually learn from the wild, that we do not have all the answers, and that our skills for learning from nature may require further refinement or polishing.

Of course, as common members of a biotic community we all have basic needs that must be met in order that the goods of our own kind can be realized. All living things must have a healthy environment, free of pollutants, toxins, and other biohazards, in order to flourish. I recognize that what is necessary for me as a living thing may be what other living things need as well. What an environmentally benevolent person must strive to avoid is a confusion over what is specifically in one's interests as a human being and what is in one's interest as a living being, a member of the biotic community.

But whatever the mechanisms are, we look to an environmentally benevolent person as having enough concern for the well-being of others to use whatever means necessary to discover what it takes for that other to flourish—and act on this knowledge.

How do we identify an environmentally benevolent person? First, we look to see that there is a movement toward action. Does this person act consistently in ways that promote the well-being of other members of the biotic community as well as his or her own? We need to see actions of various kinds done over a period of time. It is not enough to act sporadically, spurred into action by a guilty conscience, moved periodically by magazine ads for help to save the whales or contribute to rain forest protection. Although such acts are good, virtue requires that these actions be done on a regular basis as a reflection of a key ingredient of a person's character. One swallow saved does not an environmentally benevolent person make, as Aristotle might have said!

The actual content of benevolent acts will vary from place to place and reflect the context of the action. What is required to promote the well-being of one group of living things may be different from what is needed to promote the health of a particular ecosystem. A compassionate person may work long hours as a volunteer at an animal rescue shelter, feeling the suffering of injured or needy stray animals. A generous person may give time and money to restore a wetlands habitat rather than to promote worthwhile self-interests. A friend of the land might simply spend time in nature, attuning oneself to what the land can teach about the processes and structures that contribute to the health of it and its members. A friend of the land might also tell stories to others, as Thoreau and Leopold did. In each case we judge the action as environmentally benevolent because it flows from a concern to identify what is in the best interest of the nonhuman others and then to consistently act on that knowledge.

Much of my argument for environmental benevolence is based on the movement from the traditional interpersonal notion of benevolence to an environmental version. I have argued that such an extension is possible, but a critic might ask: What is the range of this extension? For example, although compassion may appropriately be extended to any sentient creature, can it also be extended to nonsentient natural entities? If not, then benevolence might be limited to human-sentient creature relations. It might also be objected that because my account of traditional benevolence seems to involve a mutual recognition of what is in the well-being of each person, benevolence cannot be extended beyond those beings that could acknowledge our actions. Finally, it could be pointed out that I call for an imaginative entering into the life of the other, which would limit the scope of environmental benevolence to conscious beings for whom such an exercise might be plausible.²⁰ These are important and significant concerns that need to be addressed.

The first criticism has to do with whether one can be compassionate toward an entity that lacks sentience. Because compassion involves making a connection with the suffering of others, it is true that one can only be compassionate toward those natural entities that can suffer. But benevolence is not equivalent to compassion. Benevolence involves a family of related virtues, each of which involves a concern with the lives and condition of others. But this concern need not be limited to a condition of suffering. Concern for the well-being of another also includes elements of friendship, kindness, and respect, which can focus on the health, integrity, or overall well-being of an entity

that is not sentient. So, for example, one can have a benevolent concern for the well-being of a forest and take action to restore or maintain forest health. Far from sentience being a prerequisite for genuine benevolence, the idea that it is betrays the lack of imagination mentioned earlier. Making sentience a necessary prerequisite for benevolence would be like making consciousness, or being human, or having white skin, or being a member of my local community a necessary prerequisite. What is lacking in such provincial, or racist, or speciesist views is the ability or willingness to take an active interest in the well-being of all others.

The second objection is that nonhuman others may not recognize our benevolent acts. Though it is true that in many interpersonal acts of benevolence there is a mutual recognition of the acts as such, this recognition is not necessary. One can act in a benevolent way to a child, a comatose patient, or even a fetus, none of which need be able to recognize that an action was done for his or her well-being. In the same way, one can act in friendly ways without the other even being aware of the performance of the action. I have argued elsewhere that acts of friendship can be done toward nonhuman natural entities such as the land, and in such cases acknowledgment is not even possible.²¹

The third objection deals with whether one can imaginatively enter into the life of the nonhuman other if that other is not conscious. The imaginative entering that is a part of benevolence involves attempting to find out what would benefit or harm that other. It is not trying just to think like that kind of thing. It is to ask oneself what actions would further or hinder the other's well-being. In the case of a conscious or sentient being, that entering is, perhaps, easier. But in any case benevolence requires me to move out of a self-referential mode (asking to what extent that other is like me, a conscious, sentient being with particular wants, desires, needs, etc.) and use my imaginative powers to see the world either from the perspective of another sentient being who is a center of a life or even as a natural entity that is made up of many biotic and abiotic parts, such as a swamp, forest, or ecosystem. I can meaningfully ask what actions would benefit or harm that kind of entity as well, even though it is not conscious or sentient. For example, I can harm a river or a bog by dumping a terrible poison into it, or damming it, or draining all its water for irrigation. Think of how the damming of the Colorado River harmed the riparian communities that required yearly flushing by the naturally occurring floods to replenish nutrients.

Environmental benevolence involves a concern for the well-being of another entity, and depending on the kind of natural entity it is, different aspects of benevolence will be appropriate to it. The environmentally benevolent person acts for the well-being or interests of individual living things, populations of living things, species, and the biotic community itself and avoids confusing self-interest alone with that of the land. I now turn to articulating the attendant vices that correspond to environmental benevolence. Previously, I presented some of the vices of general benevolence as traits that compete with our dispositions to act on behalf of the other. With an environmental focus, these vices reflect habits or traits of character that interfere with an active concern for nonhuman or natural entities. Such environmental vices can be seen as connected in a negative way to the three central features of environmental benevolence.

The first feature is the willingness to engage in an imaginative reconstruction of the lives and condition of nonhuman others. Traits such as human arrogance and chauvinism will cause us to view the condition of nonhuman others only in terms of our own satisfaction of human interests. They are seen only in instrumental terms and judged for their capacity to satisfy one's short-term personal preferences. This attitude is reflected in those who can see only the economic value of some members of a forest and dismiss as useless or worthless those other species that cannot be immediately harvested. It is reflected in the attempts to turn an old-growth forest rich in biodiversity into a monoculture crop field for trees that have high lumber value. Such a person, when considering an investment of time or money for a worthwhile cause, would ask, "What's in it for me?" A person who does not or cannot see intrinsic value in nature is closed to it and lacks the kind of openness to nature I have claimed is an important trait of an environmentally good person. Echoing the point made earlier by Schalow, such a person cannot hear what animals or the natural world are saying. Furthermore, it is not uncommon to find indifference to humans and nonhumans together in environmentally destructive acts. For example, mining operations in a fragile desert area not only despoil the land with toxic waste but also often cut and run when they close operations, leaving behind a human community that was dependent on the mine for jobs.

Jealousy and greed are thus environmental vices, for they are emotional attitudes that often lead to the harming of nature in an attempt to attain mastery over it. To greedily exploit a natural resource to the extent that other creatures suffer by one's actions, such as clear-cutting a forest to the point of destroying the habitats of the creatures living there, reflects a desire to only maximize one's own interests. Furthermore, these vices can be reflected in the willingness to turn a blind eye to environmentally destructive actions on the part of others. In southern Nevada, where drought conditions have gotten worse in the last few years, powerful gaming interests are able, through campaign contributions, to get local governments to provide them with exceptions to water use restrictions so that they may construct new hotels with extensive fountains and lagoons, while local residents face fines for washing cars in driveways.

Profligacy in the exploitation of natural resources is also a reflection of arrogance and lack of concern for the well-being of others. Overgrazing or overfishing of areas may produce short-term economic benefits for some, but they harm both the long-term interests of people and the health of ecosystems. The extensive consumption of petroleum products, especially in automobiles, that puts places such as the Arctic Wildlife Refuge at risk through oil drilling is a reflection of such profligacy. It is difficult to imagine an environmentally benevolent person who drives an SUV around town and lives a high-consumption lifestyle.

The second feature of environmental benevolence involves finding some mechanism that reveals what is in the best interest of nonhuman others. Traits such as laziness and sloth are vices because they keep us from learning what is in the interest of other living things. A person who is unwilling to take the time and make the effort to travel into the nonhuman realm reflects this laziness. A somewhat comic example from recent Las Vegas events illustrates this. A brand new development of expensive homes had been built on the edge of town, not far from a large pig farm that had been in op-

eration for many decades before development had spread toward it. Buyers of the new homes, which had not even been built yet, would travel to the developer's air-conditioned offices, look at photos and scale models of the new homes that were going to be built, and then buy a proposed home. When the new residents would move in later and catch a whiff of the hog farm, they would complain to the city government. But had they taken the time and made the effort to travel around the land, they would have been made aware of the farm. Instead, they were too lazy to examine their future surroundings and relied on salespeople to tell them about the land. Even today many of these same people have no interest in finding out where their clean water comes from and where their sewage goes. Such laziness is often a cause of neglecting to discover where runoff water from the floods (that come with regularity to desert areas) goes. Had they made an effort to investigate, they might have found out that the floodwaters go through their neighborhoods.

Slothfulness is reflected in a lack of interest in knowing or maintaining the well-being of other living things, even in cases as simple as keeping an aquarium clean of parasites or keeping a pet well groomed and healthy. A lack of interest in actively seeking out what information is needed to determine what it takes to keep a pet healthy reflects this vice. Intellectual laziness is also a vice in this context because there exists a tremendous amount of information gathered by naturalists, ecologists, animal lovers, and even pet fanciers on what is needed to promote the flourishing of living things and natural systems. Someone who is too lazy to take the time to learn about the natural world, either through personal experience or by relying on the information available from experts, is not going to be disposed to act in benevolent ways toward it.

Furthermore, because it is necessary to learn various intellectual skills and abilities, along with moral habits, from nature, the tendencies that work against such learning will be environmental vices as well. A lack of curiosity about the natural world, a lack of attentiveness, impatience, and the tendency to rush through encounters in the wild keep us from being able to learn what can be discovered. We see these habits in shallow tourist experiences, where the tour bus pulls up to a scenic area, the visitors step out quickly to take some photographs, they return just as quickly to the air-conditioned bus, and then it is off to the next photo opportunity. When people desire to encounter nature only through the frame of a bus or car window for momentary instances, they lack the necessary openness to experience readily available expert information that would make it possible for them to discover what nonhuman creatures need for their flourishing. Although such tourists may have a belief that they are open to natural beauty, the unwillingness to take the time needed for natural entities to reveal themselves makes them able to gain only a shallow understanding of the wild. Even if such tourists were armed with extensive, authoritative guidebooks and tape recordings that told them what they were seeing, it would be difficult for them to develop a greater sense of benevolence for nature without getting out and away from the bus, for deep encounters with the natural world require making real connections with nature, unmediated by glass, books, or well-intentioned bus guides. People who lack a sense of humility regarding their own ability to understand the natural world or who have an over-inflated sense of their abilities to comprehend what nature can teach us manifest the vices of arrogance and chauvinism that are expressed in phrases like "If you've seen one

redwood, you've seen them all" or "This is nothing but an empty, barren desert with nothing of interest or value in it, so let's build a megaresort here."

The third feature of environmental benevolence is the motivation to act on the basis of what one has learned from nature. Thus, those traits and habits that keep us from acting on behalf of the good of nonhuman others are also environmental vices to be avoided. The traits of laziness and sloth mentioned earlier are relevant here, as is cynicism regarding the effectiveness of environmental action. An environmentally benevolent person recognizes that it is not possible to do everything necessary to promote the well-being of every creature. He or she recognizes that environmental protection efforts sometimes fail. Yet he or she is motivated to act nonetheless. The cynicism common in environmental critics leads them to fall into the "perfectionist fallacy." They will argue that attempts to act on behalf of the interest of nonhuman entities will not provide for a complete or total fulfillment of their needs, interests, or good; thus, such attempts should not be made in the first place. But a recognition that one cannot help all things at any given time to flourish does not mean that one should not do what one can reasonably do to help some creatures to flourish. We admire those who are able to bring about even a small improvement in the good of nonhuman entities.

In summary, the environmental vices that we want to avoid are traits or habits that keep us from being open to the nonhuman world and the lives of nonhuman others, unwilling or unable to determine what is in their interests, and unmotivated to promote the well-being of all the entities involved in our encounters with the natural world. In the next section I conclude with an account of why benevolence should be cultivated by anyone seeking to be an environmentally better person.

Why Cultivate Environmental Benevolence?

This question is a variation on the general question facing environmental virtue ethics: Why cultivate environmental virtue at all? It has echoes of one of the fundamental questions of ethics: Why should I be moral? My answer to this question is that a life that reflects this virtue produces a better life for the agent, a life that allows for the agent to flourish in ways that are appropriate to a rich, full, satisfying, environmentally good life.²² This answer reflects the nature of a life fully characteristic of benevolent virtues as expanded into the biotic community.

A life informed by benevolence will be a life that fosters goodwill between humans and nonhuman creatures. Even when a natural entity cannot recognize the benevolence in environmental actions, the feeling of goodwill that can develop among the people doing the actions is a good. The various players in the Alaskan whale rescue came away from that action with a greater sense of goodwill on the part of others, even if those people had been adversaries on other environmental issues. This mutual goodwill can play an important role in forestalling further antagonisms when these same people square off in other environmental encounters. Each will be more aware that the other has been willing to avoid acting in solely self-interested ways, was willing to try to understand how things are for the others, and was motivated to act in ways that promote common interests.

The relationships that can develop when people display acts of environmental benevolence can be more satisfying ones. When people act in ways that promote the flourishing of both self and others, human and nonhuman alike, the relationships can be based on trust and a recognition of mutual interests. Such relationships are ones that we value already in our lives. Cultivating environmental benevolence makes it possible to have more such relationships, thereby enriching our own lives as well as those of others.

When people attempt to cultivate benevolence, they can resolve differences between their goals and those of the nonhuman world. Furthermore, because these are goals of the expanded biotic community of which both humans and nonhumans are a part, all can live better, richer, fuller, flourishing lives. Instead of seeing nonhuman entities as things to be fought, to be destroyed, or in opposition to our well-being, a sense of environmental benevolence makes it more likely that we can be open to and find common solutions to problems that promote the well-being of all concerned. Cultivation of benevolence makes it more likely that people can live a more harmonious life with the natural world that enriches ourselves and others.²³

The value of benevolent practices comes from the fact that they allow us to feel the interconnectedness we have with other living things, other species, and ecosystems. These practices allow us to feel joy and happiness when all the members of a biotic community flourish and to feel distress when confronted with the suffering of living beings or with distressed, disturbed ecosystems. Beneficial practices allow us to experience the interrelatedness of all things, living and nonliving. They allow us to realize that we cannot act without affecting other living beings or other natural entities. Such recognition is empowering because we can set an ethical example for others to follow.

Benevolent practices are further desirable because they help define who we are. We can come to understand that in a fundamental sense we do not exist in the world as isolated, atomic individuals who simply act on objects outside of ourselves. Rather, we are relational beings, moral agents who act in specific social, historical, and ecological contexts. These interrelationships make up the core of who we are. To be human is to dwell in relations with the nonhuman environment. Benevolent practices reaffirm our human nature, celebrate it, and strengthen our ties with the other members of the biotic community. In cultivating the environmental virtue of benevolence we can discover who we really are and what it will take to live in a joyous way with the nonhuman world of which we are a part.

Notes

1. Patti H. Clayton, *Connection on the Ice: Environmental Ethics in Theory and Practice* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).
2. In this discussion I follow the general characteristics of an environmental virtue as presented in Louke van Wensveen, "Ecosystem Sustainability as a Criterion for Genuine Virtue," *Environmental Ethics* (2001): 227-41.
3. For an example, see Carolyn M. King, "Ecotheology: A Marriage between Secular Ecological Science and Rational, Compassionate Faith," *Ecotheology* 10 (2001): 40-69.

4. Donald J. Hughes, "St. Francis of Assisi and the Diversity of Creation," *Environmental Ethics* 18 (1996): 311–20.
5. Holmes Rolston III, "Environmental Ethics: Some Challenges for Christians," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1993): 163–86.
6. Jennifer Welchman, "The Virtues of Stewardship," *Environmental Ethics* 21 (1999): 411–23.
7. Frank Schalow, "Who Speaks for the Animals? Heidegger and the Question of Animal Welfare," *Environmental Ethics* 22 (2000): 259–71. For a consideration of the whale rescue and benevolence from a Heideggerian perspective, see also Clayton, *Connection on the Ice*.
8. Schalow, "Who Speaks for the Animals?" 265.
9. Schalow, "Who Speaks for the Animals?" 265–66.
10. Schalow, "Who Speaks for the Animals?" 268.
11. In this account of benevolence I have drawn extensively on the ideas found in James D. Wallace, *Virtues and Vices* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).
12. Literature is full of examples of the hateful person who is envious of the good success or benevolent nature of another, believes him- or herself incapable of doing or being good in such a benevolent manner, and therefore actively seeks the destruction of the other. Herman Melville's story *Billy Budd* provides an excellent example of this pathology.
13. This account of environmental benevolence does not entail a position regarding the individualistic/holistic debate. It merely asserts that concern for nonhuman others, whether individual entities or otherwise, is a necessary part of environmental benevolence.
14. Lisa Newton, *Ethics and Sustainability: Sustainable Development and the Moral Life* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2003), 8.
15. Geoffrey Frasz, "What Is Environmental Virtue Ethics That We Should Be Mindful of It?" *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 8 (2001): 8.
16. Newton, *Ethics and Sustainability*, 37.
17. Geoffrey Frasz, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: A New Direction for Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 16 (1994): 259–74.
18. Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 95.
19. Philip Cafaro, "The Naturalist's Virtues," *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 8, no. 2 (2001): 88.
20. I am grateful to Ronald Sandler for raising these critical questions in a reading of an earlier draft of this chapter. I am further grateful for all the helpful comments and editorial suggestions he and coeditor Philip Cafaro have made on this essay.
21. Geoffrey B. Frasz, "Can We Love the Land? (And Would We Want To?)," paper presented at the Northwest Conference of Philosophy, November 1997.
22. I recognize that another answer to this question is that we should act altruistically, even though this might not lead to a more satisfying result for the agent. Without developing my point further, I will say that I agree with Aristotle that a virtuous life will result in a more satisfying life, even if checkered with setbacks or defeats from time to time.
23. This point is made quite forcefully by Stephanie Kaza in her essay "Acting with Compassion: Buddhism, Feminism, and the Environmental Crisis," *Ecotheology* 1 (1996): 71–98.

CHAPTER 9

Gluttony, Arrogance, Greed,
and Apathy: An Exploration
of Environmental Vice

Philip Cafaro

Search on *vice* in the *Philosopher's Index* and not much comes up. Along with a lot of articles with "vice versa" in their abstracts there is one book, which is not about vice but about just political arrangements, and half a dozen articles, none well known, actually dealing with vice or particular vices.¹ Yet there are good reasons to explore vice. Dramatically speaking, vice is more interesting than virtue: think *Inferno* versus *Paradiso*; think Lucifer versus any other character, including God, in *Paradise Lost*. More important, the exploration of moral character has been one of the great steps forward in the "virtue ethics" revival of the past two decades, and considering vice in addition to virtue leads to a more complete treatment of moral character. How human beings fail can tell us much about ourselves. Perhaps nowhere are our failures more apparent than in our treatment of nature.

Public opinion polls repeatedly have shown that most Americans self-identify as "environmentalists" and support strong policies to protect the environment.² Yet these same people routinely behave in environmentally irresponsible ways. They plant thirsty bluegrass lawns and pour poisons on them to keep them free of dandelions. They buy gas-guzzling SUVs and drive them four blocks for a loaf of bread. We need to ask why, when it comes to the environment, our actions are so out of sync with our professed values, and we need to ask why in a way that leaves room for both political and personal answers.

To some degree our political, economic, and technological systems present us with environmentally unsustainable choices or strongly incline us in those directions. Our politicians fund highways, not bike paths or mass transit; corporate advertising stimulates environmentally costly desires, rather than encouraging contentment with what we have. Still, as consumers and citizens we usually have real choices, and we often choose the environmentally worse ones. No one forces us to buy big SUVs, build three-car garages, or let our bicycles rust. This chapter argues that we do these things because we are not the people we should be. Our poor environmental behavior stems, in part, from particular character defects or vices. Among the most important of these are gluttony, arrogance, greed, and apathy.³

To anticipate one criticism, exploring environmental vice at the individual level does not mean ignoring the larger, systemic causes of environmental degradation. Creating

sustainable societies will demand fundamental political change. Citizens across the globe should work for the passage and enforcement of strong antipollution laws, more national parks and wilderness areas, funding for mass transit and taxes on personal cars, and measures to limit human population growth. Above all, we should work to end the power of large corporations to set environmental policy, directly or through their political tools. At the same time, those of us who care about nature have a responsibility to choose wisely in our everyday environmental decisions. The failures of our neighbors, or our leaders, do not absolve us from our personal environmental responsibilities. The world is an unjust place, but we should live justly within it.

Vice Defined

In common usage, a "vice" is a personal habit, a social practice, or an aspect of human character of which we disapprove.⁴ We may speak of a person's habitual lying and nose picking as vices, of more or less widely practiced activities such as smoking and gambling as vices, and of character traits such as greed and gluttony as vices. From here on in, when I speak of a vice, I mean it in the sense of a character trait.

In many cases, when people call a character trait a vice, there is nothing more in their minds than a picture of certain behaviors and a swirl of negative emotions. Thinking human beings aspire to something more than this. We believe that our vice judgments can be right or wrong—or at least more or less plausible. We try to correct or improve them. How?

Traditionally, Western philosophers have invoked the concept of *harm* in order to clarify and justify their judgments about vice.⁵ A vice harms the vicious person, those around him, or both. So, for example, gluttony may undermine the health of the glutton or predispose him to pay insufficient attention to what is really important in life. Avarice may tempt us to cheat our business partners or neglect the claims of justice and charity. Sloth undermines our ability to pursue valuable projects that give our lives meaning and which benefit society.

Judgments about the vices are thus derivative: they rest on particular conceptions of the "goods" that make up a good human life and on the general presupposition that the flourishing of the individual and society are important.⁶ Lists of key vices and specific conceptions of particular vices have changed, as notions of flourishing have changed. Aristotle imagined human flourishing to consist largely in fulfilling the roles of friend, householder, and citizen in a fourth-century Greek polis. His "vices of character" hinder our performance of these roles and cut us off from the benefits they provide.⁷ For Thomas Aquinas, human happiness finds completion in knowledge of and right relationship to God, in this world and the next. Hence, he defined the vices partly in terms of them separating human beings from God. Hence "worldliness" became a vice in the medieval tradition in a way that would not have made sense to the Greeks. For Montaigne and increasingly in the modern world, a sense of the preciousness and fragility of the individual self comes to the fore. Thus, cruelty emerges as a major vice (and diversity becomes a societal virtue).⁸ Once again as in Greek times, a vice's evil is described not in terms of disobedience to God but

in terms of how it undermines the happiness of individuals or their unlucky neighbors.

Throughout the evolution of the Western tradition and despite much variety, four commonalities tend to hold. First, selfishness and self-centeredness are condemned, whereas legitimate self-concern and self-development are praised. For Aristotle, "every virtue causes its possessors to be in a good state and to perform their functions well"; the vices undermine proper human functioning and well-being.⁹ For Aquinas, too, the notion of virtue "implies the perfection of a power," whereas vice leads to weakness, failure, and, in extreme cases, a sort of disintegration of the self.¹⁰ Even Kant, despite his caution that love of "the dear self" lies at the root of immorality, also argues that we have a duty to develop our talents and capabilities.¹¹ Vices hinder this legitimate self-development.

Second, and as a consequence, the tradition insists that vice is both bad for individuals and harmful to their communities. Indeed, individual writers have sometimes gone to extreme lengths here, arguing, for example, that we never benefit ourselves when we wrong others.¹² More sensibly, the tradition has argued that moral shortcuts to happiness in fact *tend* to place us on winding roads toward unhappiness. Sharp dealing in business leads people to distrust us, and hence we do not prosper; avarice helps us amass great wealth at the expense of our fellow citizens, who then hate us or plot our demise. In this way, the tradition often appealed to a broadened self-interest in order to convince people to act morally: our happiness is bound up with the happiness of others. This approach has largely been abandoned by modern moral philosophy, which has focused on direct appeals to altruism.

Third, the tradition sees vice as contradicting and eventually undermining reason, hence destroying our ability to understand our proper place in the world and act morally. Aristotle expresses this in his distinction between incontinence (the tendency to pursue pleasure even when we know it is wrong to do so) and the full-blown vice of intemperance (where the continued pursuit of illicit pleasure has so clouded our judgment that we no longer recognize right from wrong).¹³ The vices are habits of thought and action. Left unchecked, they tend to cloud reason, the voice of both conscience and prudence.

Fourth, and partly as a consequence of this diminished rationality, the tradition sees vice as cutting us off from reality or at least from what is most important in life. This is most obvious in the late ancient and medieval periods; for Augustine and Aquinas, sin and vice cut us off from God, the highest reality.¹⁴ But we also see this notion at work in Aristotle, where intemperance leads people to pursue gross physical pleasures at the expense of activities such as science and contemplation that connect us to higher things.¹⁵ We see it in early modern times in Montaigne, where the vice of certainty blocks sustained inquiry into existence, and intolerance blinds us to our common humanity and a true understanding of the human condition.¹⁶

What holds these four aspects of vice together is that they all involve harm: to ourselves, to those around us, or to both. What constitutes harm, particularly beyond a core of obviousness, has varied widely in the tradition, along with the particular conceptions of human nature and the ultimate commitments held by philosophers. And until recently, philosophers have paid scant attention to human harms to the environment—or to the potential for those harms to rebound and harm us in turn.

Vice and Environmental Harm

Take a look at the arguments for environmental protection in op-ed pieces in the newspapers, in articles in *Sierra* or *Audubon* magazines, or in the classic works of Aldo Leopold or Rachel Carson.¹⁷ Sometimes environmentalists appeal to human altruism. Air pollution from Midwestern power plants is killing trees and acidifying lakes in the Appalachian Mountains; a proposed dam out West will drown a river and perhaps extinguish a rare fish species. This harm to nature is, or would be, wrong, based on nature's intrinsic worth—a worth that may be expressed more in aesthetic or spiritual terms than directly in what philosophers recognize as ethical terms. As we are powerful, these arguments assert, so we should be just and merciful.

At least as often, environmentalists' arguments appeal to human self-interest. We should rein in water and air pollution because they harm human health. We should preserve an undeveloped tract of prairie, an unroaded forest, a wild and undammed river, because opportunities to know and appreciate nature will disappear if we do not do so. Scientists and artists will lose chances to study and appreciate wild nature; hunters, fishermen, and backpackers will lose recreational opportunities. We might be able to live without these activities, but at least some of us would not be able to live well or live the way we want to live.¹⁸

Both sorts of arguments are ubiquitous in the environmental literature. Both can be effective. One need not preclude the other. The first sort of argument finds direct (or intrinsic) value in nature's flourishing; the second sees human flourishing as dependent on nature's flourishing, which thus has derivative (or instrumental) value. In either case, harms to nature are ethically important. During the past thirty years, most environmental philosophers have focused on making the case for altruism, refining and developing the first sort of argument. Recently some philosophers have focused on refining and justifying the second sort of approach, arguing that we will be better and happier people if we appreciate and protect nature.¹⁹

The key idea behind such an *environmental virtue ethics* is that we cannot harm nature without harming ourselves. A basic human flourishing depends on a healthy environment (lead exposure can damage children's brains, leading to lower intelligence, mental retardation, and death, at progressively higher levels of exposure). Full human flourishing depends on a varied and stimulating environment, including accessible wild areas that preserve the native flora and fauna (children who grow up without chances to experience wild nature miss opportunities to appreciate beauty, understand human history and prehistory, and reflect on their place in the world). The complementary insight is that human flourishing does *not* depend on high levels of material consumption. In fact, when the acquisition of material possessions leads us to ignore higher pursuits, or when society's overconsumption undermines nature's health and integrity, our own lives suffer.

In her book *Dirty Virtues*, Louke van Wensveen shows that environmentalists often assert that certain vices are at the base of environmentally harmful behavior.²⁰ A *greedy* factory owner dumps untreated pollutants into a stream, even though she knows that it may harm fish in the stream or people who eat the fish. *Gluttonous* Americans

consume too much food, energy, or raw materials; thus, we take more than we need from the Earth. To justify such vice judgments, environmental philosophers must provide convincing accounts of the motivations behind antienvironmental behavior. And they must show harm.

Consider how Aristotle discusses vice. In the *Ethics*, certain persistent and cohesive aspects of human personality are defined as character traits, and certain character traits are judged vices because they harm vicious individuals and those around them. Because for Aristotle a human being can only flourish in a polis and because one's happiness cannot be completely divorced from that of one's family, friends, and descendants, even the vices that seem primarily to harm others have a potentially self-destructive aspect. There are a number of well-worn paths by which other-directed harms may harm a selfish person, including poisoning his relationships with others and undermining the social cohesion on which a functioning polis depends. Ultimately, self-harms and other-directed harms cannot be completely separated.

The way to justify environmentalists' vice talk is similar. We need to show how environmental vices—which may be largely the same as the traditional vices or may include many new ones—harm the vicious person directly. We need to show how they harm those around him and future generations, people about whom he should care (for one thing, the selfish person's happiness is not so easily separated from theirs as he thinks). We must also show that there is another legitimate circle of moral concern, not recognized by Aristotle or the philosophical tradition, pleaded for in Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* and by legions of environmentalists since then: the wider circle of nonhuman nature. Harm within this circle is bad in itself, for it is real harm to entities that can flourish and are wonderful when they do flourish. And such harm rebounds, harming human communities and (sometimes) the individuals inflicting the environmental harms. Aristotle places us in a social environment and defines human flourishing accordingly. The fact that we also live in physical environments shows the need for this more encompassing view of human flourishing and moral concern.²¹

To anticipate another criticism, some philosophers will say that only when we show how vices harm vicious persons themselves have we given the strongest possible argument for their viciousness. Although I do think that showing the connection between vice and self-harm is one benefit of a virtue ethics approach, I see no reason to limit our conception of harm to self-harm. Self-concern and concern for others are both legitimate and necessary within ethics. There is something wrong with a person who brings all of her actions to the test of her own happiness, even when they obviously affect others. Similarly, there is something wrong with ethical philosophies that do so. An environmental virtue ethics may give us good self-interested reasons to rein in our environmental vices; it does not seek to reduce all vice to self-interest.

On the other hand, I see nothing wrong with curbing our vices because we believe that it is in our self-interest to do so. My colleague Holmes Rolston is worried that you will treat nature right for the wrong reasons.²² I am more worried that you will not treat nature right at all, and I believe that any reason that convinces you to treat nature more gently is a good reason. Furthermore, a better understanding of our self-interest should lead to less materialistic lifestyles and more time exploring nature. Rolston's arguments for nature's intrinsic value deserve to prevail; they are more likely to

prevail among people who have had experiences that help them understand and appreciate them.

In the end, as in interpersonal ethics, a complete environmental ethics will have to make a place for both altruism and enlightened self-interest. In truth we are all self-interested, although not exclusively so. In truth, our flourishing and nature's flourishing are intertwined. In what follows, I discuss four key environmental vices: gluttony, arrogance, greed, and apathy.²³ If I can show how these vices lead to harm, that will be all the justification you should need that they are worth reforming (certainly it is all the justification you will ever be able to get). The greater the harm—to oneself, to others, to nature, or to all three—the greater the incentive to reform.

Gluttony

"Gluttony: excess in eating and drinking" says my *American Heritage Dictionary*; the *Oxford English Dictionary* adds that the word may also refer to an excessive *desire* for food and drink and by a natural extension to many kinds of overindulgence (I may be a glutton for punishment, learning, or cheap romance novels). Despite the word's pejorative connotations, we tend to take a relatively benign view of this vice today. Few moralists treat overeating as a serious personal failing, on a par with such qualities as selfishness or cruelty. Earlier thinkers took gluttony more seriously. Aristotle devoted extensive attention to intemperance, defined as the vice regarding the pleasures of touch: primarily food, drink, and sex. Saint Paul inveighed against those "whose God is their belly." Not only was *gula* considered one of the seven deadly sins, but early church thinkers often put it at the head of the list.²⁴

Perhaps the classic picture of the glutton is a man at table, stuffing in food with both hands, sauces dribbling down his chins, belly pushing back the table as he occasionally lurches into it. Unconcerned with quality, he is going for quantity. He does not talk to his dinner companions, even to comment on the food. He is all desire; there is something brutal and inhuman about him. Another picture of gluttony involves two women sitting in a fancy restaurant, simpering over the tomato bisque. One compares it with the soup she had at another restaurant three weeks ago; the other describes a version she made from a recipe taken from *Gourmet* magazine. We might call these women epicures rather than gluttons, and many would see nothing wrong with their behavior. Gregory the Great, who helped define the seven deadly sins for the medieval tradition, took a sterner and more encompassing view: "In another manner are distinguished the kinds of gluttony, according to Saint Gregory. The first is, eating before it is time to eat. The second is when a man gets himself too delicate food or drink. The third is when men eat too much, and beyond measure. The fourth is fastidiousness, with great attention paid to the preparation and dressing of food. The fifth is to eat too greedily. These are the five fingers of the Devil's hand wherewith he draws folk into sin."²⁵ Monkish quibbling? Or a recognition that beyond the health harms of gross gluttony, gourmandizing wastes our time and causes us to pay less attention to what is truly important? It depends on your view of human flourishing and the purpose of life.

Neither of these pictures is particularly appealing, yet our disapproval could be merely aesthetic. To show why gluttony is *morally* wrong, we must discuss the harms it generates. In the case of gluttonous eating, the most obvious harms fall on the glutton himself. Excessive eating leads to obesity, and the health dangers of obesity are well documented in the scientific literature. Of the ten leading causes of death in America, four show positive correlation to being overweight or the diet and activity patterns that lead to being overweight.²⁶ These include the three leading proximate causes of death—heart disease, cancer, and cerebrovascular disease (stroke)—as well as diabetes mellitus, the seventh leading cause. In addition to direct harms to health, obesity decreases happiness and well-being in less obvious ways that are harder to measure.²⁷ Overweight people tend to feel more lethargic. Obese individuals participate less often in many enjoyable physical activities, from sports to sex (this is a positive feedback problem: less physical activity leads to less energy, leading to less physical activity, etc.). The surgeon general has concluded that obesity is a major health problem in the United States.²⁸

With fine gluttony, the argument that it harms the glutton is less clear. Gourmands may find a lot of pleasure savoring the sauces and comparing the wines. Gregory did not have to worry about whether his monks were enjoying themselves, but for most of us today pleasure is at least part of what we want out of life. Even from a hedonistic perspective, however, we may wonder whether developing a taste for finer things will lead to happiness in the long run. If we are no longer able to enjoy simple meals, or forget Seneca's words that "hunger is the best spice," or pay more attention to how our cooking turned out than to the friends around our table, or eat such rich foods that we get gout, the gourmet life may lead away from happiness. Too, our time is limited. Attention to trivia can lead us to neglect more important things.

So gluttony takes a direct toll on gluttons, but it also has environmental costs. In America, 1,265 species are listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act: 519 animals and 746 plants.²⁹ The causes of extinction are complex, but scientists generally agree that habitat loss is primary. A comprehensive study has found habitat degradation/loss implicated as a cause for 85 percent of threatened and endangered species in the United States.³⁰ Crucially, in analyzing the causes of habitat loss, the study identifies agriculture (principally row cropping) as the leader, affecting fully 38 percent of all endangered species. Livestock grazing is also important, affecting 22 percent. In addition, agriculture is an important contributor to several other major causes of endangerment, including water developments such as reservoirs and dams (affecting 30 percent of species) and pollutants (20 percent).³¹

Now just as food consumption drives agricultural production, so food *over*consumption fuels a more environmentally harmful and intensive agriculture. A recent, comprehensive study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Unit estimated that in 2000, Americans consumed an average of 2,800 calories per day, 25 percent more than the 2,200 calories needed to supply their nutritional and energy needs.³² This translates directly into increased agricultural demand. All else being equal, Americans' habit of consuming approximately 25 percent more calories than necessary increases the amount of land needed to grow crops and graze animals by 25 percent. It increases the amount of pollutants dumped onto agricultural lands and running off into

rivers and streams by 25 percent.³³ Excess food consumption harms Americans' health; if we take *ecosystem* health to include clean rivers and streams and robust populations of our native flora and fauna, we must conclude that excess food consumption also harms environmental health.

Because ecosystem health and human health are connected, a complete account of the harms of gluttony must extend further. Unhealthy ecosystems lead to direct human harms, for example, when people sicken from the air or water pollution generated by huge livestock confinement facilities. Ecosystem sickness also leads to intellectual and spiritual losses, as a dull and lifeless agricultural landscape becomes a bore to live and work in. Even if this landscape remains productive of agricultural products, it may no longer be productive of happy and healthy human beings.³⁴ In Illinois only one-tenth thousandth of the original 37 million acres of tall-grass prairie remains: 3,500 acres occurring in small, isolated conservation areas.³⁵ Living in a monotonous sea of corn and soybeans has probably taken a toll on the minds of Illinois farmers.

Gluttony reminds us that the vices, although often selfish, harm both ourselves and others. Food overconsumption harms our health and lowers life expectancy, but it also harms nature. These harms to nature rebound, in turn, and cause new kinds of harm to human and nonhuman beings. So that in the end, it becomes difficult to separate harms to self and harms to others, harms to people and harms to nature. Our flourishing is tied up with the flourishing of others.

On the other hand, the example of gluttony reminds us that the calculus of harms does not always come out as neatly as moralists want it to. For the past thirty years, books like Frances Moore Lappé's *Diet for a Small Planet* have argued that overeating in the wealthy nations leads to Third World hunger.³⁶ The argument has developed momentum by virtue of endless repetition, but empirical studies show that the connection does not hold. Work by Amartya Sen and others suggests instead that political and economic factors within Third World countries are most important in causing famines and malnutrition: particularly civil war, indifferent governments, and terrible poverty.³⁷ This does not mean that rich, fat Americans should not do more to help the world's poor; it means that eating less food is unlikely to help feed them. However, eating less *will* lessen our agricultural footprint, helping all those other species that compete with us for habitat and resources. Gluttony's other-directed harms fall primarily on nonhuman others.

Again, the moralist may want to say that gluttony, like all vices, inevitably harms the glutton herself. But gluttony shows us that we may refine our vices, so as to direct more of their harm—perhaps *all* of their harm—toward others. I may dine out three times a week in spectacular restaurants, eating and drinking my way through my children's inheritance—without neglecting to hit the gym the next day, thus staying quite healthy. I may cook spectacular meals for myself and my friends, thoroughly enjoy both, and maximize my own pleasure—while greatly increasing my environmental harms. On average, it takes one cup of oil to grow, harvest, store, ship, and sell each cup of food (dry weight) consumed by Americans. Fine gluttony greatly increases this aspect of our agricultural footprint, as “the market” flies fish from New Zealand to Denver or strawberries from Chile to New York in January. This causes *us* no harm; furthermore, we may still get out and enjoy nature, perhaps even flying to New

Zealand or Chile to hike and ski. Still, a more comprehensive and accurate account of harm will teach us that we should limit our agricultural footprint and accommodate ourselves more to locally available foods. All important, unnecessary harm is wrong. Although it is possible to live a life in which we largely externalize the costs of our gluttony, we should not do so.

Virtue ethicists emphasize the childishness of gluttony. Aristotle believed that there is something crude and undeveloped in a person who seeks all happiness in the simplest ways.³⁸ “The gross feeder is a man in the larva state,” wrote Henry Thoreau, “and there are whole nations in that condition, nations without fancy or imagination, whose vast abdomens betray them.”³⁹ Similarly, virtue ethicists assert that self-development and lasting satisfaction come not through gluttony but through pursuing more adult pleasures and activities. “When someone lacks understanding,” wrote Aristotle, “his desire for the pleasant is insatiable and seeks indiscriminate satisfaction.”⁴⁰ In contrast, the pleasures of love and friendship, aesthetic appreciation and the pursuit of knowledge, will not pale or lead us to behave unjustly.

Traditionally, the virtue opposed to gluttony was *temperance* or moderate use. We may also speak of *gratitude* as a complementary virtue. Consider an American Thanksgiving. Originally it was a day set aside to thank the Lord for physical and spiritual sustenance, with roots in Indian green corn ceremonies with similar motivations. Now Thanksgiving is often just another excuse for Americans to pig out. The next day, we go shopping. I do not think that the answer to this is to fast on Thanksgiving but, rather, to give thanks, thoughtfully and sincerely. With gratitude will come understanding and acceptance of our environmental responsibilities.

Arrogance

With no other virtue/vice complex have Western attitudes varied so much as with pride, humility, and arrogance. The Sermon on the Mount exhorts us to live lives of meekness and humility. For Christians pride is a vice, because human beings are infinitely inferior to God and essentially equal to one another. We often go wrong in our social dealings precisely through a desire to assert our superiority over others. Contrarily, the ancient pagans tended to view pride as a necessary part of a good life. Because self-knowledge and striving to live well helped define the good life, if one lived well, one knew it and commended oneself for it. Humility was at best a just judgment of one's own mediocrity and at worst a failure to understand true human excellence and whether one had achieved it.⁴¹

We are heirs to this complex heritage. On the one hand, we condemn those who lord it over others. We dislike braggarts and prefer heroes who credit others for their successes or who downplay them. On the other hand, we scoff at obsequious people. We encourage our children to take pride in their schoolwork and other efforts and are proud of their achievements.

If we look to the harm criterion, I believe we will make a place for a proper pride as a virtue, with obsequiousness as one vice and arrogance as another. As Kant, our greatest exponent of egalitarian morality, puts it, we have no right to disrespect humanity in our

own person; nor should we encourage others to do so through excessive meekness. Furthermore, part of our legitimate motivation for treating others morally is a sense that we exalt our own humanity in the process.⁴² Still, arrogance—an overvaluation of ourselves and an undervaluation of others—remains a vice. The human harms that arrogance leads to are obvious, as we selfishly place our own interests far ahead of other people's.

Environmentalists and environmental philosophers see a similar arrogance in much of our treatment of nature. "Christian as well as non-Christian ecowriters warn against the prideful attitude that makes us humans think we are number one in the universe," Louke van Wensveen writes, "that we are . . . 'central and in control'." She notes that "the Latin term for pride, *superbia*, translates the Greek *huperbios*, which means 'above life'," and "the Latin term *humilitas* literally suggests closeness to 'humus', i.e., 'soil' or 'ground'."⁴³ An early attempt to articulate a better environmental ethics was titled "the arrogance of humanism."⁴⁴ Today philosophers speak of the arrogance of "anthropocentrism," the vain and selfish view that human beings alone are worthy of respect, whereas everything else in the world, including several million other species of life, only has value if it is useful to humans.

Arrogant indifference to nature and arrogant indifference to people often go together. For four decades, Chevron and Shell have been drilling for oil in the Niger Delta, making billions of dollars for their companies, their shareholders, and Nigeria's successive military and civilian dictators. Little of this wealth has made its way into the hands of the delta's inhabitants, who have had to bear the brunt of the environmental harms of oil drilling. These have included poisoned water and diminished fisheries, leading to sickness and hunger for many inhabitants. Efforts to protect the environment and other local interests have been brutally suppressed. Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other leaders of the Ogoni people were executed following a show trial in 1995. Since then other activists have been jailed and tortured, as documented in a 200-page report from Human Rights Watch.⁴⁵

In May 1998, more than 100 activists from the Ilaje people occupied a Chevron drilling platform and service barge in an effort to force the company's management to negotiate with them. Activists' demands included clean drinking water, electricity, environmental reparations for nearby villages, and rebuilding of eroding riverbanks. With work on the barge stopped, Chevron was losing money. After four days and while the activists believed they were still in negotiations, Chevron flew in members of the Nigerian military, who opened fire on the unarmed occupiers, shooting two of them dead. The rest were taken off to prison and tortured.⁴⁶

The Nigerian armed forces were brought in on Chevron contractors' helicopters and given bonus pay by the contractor; the decision to bring them in was made by Chevron management. Nigeria's armed forces and police are notorious for human rights abuses. By bringing in the military and sending the activists off to jail, oil company managers knew what they were buying.

Bola Oyinbo, one of eleven protesters arrested, reported being handcuffed and hung from a ceiling hook for five hours, in an effort to extract a confession of piracy and destruction of property. The radio program *Democracy Now* asked Bill Spencer, a Chevron contractor in charge of servicing the barge, what he thought of the torture endured by Oyinbo and others:

Spencer: I don't think anybody here was under the impression that when you go to jail in Nigeria, it's pleasant.

Q: Was there concern about the young people who were held in detention. Was there any follow up?

A: By me? Not at all. No.

Q: Were you concerned about them in detention?

A: I was more concerned about 200 people who work for me. I could care less about the people from the village, quite frankly.

Q: Once your people were safe . . .

A: Did I personally have any concern for them, not one little bit. No.

The arrogance here is blatant. With this view of the Niger Delta's inhabitants, it is hard to imagine Spencer or the other oil men working there having much concern for the delta's fisheries or wildlife. Indeed, coming to Nigeria seems to provide them with a well-paid moral holiday. As Spencer puts it: "I'm not leading a moral campaign. We're just here to work. Strictly commercial venture. Not a political one."

But Chevron's and Shell's activities have enormous political consequences. Oil provides the government with 80 percent of its revenues. That money helped prop up military dictatorships for more than thirty years. The oil companies got what they wanted: zero accountability for the environmental and human harms caused by their activities, hence maximum profits. Only the Nigerian people suffered. Here is Bill Spencer again, on that subject:

Democracy Now: Do you have any reservation about working with those forces [Nigerian armed forces and police] knowing or acknowledging they can in fact be ruthless?

Spencer: No, I don't know. Life is tough here. And people, you often hear it said, that life is cheap here. I guess it is. It's looked at a little differently. I think that that's something that doesn't happen in our society. Life is a little more maybe precious or something. I think here or any of these developing countries it tends to be a little cheaper.

It is fascinating to see how arrogance can dim a man's sense of moral responsibility. This is how it is here, Spencer says, as if he and the oil companies are not helping to create the conditions in Nigeria from which they profit. But read the words of the activists describing what they hope to achieve: clean water, secure food, education for their children, and some say in how they are governed and how their environment is managed. *They* seem to think that their lives and the lives of their children are precious. Now we can begin to understand why Chevron managers prefer to send in the armed forces to kill these people and crush their spirit, rather than meet with them. If they heard them speak and looked them in the eyes, they would be forced to see them as human beings. That might get in the way of maximizing profits.

Examples of corporate arrogance are legion; arrogant environmental destruction by individuals is just as common. A good example in the United States is off-road vehicle

(ORV) use. Over the past three decades, ORVs have created major, well-documented harms to our public lands.⁴⁷ Four-wheelers have carved tens of thousands of miles of illegal roads onto our national forests, degrading wildlife habitat and causing erosion. Snowmobiles in Yellowstone National Park stampede wildlife and cause such serious air pollution that entrance guards have been forced to wear respirators. Jet skis dump up to one-quarter of their oil and gas directly into lakes and rivers, polluting them. While they trash nature, ORV users ruin the experience of other recreationists—who happen to be the vast majority of visitors to national parks and national forests.

The arrogance of many ORV users is palpable. Magazines such as *Petersen's 4-Wheel & Off-Road* or *4-Wheel Drive and Sport Utility Magazine* are filled with macho posturing. "Bud Vandermel chose to display some attitude coupled with Chevy prowess when building his '78 Scottsdale off-roader," begins a typical article: "Wanting to run with the big trucks, or wanting them to follow, Bud's off-road machine needed to be tall, and it needed to display dominance. To get the altitude, Bud installed 8-inch Skyjacker Softride leaf springs."⁴⁸ When Bud revs up his truck and heads into the backcountry, crashing through small trees and leaving tire tracks in the streams are part of the experience. At a minimum, ORV users do not care about their effects on the places they are tearing up. For some of them, harming nature is part of the fun.

These arrogant practices showcase important aspects of the vices. First, they tend to make us *selfish*. The ORV magazines rarely mention the obvious environmental harms ORVs cause or how annoying they are to other public lands users. In an extensive review, the few mentions I found of environmental harms all focused on the "environmental extremists" or "eco-wackos" complaining about them. Second, as Aristotle emphasizes, the vices *corrupt our reasoning abilities*.⁴⁹ In eight years teaching environmental ethics, I have read term papers on most major environmental issues, and some of the most illogical, rhetorically overblown, and willfully confused ones have been discussions of the ethics of ORV use by ORV enthusiasts. Third, vices come from and lead to *crude views of the good life* and make it hard to appreciate better ones. In discussing the experience of off-roading the emphasis is on fun, excitement, "the adrenaline rush." That is what people want—and it has nothing to do with understanding or appreciating nature. Indeed, it makes it harder for ORV users or anyone else to do so.

Vice cuts us off from reality, according to Thomas Aquinas. The arrogance of anthropocentrism cuts people off from the reality of nature. ORV users arrogantly destroy the wild nature that others want to appreciate and whiz through it so fast that they learn nothing about it themselves. In the Niger Delta, Chevron and Shell are arrogantly displacing traditional ways of life based on small-scale agriculture and sustainable fishing. Anthropocentrism as an intellectual outlook also cuts us off from reality, as we ignore nature's stories and tell truncated and false stories about ourselves.⁵⁰

In the pursuit of virtue, *practices and laws* are crucial. ORV use is a good example of a practice that encourages anthropocentrism. If we want to live environmentally responsible lives, we will have to cultivate practices that lock in habits and ways of looking at the world that are nonanthropocentric. As Aristotle says, we learn to act morally by instilling proper habits, not by arguments. Activities such as bird-watching, trout fishing, wildlife photography, and backcountry camping instruct us in nature's diver-

sity and beauty each time we engage in them. They teach us nature's stories, sharpening our senses and quieting our minds enough to appreciate them.⁵¹ We should encourage our children in these practices—and we should keep them from engaging in what might seem like harmless fun on ORVs.⁵²

For the irredeemably arrogant, of course, we need laws. Current efforts in the United States to replace strong environmental laws with voluntary environmental protection must be exposed and defeated. And as Peter Singer has recently argued, we must create an international legal order in which Chevron, Shell, and other corporations are held accountable for encouraging human rights abuses and propping up tyrannical regimes that abuse their own people.⁵³ Similarly, we must develop strong, binding international agreements to halt global warming, preserve endangered species and ecosystems, and reverse human population growth. Nothing less than this will succeed in preserving the flourishing natural world that an environmental virtue ethics insists is the prerequisite for human flourishing.

We cannot be good people without appreciating and developing those aspects of our humanity that distinguish us from the rest of nature: our abstract reason, our complex culture. Yet exalting our humanity does not mean focusing exclusively on these differences or setting ourselves up as tyrants over the rest of creation. Rather, the more we preserve and appreciate nature's beauty, the more we will flourish ourselves. The greater our moral restraint, the more a proper human pride will be justified.⁵⁴

Greed

Greed is "an excessive desire to acquire or possess more than what one needs or deserves, especially with respect to material wealth."⁵⁵ It is natural to enjoy material possessions; it is necessary, in modern society, to deal with money. But the desire for wealth may prove excessive for several reasons. It may leave us perpetually unsatisfied; as one philosopher puts it, greed is "an insatiable longing" that actual possession cannot slake.⁵⁶ The greedy person is often portrayed as rich. He has more than most people, more, perhaps, than he knows what to do with. Still, it is not enough. Greed may also lead us to neglect other, more important aspects of life. Another picture of greed is the miser counting gold pieces, alone in a windowless room, without friends, without interest in the world outside. The clink, clink, clink of each coin as it hits the pile echoes hollowly down the empty halls.

These are just images, of course, proving nothing. To show greed's viciousness, we must explore how too great an emphasis on money or possessions leads to harm. We must show, too, that there are limits to what we need, deserve, or really can use here.

Greed is perhaps the most selfish-making vice; in its grip we become incapable of generosity and immune to the demands of justice. When Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick broke the Homestead steelworkers strike in 1892, they were among the wealthiest men in America, but they had no intention of sharing any more of that wealth with their workers than they could possibly avoid. No claims of justice, no consideration of the good uses their workers could put that money to or the sheer pointlessness of *them* amassing any more wealth, made any impression.

Cases such as Homestead or the oil companies' injustices in Nigeria show how greed can lead to great injustice. But even everyday, small-scale greed can lead to important harms, accentuating differences in wealth, fueling envy in the poor and vanity in the rich, and undermining the social bonds necessary for a happy society. Christians have criticized avarice above all for these social harms. "Now shall you understand that the relief for avarice is mercy and pity in large doses," Chaucer's Parson says: "Certainly, the avaricious man shows no pity nor any mercy to the needy man; for he delights in keeping his treasure and not in the rescuing or relieving of his fellow Christian."⁵⁷ Aquinas condemned the hoarding of unnecessary possessions in clear terms, stating that "whatever a man has in superabundance is owed, of natural right, to the poor for their sustenance."⁵⁸ To grasp possessions beyond this limit is unjust and idolatrous: the worship of Mammon.

To the traditionally recognized social harms of greed, environmentalists add harms to nature. Greed leads to environmental harms in three ways. First, when profit is placed over all other goals, greed leads businesspeople to break environmental laws or do the minimum necessary to comply with them. For example, a factory hog farm might be highly profitable; still, its owner wants more money. He doubles his hog sheds, increasing the stink breathed by the neighbors and his poorly paid workers. The resultant increase in manure overstresses his waste lagoons, causing overflows into a nearby river. This kills fish and other wildlife, drives anglers and canoers from the river, and decreases property values for dozens of his neighbors. Unfortunately, it is easy to find real examples where businesspeople break or bend environmental laws in pursuit of profit.⁵⁹

Second, greed undermines the democratic political process. In his final year as CEO of Halliburton, an oilfield services and construction firm, Dick Cheney earned \$26.4 million in compensation.⁶⁰ Upon taking office as U.S. vice president a year later, Cheney's main job was to chair a task force charged with setting U.S. energy policy. Its recommendations, developed in meetings closed to the public but open to friends and colleagues from the energy industries, read like a wish list from those same industries, including rollbacks of environmental regulations and tens of billions of dollars in unnecessary subsidies for new energy development. In the Bush administration, in one governmental department after another, industry lobbyists and managers are "regulating" their own industries, lining their friends' pockets just as their own pockets will be lined when they return to private life. In Cheney's case he does not even have to wait, for he continues to receive compensation from Halliburton while serving as vice president.⁶¹ These are clear cases of greed trumping the public interest.

Third, greed leads to environmental harms by helping drive overconsumption among the general populace. Americans use vastly more oil, coal, water, metals, and other resources than our grandparents did, largely because we purchase lots of unnecessary things. Four and five year olds badger their parents for the latest plastic action figures and video games, which soon enough are dispatched to overflowing landfills. Middle-aged men with flagging libidos acquire mysterious desires for large, powerful cars—no matter that they already own cars or that the new Porsche or Hummer gets one-third the gas mileage and generates three times the CO₂ of the family's Taurus. All this overconsumption makes a pitiful enough spectacle, but the more important point is that it leads to great harms to nature. Human beings compete with millions of other

species for the habitat and resources needed to survive. Like Carnegie and Frick 100 years ago we are willing to destroy other lives or monopolize the resources needed to preserve them for the most trivial reasons. At a minimum, justice would seem to demand that we avoid consumption that does *nothing* to further our happiness. But greed leads us on to ever more consumption.

In these ways, greed harms nature. But it also harms greedy people themselves. In the first place, there is no strong connection between increased wealth and happiness. Sages and philosophers have taught that "money can't buy happiness" for millennia—now science is starting to confirm it. Numerous studies in America have shown that beyond the poorest 10 to 15 percent of the population, there is no statistically significant correlation between wealth and subjective or objective measures of happiness.⁶² You are no more likely to be happy earning \$4,000,000 per year than \$40,000. The factors that correlate most strongly with happiness are *security* of income—having some assurance that you and your family will have enough—and getting along well with your fellow workers and your spouse. But having some assurance that one has enough depends on being able to *recognize* that one has enough. Greedy people find this hard to do. Furthermore, studies have shown that people with more materialistic outlooks on life tend to have poor interpersonal relationships.⁶³ So the most proven, effective means to happiness tend to be beyond the reach of greedy people—no matter how wealthy they are.

Beyond the fact that material possessions are largely irrelevant to happiness, psychological studies show that a materialistic *outlook* on life tends to undermine happiness. One group of psychologists report:

A growing body of research demonstrates that people who strongly orient toward values such as money, possessions, image, and status report lower subjective well-being. For example, [several studies] have shown that when people rate the relative importance of extrinsic, materialistic values as high in comparison to other pursuits (e.g., self-acceptance, affiliation, community feeling), lower quality of life is also reported. Late adolescents with a strong materialistic value orientation report lower self-actualization and vitality, as well as more depression and anxiety.⁶⁴

Other studies have replicated these findings with college students and older adults.

Why are materialists less satisfied with life? One review article has considered various hypotheses and concluded that there is good evidence for three of them. First, materialists have poorer social lives, thus undermining their subjective well-being (but whether materialism is cause or effect remains unclear; unhappy people may grasp at materialistic values like straws). Second, it appears that "working toward material goals is less rewarding in the moment than working toward other goals." Anyone who has worked jobs that were enjoyable and challenging and jobs that were not knows this already. Third, the evidence suggests that the gap between what people have and what they want is more pronounced in the material realm than in other areas of life; hence focusing on material goals fosters dissatisfaction. It leads to a race to get and spend that leaves many people feeling hurried and harassed.⁶⁵

Philosophers, following Thomas Aquinas, will add that materialism pales because it involves turning away from real goods to apparent goods.⁶⁶ When we are greedy, we

neglect the real goods of activities for mere passive possession (the bird-watcher with top-of-the-line Zeiss binoculars who rarely gets up to hear the dawn chorus, the spoiled teenager with a fifteen-piece drum kit sitting unused in the basement). We reject the real goods of relationships for the apparent goods of triumphing over others (the CEO who cheats his employees out of their expected pension benefits and trades in his wife for a younger model). We neglect fulfilling, socially useful work for the trappings of status or success (the millionaire plastic surgeon specializing in boob jobs versus the humble pediatrician who volunteers at a free clinic twice a month).

In an excellent study of the seven deadly sins, Henry Fairlie notes that different societies predispose their members to different vices.⁶⁷ In America, we are raised to be greedy. Never before has a nation been so relentlessly bombarded by advertising; the average American child sees hundreds of thousands of television commercials by the time he or she reaches adulthood. Advertising emphasizes consumption as the primary means to happiness and works by increasing our dissatisfaction with life. As one marketer puts it: "Advertising at its best is making people feel that without their product, you're a loser. Kids are very sensitive to that. . . . You open up emotional vulnerabilities, and it's very easy to do with kids because they're the most emotionally vulnerable."⁶⁸

This education in greed does not stop with childhood. Our colleges and universities teach applied avarice in their economics classes and business schools. At election time, candidates work to convince us that they can increase economic growth, without asking whether that growth will make us happier or better people. Institutions that once spoke out against materialism, above all the churches, have largely fallen silent about its dangers.⁶⁹

We cannot eradicate the vices from human beings. However, there are practical steps we can take to limit greed and promote its contrasting virtues: thrift, modesty, generosity, and contentment. Individuals can focus on engaging in activities, rather than purchasing things. We can *share* things: buying a new lawnmower with several neighbors, for example, rather than buying one alone. We can stop watching television, eliminating much of the commercial incitement to greed from our lives. We can find alternatives to "recreational shopping" and other activities that cause wasteful consumption and leave us feeling unsatisfied.

At the political level, communities should ban billboards and commercial advertising in public schools. They should *require* recycling: current voluntary systems ensure that those who most need to learn restraint do not do so. More ambitiously, communities could pass sumptuary laws: limiting the size of houses, for example, to decrease human impacts on the landscape and standing incitements to envy. Beyond their direct environmental benefits, such measures would send a powerful, socially sanctioned message that greed is bad. Taking these personal and political steps would be good for us and good for nature.

Apathy

"Apathy" comes from the Greek *apatheia*, "without feeling"; one synonym in old English was *unlust*.⁷⁰ It is perhaps best understood as a lack: "lack of interest or concern,

especially regarding matters of general importance or appeal . . . lack of emotion or feeling; impassiveness."⁷¹ There is a close connection between apathy and laziness. Over the course of the Middle Ages, the two vices of *tristitia* (pessimism, despair) and *accidia* (apathy, "dryness of spirit") merged and morphed into the cardinal sin of sloth.⁷² Calling apathy and sloth vices, or sins, emphasizes the active nature of a good human life.

Apathy is a key environmental vice, for several reasons. Our default procedures typically harm the environment, whereas doing better takes work, especially initially: bicycling to work rather than driving a car, setting up recycling bins rather than just tossing our garbage. One pop philosopher connects *all* our moral failures to laziness, and if this perhaps goes too far, it is true that doing right requires effort.⁷³ Often, we need to *think* our way toward better environmental solutions, and apathy shows itself in lazy thinking as well as in halfhearted action or inaction. Sluggish thinking tends to be selfish, short-term, and unimaginative. It reinforces passivity, as when my students' inability to imagine any way forward beyond American car culture, combined with their understanding of its environmental harms, leaves them feeling defeated and hopeless.

Thankfully, some of my students are not apathetic but, rather, are filled with passion and energy: to save Yellowstone's buffalo or Colorado's prairie dogs, to convince the university to purchase more recycled paper and wind power. Here, though, another problem can crop up, for too often their passions burn bright and flare out after a semester or two of activity, leaving them apathetic and disengaged. This is not just an issue for students learning about environmental issues for the first time; "burnout" among activists is a major problem for environmental groups, which depend on grassroots strength to combat the overwhelming monetary advantages of their opponents. When activists burn out, particular environmental efforts lose continuity and focus.⁷⁴

The harms to nature from apathy are obvious: the old growth is cut, the refuge is drilled, the endangered species disappears. Polls might say that the great majority of the population supports preserving old growth, wilderness areas, or endangered species, but it is no matter if an active, eloquent few do not speak up on their behalf. "The broadest and most prevalent error requires the most disinterested virtue to sustain it," wrote Henry Thoreau, discussing his own society's apathetic acceptance of slavery.⁷⁵

Apathy's harms to people are just as clear. Most simply, *apatheia* feels bad. A passive life is dull and boring. It lacks the engagement and interest in the world that are keys to happiness. It makes life seem meaningless, and meaning is as important as bread for living a fully human life.⁷⁶ Environmental apathy is especially pernicious for environmentalists; arguably, a person who has a strong sense of nature's beauty and worth, yet who cannot summon the energy to try to protect it, fails to live up to his or her full humanity.⁷⁷ Nothing makes us more fully human than the ability to articulate and live up to our ethical values. Environmentalists who do not act on their beliefs forfeit moral integrity.

With its focus on human flourishing, the virtue ethics tradition has generally praised the active life.⁷⁸ According to Aristotle, "Virtue is an ability [or power; *dynamis*] that is productive and preservative of goods, and an ability for doing good in

many and great ways, actually in all ways in all things.”⁷⁹ “By *virtue* and *power* I mean the same thing,” wrote Spinoza: a power that allows us to become more fully ourselves.⁸⁰ Giving in to apathy means acquiescing in powerlessness. It means allowing others to circumscribe your life and your children’s lives. Fighting for a special place or a beloved species, although it opens us up to disappointment, engages a basic human capability for political action. One of my students astutely suggests *vulnerability* and *ambition* as two virtues opposed to apathy.

A fear of vulnerability was partly behind the Stoic cultivation of *apatheia* as a virtue. Indifference toward “externals” beyond one’s control allowed a person to take charge of his life and achieve happiness, the Stoics believed, while an unemotional rationality helped further just and successful action out in the world. The Stoic approach holds some appeal. It can further focus, hence effectiveness. Environmentalists do need to avoid fretting about events beyond our control, in a world with immense environmental problems and too much information about them. Nevertheless, cultivating environmental apathy seems misguided, for our happiness and flourishing depend, to an important degree, on flourishing natural and human communities. These must be defended. Environmentalists also *want* to explore and connect with these communities, which necessarily involves caring for them. There are many benefits to caring—but they cannot be divorced from the pain we feel when that which we care for is harmed.

Still, a person sometimes might be happier not caring about the environment and just living in it. From an individual point of view, being a free rider might make sense. In my home state of Colorado, many people take the attitude: “I’ll float the rivers and ski the mountains, build my second home in prime elk habitat, enjoy it while I can, and not worry about tomorrow.” These people may be happier than the people sitting through four-hour-long city council meetings, waiting nervously for a chance to speak for two minutes in favor of a new zoning ordinance. After all, you cannot sit in a meeting room and ski fresh powder at the same time. But with too many free riders, too much selfishness, the environment will be degraded, and soon enough the people living within it will suffer. I believe that those of us who enjoy nature’s benefits have a duty to try to preserve it: for our communities and for future generations, for nature’s sake and for our own.

In a recent article, Louke van Wensveen argues that genuine virtues must help ensure ecosystem sustainability.⁸¹ As the virtues are virtues because they contribute to human flourishing and as flourishing is an ongoing project, the virtues must help secure the conditions necessary for their own cultivation. Traditionally, philosophers have emphasized the need to sustain the *social* conditions necessary for flourishing; today the evidence is clear that sustaining necessary *environmental* conditions is just as important. Wensveen’s position seems unassailable.⁸² It sets minimum standards for environmental concern that any plausible virtue ethics needs to uphold. Generalizing the point and shifting the focus from virtue to vice, I contend that any character trait, habit, institution, or way of life that cannot be sustained indefinitely is vicious. Furthermore, any character trait, habit, institution, or way of life whose current pursuit jeopardizes the well-being of others, now or in the future, is unjust. Apathy and indifference are socially and environmentally unsustainable. They cause, or allow, great harm. By these criteria, they are vices.

To fight apathy, we must find sustainable ways to engage in politics. Ideally, we will find political roles that we enjoy. Failing that, we will have to come up with tasks that we can tolerate for restricted amounts of time. Here we see particularly well the limits of general rules and prescriptions in ethics. People are different and suited to different social roles. The idea that you *should* engage in particular political activities will almost certainly fail to motivate sustained action. Instead, find out what you are good at and what you find enjoyable. Perhaps you like the excitement and combat of political campaigns; or the fleeting, minor celebrity of writing newspaper editorials; or the quiet, anonymous analysis of complex government policy proposals. Perhaps you would prefer teaching children the names of the flowers and birds in the local woods. All these activities are necessary in the ongoing struggle for nature.

To fight apathy and despair, we also need to find ways to *escape* from politics.⁸³ Aldo Leopold wrote that the price of an ecological education is to walk through a world of wounds. Leopold spent a good part of his life speaking out for wildlife and wilderness preservation, working politically to heal the wounds. But he also spent many hours planting trees and filling gullies on his sand county farm and many more hours hunting, fishing, bird-watching, snowshoeing, canoeing, and horse packing. No matter how dismal the environmental policies of the Soil Conservation Service or the State of Wisconsin were, Leopold could see the slow healing of land on his farm. No matter how often the Forest Service or Park Service punched roads into wilderness or exterminated predators, he found opportunities to explore and connect with wild nature. Leopold crafted a life that he found enjoyable and meaningful, that sustained him and made possible his lasting contributions to conservation. Our challenge is to do likewise. In the end, action is the only answer to apathy.⁸⁴

Conclusion

Why do we harm nature? Because we are ignorant. Because we are selfish. Because we are gluttonous, arrogant, greedy, and apathetic. Because we do not understand our obligations to others or our own self-interest. We falsely assume that we can keep separate harms to nature and harms to humanity, harms to others and harms to ourselves. We do not see that environmental vices do not just harm nature; they harm us and the people around us. As I have shown in this essay, many of these harms are scientifically verifiable; the rest can be understood by anyone with open eyes and an open heart. The environmental vices are bad for us and bad for the Earth. For better and for worse, we really are all in this together.

Notes

1. Why is vice so little discussed in contemporary philosophy? Perhaps the failure comes from a discomfort with appearing too judgmental. When we assert that a particular action is wrong, we typically assume that people are free to act otherwise. Vice terms imply a deeper evil in people, harder to reform, certainly not to be shaken off by an argument or two. Similarly,

when we assert that particular social arrangements are unfair or unjust, we locate the primary evil in "the system." Vice terms, in contrast, locate evil squarely within people. It is fine to criticize particular acts or social arrangements; criticize people generally and you trespass on the sacred, humanity having replaced God as the divine object in modern secular philosophy. Locate a *persistent* evil in individuals, and you verge on a pessimism at odds with the Enlightenment optimism still at the heart of most moral philosophy.

2. See recent Gallup Earth Day polls, available at www.gallup.com (accessed 18 February 2004).

3. My sense is that these are our four most important, or cardinal, environmental vices because they are fundamental and lead to the greatest environmental harms. Justification of this claim lies beyond the scope of this essay, depending as it would on a fully developed moral psychology and a comprehensive account of environmental degradation.

4. See the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (3d ed.).

5. Louke van Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues: The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Ethics* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000), 103–6.

6. In this way vice judgments are similar to virtue judgments. See Martha Nussbaum, "Non-relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," in *The Quality of Life*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 242–69.

7. Aristotle also described human flourishing in terms of higher activities such as philosophical study and contemplation, leading to a different set of virtues and vices. These two different conceptions of happiness and virtue are incompletely integrated in his ethical philosophy.

8. See the essays "Of Cruelty" and "Cowardice, Mother of Cruelty" in Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*.

9. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 23 (bk. 2, chap. 6).

10. Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on the Virtues* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 57 (*Summa*, pt. 2, question 56).

11. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, AK 397; Immanuel Kant, *The Doctrine of Virtue: Part II of The Metaphysic of Morals*, AK 384–91, 443–45.

12. If we take moral character to be the sole determinant of personal well-being, or infinitely more important than other aspects of personal well-being, then it becomes true that we cannot improve our own well-being by wronging others. However, these Socratic and Stoic views give morality more importance than it deserves. Morality is important, but it is not all-important. We can preserve the nobility behind the view that we can never benefit ourselves by harming others by saying instead that we never *should* benefit ourselves by harming others.

13. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 110–11 (bk. 7, chap. 8).

14. See, for example, Augustine's account of his theft of the pears in the *Confessions*, bk. 2.

15. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 48–49 (bk. 3, chap. 12), 160–61 (bk. 10, chap. 5).

16. Both these themes are treated in Montaigne's final essay, "Of Experience." On tolerance, see also "Of Cannibals."

17. See Bill Shaw, "A Virtue Ethics Approach to Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic," in this volume; and Philip Cafaro, "Rachel Carson's Environmental Ethics," *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion* 6 (2002): 58–80.

18. This last point is important. We need not show that some aspect of environmental protection is a *necessary* condition for the happiness of *all* members of society; to show that it is an *important* condition for the happiness of *some* members of society may be all the justification we need for environmental protection. As Aldo Leopold wrote: "Mechanized recreation already has seized nine-tenths of the woods and mountains; a decent respect for minorities should ded-

icate the other tenth to wilderness" (*A Sand County Almanac with Essays on Conservation from Round River* [New York: Ballantine, 1970], 272).

19. The most comprehensive study so far, setting the agenda for future scholarship in this area, is Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues*.

20. Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues*, 97–103.

21. To be fair to Aristotle, he already had some sense of the importance of environmental protection to human flourishing. See Aristotle, *Politics*, bk. 7, chaps. 4–6, 11–12.

22. See Holmes Rolston III, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole," in this volume.

23. Once again, though I believe that these are our cardinal environmental vices, sustaining that claim would require further elaboration and defense. Selfishness, injustice, and ignorance are also plausible candidates for cardinal environmental vices.

24. Morton Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967), 59, 69. Bloomfield (*The Seven Deadly Sins*, 74–75) documents how, early in the medieval period, gluttony lost its place at the head of the list to pride; he speculates that as the list began to be used to guide moral life outside monasteries, sins of the flesh such as gluttony and lust came to seem less important than more socially damaging sins such as pride and avarice.

25. Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales* (New York: Covici and Friede, 1934), 603.

26. J. M. McGinnis and W. H. Foege, "Actual Causes of Death in the United States," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 270, no. 18 (1993): 2207–12.

27. One study notes that "aside from mortality rate . . . obesity substantially increases morbidity and impairs quality of life" (D. B. Allison, K. R. Fontaine, J. E. Manson, J. Steens, and T. B. Van Itallie, "Annual Deaths Attributable to Obesity in the United States," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 282, no. 16 [1999]: 1530).

28. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity* (Rockville, MD: Public Health Service, Office of the Surgeon General, 2001).

29. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, "Summary of Listed Species," available at http://ecos.fws.gov/tess_public/TESSBoxscore?format=display&type=archive&sysdate=5/01/2004 (accessed 14 May 2004).

30. D. S. Wilcove, D. Rothstein, J. Dubow, A. Phillips, and E. Losos, "Quantifying Threats to Imperiled Species in the United States: Assessing the Relative Importance of Habitat Destruction, Alien Species, Pollution, Overexploitation, and Disease," *BioScience* 48, no. 8 (1998): 607–15.

31. Wilcove et al., "Quantifying Threats to Imperiled Species in the United States." A more recent study has confirmed agriculture's leading role in species endangerment; see B. Czech, R. Krausman, and P. K. Devers, "Economic Associations among Causes of Species Endangerment in the United States," *BioScience* 50, no. 7 (2000): 593–601.

32. J. Putnam, J. Allshouse, and L. S. Kantor, "U.S. Per Capita Food Supply Trends: More Calories, Refined Carbohydrates, and Fats," *FoodReview* 25, no. 3 (2002): 2–15.

33. Of course, all else is not equal. For one thing, approximately 20 percent of the food produced in the United States is exported (see M. Reed, *International Trade in Agricultural Products* [Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2001]). But this point cuts both ways: much of the food consumed today in America is imported, and its growing, harvesting, and shipping have environmental costs.

34. Robert Pyle, *The Thunder Tree: Lessons from an Urban Wildland* (New York: Lyons Press, 1993); Kent Meyers, *The Witness of Combines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

35. D. H. Chadwick, "American Prairie: Roots of the Sky," *National Geographic* 184 (October 1993): 116.
36. Frances Moore Lappé, *Diet for a Small Planet* (New York: Ballantine, 1991).
37. Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).
38. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 46, 48–49 (bk. 3, chaps. 10, 12), 157 (bk. 10, chap. 3).
39. Henry Thoreau, *Walden* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 215.
40. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 49 (bk. 3, chap. 12).
41. Readers interested in the ancient pagan view should review Aristotle's discussion of magnanimity or "great-souledness" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. 4, chap. 3). Aristotle there defines magnanimity (Greek *megalopsuchia*) as a virtue specifying the proper attitude toward honor, stating that the magnanimous man "thinks himself worthy of great honors, and is worthy of them." The associated vices are overvaluation of oneself, on the one hand, and pusillanimity, thinking oneself worthy of little, on the other. Interestingly, Aristotle thinks that the latter vice is more usual than the former.
42. For a good discussion of Kantian self-respect, see Thomas Hill Jr., "Servility and Self-Respect," *Monist* 57 (1973): 87–104.
43. Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues*, 98.
44. David Ehrenfeld, *The Arrogance of Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).
45. Bronwen Manby, *The Price of Oil: Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria's Oil Producing Communities* (Washington, DC: Human Rights Watch, 1999).
46. This account of events in the Niger Delta, and the quotes from Chevron contractor Bill Spencer that follow, come from the *Democracy Now* radio program "Drilling and Killing: Chevron and Nigeria's Oil Dictatorship," produced by Amy Goodman and Jeremy Scahill, 30 September 1998, available at www.pacifica.org/programs/nigeria (accessed 13 February 2004).
47. For a comprehensive discussion and bibliography, see American Land Alliance, *Off-Road Vehicles: A Growing Threat to Public Lands and Waters*, available at www.americanlands.org/forestweb/offroad.htm.
48. Kevin McNulty, "Off-Road Attitude," available at www.off-roadweb.com/features/0202or_covertruck/index.html (accessed 12 February 2004).
49. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. 7, chaps. 7–8.
50. The arrogance of someone who holds to belief in a literal biblical creation, its combination of stubbornness and laziness, has a lot in common with the justifications for corporate crime and personal irresponsibility above. Anthropocentrism is not just a faulty value system but also a faulty way of understanding the world. In Aristotle's terms, it is an intellectual vice as well as a character vice.
51. It is no accident that most of our environmental heroes have been naturalists. See Philip Cafaro, "The Naturalist's Virtues," *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 8, no. 2 (2001): 85–99.
52. For similar reasons, federal and state land management agencies should ban ORVs from our public lands. By allowing and often encouraging such use, they are creating a whole constituency of people who do not respect nature. They are training people on public lands to trash public lands.
53. Peter Singer, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 104–5.
54. Ron Sandler makes the good point that arrogance is as much about what we think we can do as what we think we are worth. It is the former that is most in play in genetic engineering, damming and straightening rivers, industrial agriculture, and so on.

55. See the *American Heritage Dictionary*. Greed can also refer to an extreme desire for anything; as Chaucer says, "Avarice ne stont not only in lond ne in catel, but som tyme in science and in glorie" (quoted in the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition for *avarice*).
56. Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues*, 233.
57. Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, 601.
58. Thomas Aquinas quoted in Singer, *One World*, 185.
59. For examples of businessmen and businesswomen who are building profitable businesses that enhance environmental protection, see Steven Lerner, *Eco-pioneers: Practical Visionaries Solving Today's Environmental Problems* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998).
60. Gary Strauss, "Cheney as VP Faces a Serious Cut in Pay," *USA Today*, 26 June 2000. Available at www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/e2415.htm (accessed 15 June 2004).
61. John King, "Cheney Aide Rejects Halliburton Questions," *CNN.com/Inside Politics*, 16 September 2003. Available at www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/09/16/cheney.halliburton/index.html (accessed 15 June 2004).
62. These studies are summarized in Robert Lane, *The Market Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 524–47.
63. Tim Kasser, Richard Ryan, Charles Couchman, and Kennon Sheldon, "Materialistic Values: Their Causes and Consequences," in *Psychology and Consumer Culture: The Struggle for a Good Life in a Materialistic World*, ed. Tim Kasser and Allen Kanner (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2004), 19.
64. Kasser et al., "Materialistic Values," 29 (in-text citations silently removed).
65. Emily Solberg, Edward Diener, and Michael Robinson, "Why Are Materialists Less Satisfied?" in *Psychology and Consumer Culture: The Struggle for a Good Life in a Materialistic World*, ed. Tim Kasser and Allen Kanner (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2004), 45.
66. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 88.
67. Henry Fairlie, *The Seven Deadly Sins Today* (Washington, DC: New Republic Books, 1978), 25. Fairlie argues that American society instills avarice, gluttony, and lust in its members.
68. Nancy Shalek, quoted in Tim Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 91.
69. Of course, one can take the view that our contemporary acceptance of greed is all to the good. Almost 300 years ago, Bernard Mandeville, in his *Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Public Virtues*, argued that the vices are in fact necessary to a happy and flourishing nation.
70. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 251.
71. See the *American Heritage Dictionary*.
72. Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues*, 100; Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 96.
73. M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).
74. Randy Larsen, "Tenacity as a Virtue," unpublished MS, 8. For a good discussion of issues surrounding apathy and activism, see Randy Larsen, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: Nature as Polis" (M.A. thesis, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, 1996), chap. 3.
75. Henry Thoreau, *Reform Papers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 72.
76. See Matthew 4:4.
77. David Schmidtz, "Are All Species Equal?" in *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, ed. David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willot (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 100.
78. Still, passivity remains a live option within virtue ethics, embraced in ancient times by Eastern Taoists and Western Cynics. Given how much environmental harm is caused by the human need to act, regardless of whether action is justified, an environmental focus may challenge

the traditional preference for activity within virtue ethics. Perhaps the most radical aspect of the U.S. National Environmental Protection Act is its requirement that federal managers consider a "no action" option before proceeding with projects.

79. Aristotle, *On Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 79 (bk. 1, chap. 9).

80. Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics and Selected Letters* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1982), 156 (pt. 4, definitions). We see this equation of virtue, power, and activity in various archaic uses of the word *virtue*, when botanists or physicians write of the virtues of medicinal plants, for instance. Contrarily, many contemporary philosophers could agree with Ambrose Bierce's definition of virtue in his *Devil's Dictionary*: "virtues: certain abstentions."

81. Louke van Wensveen, "Ecosystem Sustainability as a Criterion for Genuine Virtue," *Environmental Ethics* 23 (2001): 232–34.

82. Wensveen's approach is challenged in Ronald Sandler, "The External Goods Approach to Environmental Virtue Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 25 (2003): 279–93.

83. For a discussion of hope, despair, and political activism in environmental virtue ethics, see Philip Cafaro, *Thoreau's Living Ethics: Walden and the Pursuit of Virtue* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 174–204.

84. Ed Abbey echoes Leopold and well sums up the claims of an environmental virtue ethics when he writes: "Do not burn yourselves out. Be as I am—a reluctant enthusiast . . . a part-time crusader, a half-hearted fanatic. Save the other half of yourselves and your lives for pleasure and adventure. It is not enough to fight for the land; it is even more important to enjoy it. . . . Enjoy yourselves, keep your brain in your head and your head firmly attached to the body, the body active and alive, and I promise you this much: I promise you this one sweet victory over our enemies, over those desk-bound people with their hearts in a safe deposit box and their eyes hypnotized by desk calculators. I promise you this: you will outlive the bastards" (quoted in Steve Van Matre and Bill Weiler, eds., *The Earth Speaks* [Greenville, WV: Institute for Earth Education, 1983], 57). Randy Larsen points out the appropriateness of this quote in his "Environmental Virtue Ethics."

CHAPTER 10

Vices and Virtues in Religious Environmental Ethics

Charles Taliaferro

Virtues and vices often depend on context. Some of the context involves the external circumstances; a person's active movement or stationary restraint may be courage or cowardice depending on which dangers and opportunities are in play. And some of the context involves more interior matters: a person's beliefs and desires, her or his physical and mental abilities. You and I may both walk across the same street in the same surrounding circumstances at the same time, and yet for me this is courageous (I am confronting and overcoming a physical or mental disability), whereas for you the event is of no particular importance.

The great religious traditions of the world have an important bearing on the philosophy of environmental virtues and vices because they portray competing, sometimes complementary, nonsecular accounts of our external circumstances as well as different interior philosophies of human beliefs and desires, our physical and mental abilities. The virtues and vices that are recognized in religious ethics often overlap those of secular ethics, but sometimes they differ in magnitude and kind. As I shall argue below, they differ in magnitude insofar as they treat some values with a higher intensity than one finds in a secular context, and they differ in kind insofar as they introduce virtues and vices not found in secular ethics. In this chapter I consider environmental virtues in a theistic context that is common to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (the Abrahamic faiths). I then contrast it with a nontheistic Buddhist philosophy. The chapter concludes with reflections on religious virtues in a practical moral and political context.

Before considering religious virtues and vices at closer range, consider five general reasons for undertaking this study. First, one or more religious traditions may be true, for example, there is a God or the Buddhist view of the self is right.¹ If so, and if (as I shall argue) religious traditions present us with virtues and vices that expand secular ethics, then any comprehensive view of values must include religious ethics. The exclusion of religion from serious philosophical inquiry has become less fashionable in the last forty years. In the 1950s and 1960s, religious views of the cosmos were frequently cast as superstitious nonsense by anglophone philosophers in light of an empirical, scientifically grounded naturalism. For a range of reasons, such a rigorous naturalism (sometimes closely associated with logical positivism) was overturned or at

least marginalized.² Naturalism is still a dominant intellectual force, but the idea that theories of the cosmos that challenge naturalism are incoherent (or even nonsensical or meaningless!) is no longer obvious or commonplace.³ Recent decades have witnessed a renaissance of philosophy of religion, and there is now an impressive philosophical literature articulating and defending all the main world religions. Because philosophers today often take seriously the credibility of religious views of human nature and the cosmos, the inclusion of religious ethics in the study of environmental virtues is a natural development.⁴

Second, if a religious view of the cosmos proves to be adequate, it could provide an overarching grounding or justification for one's secular environmental ethics. Some applied environmental ethics simply assume a basic view of values—for example, pleasure is good, suffering is bad, biodiversity within sustainable limits is good, the avoidable involuntary infliction of cancer on the innocent is wrong, and so on. There is discussion of whether values are intrinsic, inherent, instrumental, or holistic, but this is often carried out without considering a comprehensive metaphysical framework that accounts for such values. There is a further task of offering an account of such values and disvalues: What is their origin? Are these values a reflection of largely human preferences and institutions, or are they instead derived from a transcendental source? Most theists, for example, understand the values of this cosmos to be grounded in the goodness of God.⁵ My point is not that an acceptable environmental ethics must include an overarching, plausible metaphysics that bolsters and grounds secular ethics. As a subfield of philosophy, there is already more than enough for environmental ethicists to do besides debating comprehensive metaphysics. Still, this larger metaphysical task may be seen as a complementary project that (under ideal conditions) would provide a backing for environmental ethics.⁶

Third, even if we bracket questions about the truth of religious convictions, the majority of the world population is either identified as religious or is affected by religious traditions.⁷ So long as you wish to carry out environmental ethics in a way that engages vast portions of the world population, some acquaintance with religious ethics is pivotal. An intelligent encounter with religious traditions may be especially important when environmental ethics addresses problems across cultures, when, for example, secular and religious values clash. An environmental ethic that ignores religious values is in danger of failing to engage and respond to the world population as it is today, substituting in its place an engagement with a limited academic community.⁸

Fourth, the study of religious ethics can provide lessons for secular environmental ethics. I cite just one example. In environmental ethics today there is some tension between those who emphasize the individual versus those who focus on species, collectives, or holistic values.⁹ I suggest that the history of religious values—both in the West and in the East—provides some reason for questioning unbridled or extreme forms of both individualism and holism. Some middle ground is needed between a holist stress on universals and collectives, on the one hand, and individual, particular values, on the other. In Christianity, for instance, there is an important moral tradition that places enormous value on “agape” (a Greek term for love), which is theologically defined as selfless, unconditional love. In this tradition, the love of other persons must not include preferential friendships. The history of ethics in Christianity reveals, however, the un-

sustainability of an agape ethic and the need to allow for healthy, preferential friendships (sometimes referred to by theologians as “eros”). In theological terms, agape needs to make room for eros.¹⁰ For a non-Western instance, consider the tension between Yang Zhu and Moism. Moism, named for the philosopher Mo Tzu (490–403), extols universal love of all persons over against Yang's ethic of self-interest. Yang was a kind of warrior Ayn Rand who promoted a philosophy of *weiwo* (for myself). I believe that the history of Chinese ethics gives one reason to see the problem of Moist universal ethics (the movement did not win wide sustained following) being ungrounded in specific social contexts, as well as the problem of a narrow form of self-interested individualism.¹¹

The unsatisfactory nature of these extremes was historically important in the search for a middle ground in Confucianism. Xingzhong Yao writes about the great Mencius's case for Confucianism, set forth in *The Book of Mencius* (300 B.C.E.):

Mengzi [Mencius] believed that both [Mo Tzu and Yang Zhu], in one way or another, stripped morality from human relationships and made men no better than beasts. Opposing these doctrines Mengzi taught the Confucian understanding of individuals as members and participants in the wider society of family and the state. He called for all human relations to be based on family affections and believed that the world would be naturally at peace if only everyone respected the old people in their own family as they should be respected, and extending this respect to the old of other people's families; and cared for the young people in their own family as they should be cared for, and extending this care to the young people of other people's families.¹²

These sorts of lessons can, I think, provide a helpful perspective on secular environmental ethics.¹³

Finally, religious conceptions of human flourishing are important to consider, as they are, socially and philosophically, an important challenge to consumptive, economically defined values in popular culture, the marketplace, and politics. Although most of the world religions have had economic roles (witness Max Weber's study of religion in European culture), historically they have often delimited a sphere that is independent of economic values (e.g., the worth of a religious rite is not measurable solely in economic terms) and one that can serve as a base for critically assessing economic values. In *Spheres of Justice*, Michael Walzer discusses how religious concepts of divine grace can form an “autonomous sphere” set apart from the marketplace: “Here is perhaps the clearest example in our culture of an autonomous sphere. Grace cannot be purchased or inherited; nor can it be coerced. It cannot be had by passing an exam or by holding an office.”¹⁴ By taking seriously the sphere of religion, one may entertain values that are not narrowly restrained by the economy. Let us now turn to theistic values, virtues, and vices and then to nontheistic, religious ones.

Theistic Virtues and Vices

At the heart of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is the thesis that the cosmos is itself the good creation of an all-good, -powerful, -knowing God. Theism is united in this

core, value-centered philosophical position despite the divergent convictions in religious terms over the scope of divine providence (Has the messiah come? Was Jesus Christ God and man? Is Mohammed the great prophet of Allah?), God's nature (Is God triune? Is God eternal or temporal?), and how to understand religious scriptures.

In the field of environmental ethics, debate over religion in the 1960s until the early 1980s was often limited to theism and the question of whether Christianity in particular is responsible for the modern ecological crisis. The key essay that defined the parameters of this debate was Lynn White's "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis."¹⁵ White castigates the Genesis account of creation on the grounds that it has historically been interpreted as identifying human beings as the central purpose of creation and licensing humanity in dominating (and thus exploiting) nature. He also laments that monotheism led to a desacralized view of the natural world. White's purpose was not altogether secular (he wished to revise or reform Christianity), though some subsequent philosophers have held that Christianity is thoroughly toxic from the standpoint of environmentalism.¹⁶ Further work, however, has successfully challenged such a sweeping critique.¹⁷ It is now widely recognized that although Christianity may be interpreted as fostering anthropocentric, exploitive policies, it may also be reasonably taken to foster an ethic of stewardship and respectful care for creation out of gratitude and worship of the God who "saw everything that [God] had made, and indeed, it was very good."¹⁸

A theistic environmental ethic may be seen through three, closely related tenets: creation, divine ownership, and the identification of natural goods with God's presence. I have already taken note of the centrality of God creating nature as good. It is interesting to note that the scriptural testimony to God as the supreme and sole creator is often couched in terms that praise or treasure natural goods. Consider this extensive passage from the Qur'an:

And who other than He created the heavens and the earth and sent down for you water from the sky, whereby We cause to grow lush orchards—for it is not up to you to cause their tress to grow! Is there, then a god beside God? Yet these are the people who ascribe partners to Him! And who other than He made the earth a firm abode [for you], and set rivers traversing through it, and put firm mountains therein and sealed off one ocean from another? Is there, then a god beside God? . . . And who other than He responds to the distressed one when he calls Him and He relieves him of the distress and who had made you His vicegerent on earth? Is there, then a god beside God?—little do you reflect. And who other than He guides you in the darkness of the land and the sea? And who sends forth winds heralding His mercy [*sc.* rain]? Is there, then a god beside God? For exalted be He above what they associate with Him! And who other than He brings forth His creation and then re-creates it? And who gives you sustenance from the heaven and the earth?¹⁹

The common conviction among theistic Jews, Christians, and Muslims that nature is the creation of a good God has historically distinguished them from religious movements such as gnosticism, which denigrate the natural order.

The second tenet, divine ownership, comes in with the thesis that nature, as a creation of God, belongs to God: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof"; "to God belong all things in the heavens and the earth; And it is He that encompasseth all things."²⁰ Jews, Christians, and Muslims have differed over the meaning of this teaching, but there is consensus over the concept that creation itself is a bounteous gift. God owns the cosmos as Creator, and yet he gives it to his creatures for their good.²¹ As such, gratitude is proper, as well as the respectful treatment of the gift.

The third tenet is God's affective identification with the values in the cosmos. That is, the cultivation of a good cosmos is seen in theism as participating in a God-given practice or, in more general terms, to participate in God's caring love of creation. There are abundant references in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles and the Qur'an to God's care of the cosmos. Consider this passage as representative: "Who hath cleft a channel for the waterflood, or a way for the lighting of the thunder; To rain on a land where no man is, On the wilderness where there is no man; To satisfy the desolate and waste ground; And to cause the bud of the tender herb to spring forth?"²² Respectful, life-sustaining cultivation has been cast as the covenant between God and humanity.²³ By caring for creation one joins in a divine providence. Jonathan Helfand offers this succinct view of a religious ethic, which sees glad, respectful pleasure in creation as a part of life: "An evil person is considered dead, for he sees the sun shining but does not bless 'him who brings on the evening'; he eats and drinks and offers no blessings."²⁴

Jews, Christians, and Muslims do not just provide a view of our cosmic context concerning the things around us; they also offer an engaging view of our beliefs and desires, our mental and physical abilities. Perhaps the simplest and most sweeping way to state this religious perception is that, according to Abrahamic faiths, the fulfillment of our beliefs and desires, our mental and physical life, is to be found (in part) by living in concord with God. God wills the consummate fulfillment of creation. Acting or living in solidarity with such a divine will is believed to answer (in part) our deepest human needs and longings. As Augustine put it, famously, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."²⁵ Theists have differed in their views about the extensiveness of the good of this "rest" or abiding in solidarity with God. Most, for example, believe in an afterlife for at least human beings, whereas some do not. Some hold that the natural world itself has been profoundly marred by human sin, whereas others do not.²⁶ Even so, there is a widespread common core conviction that (in the words of Thomas Aquinas) divine grace fulfills and perfects nature rather than destroys nature.²⁷

The virtues that emerge from this theistic philosophy include the virtue of feeling gratitude in response to seeing nature as a gift, the virtue of caring for creation as a gift out of respect and gratitude, and the virtue of acting in solidarity with the good Creator. Religious vices take shape as the mirror opposite states of character and action: the vice of ingratitude out of vanity or malice, the exploitive destruction of a gift, and the repudiation and antagonism toward the good Creator of a gift. On this account, is anyone who has no knowledge of God or who thinks that there is no God—and thus anyone who does *not* see nature as a gift—guilty of vice? No. You can only deliberately repudiate a gift when you are aware that there is a gift to repudiate. Vice only comes into play when, say, you are aware that you have been given a gift (for example, you

are given the gift of the kiss of life when you are rescued from death by a good person) and you destroy or repudiate the gift out of vanity (imagine that you belittle the gift of the rescue as unnecessary, and, out of pride, you lie, claiming that in reality it was you who did the rescuing).²⁸

Consider an objection: The above portrait of virtues and vices is quite general. In practice, theistic religious traditions advance specific moral teachings that can be (from the standpoint of a secular ethic) deeply appalling. Theistic religious traditions have provided justifications for slavery, male domination, raising nonhuman animals for food and other ends, depriving native populations of land, aggressive wars, religious intolerance, the persecution of homosexuals, ecologically disastrous population policies, and so on. In this context, it is impossible to take up each of these issues, but it may be helpful to identify a general feature of theism that helps foster moral development and self-criticism within a religious tradition. Theism understands God to be impartial, all-knowing, and affectively apprised of the standpoint of all creatures.²⁹ Insofar as moral progress is achieved through impartiality, knowledge, and affective awareness of others, then the religious theist can hold that moral progress is made by the increasingly accurate, or a better understanding of, a God's-eye point of view. Let me illustrate how this works in light of a debate between theists on ethical vegetarianism.

Imagine that theists agree that in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles and the Qur'an there is a bona fide revelation of God and that in these scriptures the raising of non-human animals for food accords with what appear to be divinely revealed precepts. They nonetheless also believe God to be all good and that vegetarianism is ethically obligatory. Must the theist set to one side her or his ethical scruples and submit to a nonvegetarian authority?³⁰ No, it does not. Thinking ethically within a religious tradition should not be equated with the mandatory submission to a fixed moral teaching. There is a flexibility built in to most modern faiths that invites progressive, moral reflection. In this case that flexibility would be exercised and ex hypothesi progress would be made by one of the following two alternatives: first, denying that the scriptural precepts about eating animals are genuine; perhaps they are human in origin (the result of partiality, false beliefs, and a failure to appreciate animal consciousness) and not properly, divinely inspired. Our greater impartiality et ceteras allows us to see what is merely human and what transcends human self-interest. Contemporary theologians in each of the Abrahamic faiths distinguish the *inspiration* of scripture from its *inerrancy*, thus allowing that religious scripture and subsequent religious history can be progressive and (to some extent) revisionary. The second alternative is acknowledging that the relevant divine precepts are genuine but claiming that they were only an accommodation of human weakness (vegetarianism represents the ideal following of God) or that the conditions that countenanced nonvegetarian practices (and thus their divine permissibility) have changed. Many vegetarian Christians, for example, argue that the current meat industry is unjust because of the harm done to animals and because it is unnecessary for human flourishing. Perhaps the sacrifice of animals in the past was essential (in evolutionary history the consuming of animals was natural and not evil), but it is not now and so must be renounced. The structure of this reasoning is similar to what you find in the history of religion as ethicists critically reevaluate past judgments

and seek greater clarity on moral concerns. So thinking ethically within a religious tradition does not amount to mandatory submission to fixed moral teaching. There is an appropriately critical attitude recognized by many religious ethicists as essential to moral and religious thinking.³¹

Theism, I suggest, elevates some virtues that are shared by secular ethics. In addition to the virtues of humility and self-respect, justice, and so on, there are the virtues—of the kind of impartiality, the desire for knowledge, and the affective appreciation of the points of view of others—that contribute to progress in religious and secular ethical reflection.³² I have also, in this section, highlighted some alternative virtues and vices that come to the fore in a theistic cosmos. So, the virtues involving gratitude toward, and acting in solidarity with, God are virtues in Abrahamic faith, but in a non-theistic, secular context these would not be seen as virtues. Let us turn now to a non-theistic religion.

Buddhist Virtues

Buddhism is a rich tradition with many strands. The earliest versions are nontheistic in an interesting way. Though some early Buddhists were atheists, a common view is that God should be ignored even if there is a God.³³ This is largely because one goal of Buddhism is detachment from the concept of an enduring self (whether human or divine). Buddhism begins with a realization of the ill of suffering and its source. As Gautama Buddha teaches:

Now this, O monks, is the noble truth of the cause of pain: that craving which leads to rebirth, combined with pleasure and lust, finding pleasure here and there, namely, the craving for passion, the craving for existence, the craving for non-existence.

Now this, O monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of pain: the cessation without a remainder of that craving, abandonment, forsaking, release, non-attachment.³⁴

The liberation from the cycle of rebirth (and thus redeath) is an emancipation from one's individual consciousness as an enduring thing. Gautama points to a transcendent consciousness, beyond all the distinctions that mark our ordinary ways of thinking and acting:

All consciousness by which one could predicate the existence of the saint [someone meditating and engaging in a virtuous life], all that consciousness has been abandoned, uprooted, pulled out of the ground like a palmyra-tree and become non-existent, and not liable to spring up again in the future. The said, O Vaccha, who has been released from what is styled consciousness is deep, immeasurable, unfathomable, like the mighty ocean. To say that he is not reborn would not fit the case. To say that he is reborn would not fit the case. To say that he is neither reborn nor not reborn would not fit the case.³⁵

The result is a state of being that goes beyond or displaces the God-cosmos distinction one finds in theism.

I highlight only two Buddhist virtues that emerge from this extraordinary tradition. One virtue may be seen as straightforwardly compatible with secular environmental ethics, whereas the second offers a distinct, alternative religious contribution. Buddhism is well known for its teaching that the natural world is in a state of impermanence and interconnection. Each thing exists in a state of relations with others. This is sometimes described as the doctrine of *Praitiyasamutpada*, the "together-rising-up-of-things." The virtue called for here is to live in mindfulness of this interconnection of elements. This virtue may be seen as a quintessential ecological virtue. It is out of this wise understanding of interdependence that Buddhism goes on to see as vices what Buddha called the three fires of greed, delusion, and hatred. This wise realization of interconnection is, I think, at home in both Buddhist and secular ethics.

A more radical virtue rests in the life of compassion of a bodhisattva; this is one who attains but then postpones ultimate enlightenment in order to aid others. As Nan Huia-Chin writes, "The philosophy of Mahayana Bodhisattva opens up the Hinayana philosophy of detachment into a spirit of active entry into the world."³⁶ The bodhisattva helps others overcome their ignorance, craving, and grasping. I think the virtue of being a bodhisattva does not have a secular equivalent, for (in Buddhist tradition) this compassionate life is carried out in the midst of a religious conception of the cycle of life and rebirth (*samsara*) and the transcendental end of nirvana where a person realizes the transcendent consciousness (described above). A bodhisattva is not just a compassionate person; he or she lives in a world that has values and a structure that differ from a secular naturalism.³⁷ These Buddhist virtues—mindfulness and compassion—have commonly appealed to environmental contexts. They are employed, for example, in defense of nonexploitive treatments of land and animals.³⁸

Religious Virtues in Context

The virtues and vices outlined above may come into environmental ethics on many levels. They can take explicit shape in outlining distinctive Buddhist or Christian views on animals, for example.³⁹ Or they may function below the surface, either enhancing or holding in check our secular environmental ethics. I close this chapter by highlighting a practical, moral, and political context in which religious virtues are sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit: agriculture.

Contemporary agrarians Wendell Berry, Marty Strange, and Wes Jackson have emerged over the last twenty-five years as leading advocates of alternative agriculture. Roughly, this means an agriculture that is practiced in light of ecology with the goal of long-term sustainability, the reduction or elimination of chemically intensive farming, and the promotion of more dispersed family- and community-oriented farming as opposed to industrially organized, capital-intensive, management-centered, corporate agriculture. Strange (who shares many of Berry's and Jackson's views on virtue) weaves together a case for such a virtue-oriented view of family farming.

Above all, family farming carries with it a commitment to certain values, entirely independent of the pettiness of economics. The agrarian tradition, of which family farming is a part, calls for people to be neighborly, to care for future generations, to work hard and to believe in the dignity of work, to be frugal, modest, honest, and responsible for and to the community. Family farming may be a business, but it is not just a business. It is a way of life as well. The farms in a family farming system operate in a social milieu that constrains the business behavior of farmers. Perhaps the best test of whether a farm is a family farm is this: Does the farmer feel more pain at the loss of a neighbor than joy at the opportunity to acquire that neighbor's land?⁴⁰

The way of life that Strange advocates is, for Berry and Jackson, linked to a broader need for a culture of virtues that link persons and land. Berry writes:

A healthy culture is a communal order of memory, insight, value, work, conviviality, reverence, aspiration. It reveals the human necessities and the human limits. It clarifies our inescapable bonds to the earth and to each other. It assures that the necessary restraints are observed, that the necessary work is done, and that it is done well. A healthy farm culture can be based only upon familiarity and can grow only among a people soundly established upon the land; it nourishes and safeguards a human intelligence of the earth that no amount of technology can satisfactorily replace.⁴¹

If Berry is right, the resulting ideal may seem romantic or sentimental, but it may still (for all that) be an ideal to pursue.

When one undertakes to live fully on and from the land the prevailing values are inverted: one's home becomes an occupation, a center of interest, not just a place to stay when there is no other place to go; work becomes a pleasure; the most menial task is dignified by its relation to a plan and a desire; one is less dependent on artificial pleasures, less eager to participate in the sterile, nervous excitement of movement for its own sake; the elemental realities of seasons and weather affect one directly and become a source of interest in themselves; the relation of one's life to the life of the world is no longer taken for granted or ignored but, rather, becomes an immediate and complex concern. In other words, one begins to stay at home for the same reasons that most people now go away.⁴²

So far the case for such an ideal alternative agriculture seems as open to the secularist as the religious believer, but Berry and Jackson go further. They draw on Christian views of land to bolster stewardship in light of God's goodness and contend further that this outlook supports what in Buddhism is called "right livelihood."

Berry develops his philosophy of land in light of the biblical narrative of God giving land ("the promised land") to the people of Israel. He uses this as a general outlook whereby all land should be seen as a gift:

It is a gift because the people who are to possess it did not create it. It is accompanied by careful warnings and demonstrations of the folly of saying that "My power and might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:17). Thus, deeply implicated in the very definition of this

gift is a specific warning against *hubris*, which is the great ecological sin, just as it is the great sin of politics. People are not gods. They must not act like gods or assume godly authority. If they do, terrible retributions are in store. In this warning we have the root of the idea of propriety, of *proper* human purposes and ends. We must not use the world as though we created it ourselves.

The Promised Land is not a permanent gift. It is "given," but only for a time, and only for so long as it is properly used. It is stated unequivocally, and repeated again and again that "the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is" (Deuteronomy 10:14). What is given is not ownership, but a sort of tenancy, the right of habitation and use: "The land shall not be sold forever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me" (Leviticus 25:23).⁴³

Berry depicts us as oriented to a giving, transcendent Creator whose calling to respectful land use is an opportunity to act in solidarity with God in a sacred order. In Berry's work one can see each of the virtues I highlighted in the second section of the chapter, and you may also see an ideal case of someone who promotes a religiously informed agrarianism that challenges our consumer-driven culture.⁴⁴

This theology of land and land use has at least two consequences to consider in practice and politics. First, formal agricultural education needs to be sufficiently open so as to recognize agrarian values (religious and secular) as they function in social contexts. Berry and others stress how the virtues that function in good family farming must be appreciated or inculcated in practice; they are not likely to be grasped in abstraction: "If family farming and good farming are as nearly synonymous as I suspect they are, that is because of a law that is well understood, still, by most farmers but that has been ignored in the colleges and offices and corporations of agriculture for thirty-five or forty years. The law reads something like this: land that is in human use must be lovingly used; it requires intimate knowledge, attention, and care."⁴⁵

Gary Comstock points out the limitations of formal education versus the education and character formation that comes from participating in good family farming:

Being a family farmer means caring for one's land. Such love cannot be taught in agricultural colleges; it is a practice that one learns at the feet of a master. It is knowledge of the heart, not the head, and it is best passed from generation to generation, not from agribusiness expert to agricultural student. This does not mean that newcomers cannot love the land; only that their doing so requires that they learn right emotions and intentions, not just right equations and ratios. This sort of care comes from lived experience and tradition—from memories, from the past. This provides a clear moral justification for giving preferential treatment to those farms that have long histories of having been family undertakings.⁴⁶

This case for a practical encounter with family farming need not involve an explicit encounter with religious values, though in practice (given the current family farm population) it often will. Prominent contributors to environmental education have long recognized the importance of taking agricultural practice and what might be called

"spirituality" seriously. Aldo Leopold, for example, claimed that there were "spiritual dangers in not owning a farm. One is the danger of supposing that breakfast comes from the grocery."⁴⁷

Second, a closer look at the intermix of religious and secular virtues in agriculture can contribute to the debate on the political status of family farming. In the United States, there is debate over the extent to which current public policy gives an unfair advantage to corporate agribusiness. Debate also extends over the contribution of family farm culture to American culture at large. If Berry, Comstock, Strange, Jackson, and others are right, then family farming involves an interwoven set of goods such as the good of family or community, ecological health and sustainability, and neighborliness and civic virtues, which make an invaluable contribution to public life. Such claims need to be taken seriously in the debate over whether public funding should protect this virtuous way of life (or reduce the likelihood of it perishing). Of course, there are countless cases where family farms may fail to match the ideal of Berry and others. But we will not know this until we look closely for the virtues (and possible vices) that are at work. To do this calls for a comprehensive inquiry into secular and religious values.

In this chapter, I have sought to motivate the philosophical exploration of religious virtues in environmental contexts. I have proposed that theistic and nontheistic religions can provide philosophically interesting frameworks for identifying respectful environmental practices. As the case of agriculture shows, religious environmental virtues can function in a healthy environmental context in which the land is seen as a divine gift and caring for it is seen to be a divine vocation.

Notes

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1. I adopt what is often called a realist view of religion, according to which religions either make or assume assertions about the nature of reality that are either true or false. Some so-called nonrealists or antirealists, following Wittgenstein, see religions as "forms of life" without such commitments to what exists. For a discussion of realism and nonrealism, see my *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

2. For an overview of the outlook, see my *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* and my *Evidence and Faith: Philosophy and Religion since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), chap. 8.

3. See, for example, W. Craig and J. P. Moreland, eds., *Naturalism: A Critical Appraisal* (London: Routledge, 2001).

4. The significance of the truth of one or more religions for environmental reflection may be brought to light in relation to Allen Carlson's views about the appreciation of nature. Carlson contends that although nature may be appreciated in terms of isolated individual objects (the appreciation of a rock, say, with no attention to geology) or of scenes (a picturesque landscape), it is better or deeper to see nature in its proper ecological framework (one grasps the relevant biota and abiota). Imagine that Christianity or Buddhism is true and credible. This would provide a fourth, deeper or wider, framework in which to appreciate

nature. See Allen Carlson, "Appreciation and the Natural Environment," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 37 (1979).

5. See, for example, R. M. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

6. To clarify my position, you might consider two views. In what may be called the "Hostage Model" environmental ethics is not adequate without an articulate, plausible metaphysics shedding light on the origin and nature of values. According to the "More Is Better Model" such a plausible metaphysics is valuable and thus desirable but not essential for an adequate environmental ethic. I am proposing the second, not the first, model.

7. For a good overview of the religious composition of the Western contemporary world, see R. Stark and R. Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

8. Reliable statistics are difficult to secure, but the *2003 Year Book of the Encyclopedia Britannica* includes figures such as the following: Christianity, 32.9 percent of the world population; Islam, 19.8 percent; Hinduism, 13.3 percent; Buddhism, 5.9 percent; and so on. In a pluralistic religious democracy like the United States explicit religious reasons may be shunned in policy making, but that does not mean that they are not operative socially and politically. See Michael Perry, *Under God? Religious Faith and Liberal Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

9. So, for example, Tom Regan is more of an individualist than, say, J. Baird Callicott.

10. For a classic case of subordinating eros to agape, see Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. P. S. Watson (New York: Harper and Row, 1969). For an excellent critique and a case for a more balanced view, see R. M. Adams, "Pure Love," *Journal of Religious Ethics* (1980).

11. See Xingzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

12. From Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, 74.

13. For further material on this, see my "Divine Agriculture: The Role of Philosophy and Theology in Agricultural Ethics," *Agriculture and Human Values* (fall 1992).

14. Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 244.

15. Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-7. This essay has been widely anthologized.

16. See, for example, the casual dismissal of Christianity in Paul Taylor's widely anthologized "The Ethics of Respect for Nature," in *Environmental Ethics*, ed. A. Light and H. Rolston (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

17. See, for example, Robin Attfield, "Christianity," in *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, ed. D. Jamieson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003); and E. C. Hargrove, "Religion and Environmental Ethics: Beyond the Lynn White Debate," in *Religion and Environmental Crisis*, ed. E. C. Hargrove (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

18. Genesis 1:3 (NSRV).

19. Surah 27:60-64.

20. Psalm 24:1; Surah 4:26.

21. I defend the concept of divine ownership in "God's Estate," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 20, no. 1 (spring 1992).

22. Job 38:25-27.

23. See Genesis 8:8, 13.

24. Jonathan Helfand, "The Earth Is the Lord's: Judaism and Environmental Ethics," in *Religion and Environmental Crisis*, ed. E. C. Hargrove (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

25. Augustine, *Confessions*, first paragraph.

26. See Holmes Rolston III, "Does Nature Need to Be Redeemed?" *Zygon* 29 (1994).

27. See Thomas Aquinas, "De Veritate," Q.24, art. 8; and "Commentary on Boethius's 'De Trinitate.'" In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas writes: "Gratia non tollat naturam sed perficiat" [Grace does not destroy/scrap nature but brings it to perfection].

28. The virtues cited here certainly have analogues in secular environmental ethics. One may even see them as cardinal virtues (e.g., respect, gratitude, and solidarity) or vices (e.g., vanity/arrogance, exploitiveness, ingratitude). But for the theist the respect, gratitude, and solidarity are with respect to the good Creator whom (ex hypothesi) the nontheist does not recognize. An atheist may be glad or reverential about nature (I have no doubt whatsoever over this), but "gratitude" is customarily something reserved for respectful, glad response to someone who has given one a gift. This is a position shared among many philosophers who otherwise hold very different views (e.g., Aquinas, Spinoza, Kant, and Hume).

29. For a further account of this thesis, see my *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*.

30. For an overview of the issues, see R. A. Young, *Is God a Vegetarian?* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999).

31. See R. M. Adams's treatment of what he calls the "critical stance": "The [critical] stance amounts to at least this. For any natural, empirically identifiable property or type of action that we or others may regard as good or bad, right or wrong, we are committed to leave it always open in principle to raise evaluative or normative questions by asking whether that property or action-type is really good or to issue an evaluative or normative challenge by denying that it is really good or right" (*Finite and Infinite Goods*, 77-78). Adams argues that theism promoted a critical stance more thoroughly than nontheistic naturalism. See R. M. Adams, "Anti-consequentialism and the Transcendence of the Good," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 67 (July 2003).

32. I am using the term *virtue* in an extended, broader use than in customary lists of virtues found in works by Aristotle and Aquinas. For a further, broader look at virtue, see my "The Virtues of Embodiment," *Philosophy* 76, no. 295 (January 2001). For a good account of the way arguments are conducted within religious traditions, see Basil Mitchell, *Faith and Criticism* (Oxford: Sarum Lectures, 1992).

33. See Paul Griffiths, "Buddhism," in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. P. Quinn and C. Taliaferro (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

34. Buddha, quoted in S. Randhakishnan and C. A. Moore, eds., *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 274.

35. Buddha, quoted in Randhakishnan and Moore, *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, 292.

36. Nan Huia-Chin, *The Story of Chinese Zen*, trans. T. Cleary (Boston: Charles E. Tuttle, 1995), 52.

37. For an overview of the impact of Buddhism on environmental practices in Asia, see Christopher Chapple, "Jainism and Buddhism," in *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Dale Jamieson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003). For further study of Buddhist and other religious environmental ethics, see M. E. Tucker and J. Grim, eds., *Worldviews and Ecology: Religion, Philosophy, and the Environment* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994).

38. For a fuller look at the nonsecular, doctrinal context of Buddhism, see Paul Griffiths, *On Being Buddha* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

39. See A. Linzey and T. Regan, eds., *Christianity and Animals* (New York: Crossroads, 1988); A. Linzey, *Animal Theology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); A. Linzey, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals* (New York: Crossroads, 1987); and M. E. Tucker and D. R. Williams, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 1997).

40. M. Strange, *Family Farming: A New Economic Vision* (San Francisco: Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1988), 35.

41. W. Berry, *The Unsettling of America* (New York: Avon Books, 1977), 43.
42. W. Berry, *The Long-Legged House* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1969), 88–89.
43. W. Berry, *The Gift of Good Land* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981), 270–71. Though I have given prominence to Berry's work, Wes Jackson is also an important reference point in mapping a theistic account of the virtues. See his *Altars of Unhewn Stone* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1987).
44. Although Berry explicitly links his treatment of ecological stewardship with Buddhist right living, he does not develop this very extensively. I believe this is partly because of the fact that, historically, much of Buddhist ethics was fashioned in monastic, not familiar, contexts. Still, Buddhists have vied for the view that moral duties of compassion and care are sacred, and thus there is a serious kinship between Buddhism and Christianity.
45. W. Berry, *Human Encounters* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1987).
46. G. Comstock, ed., *Is There a Moral Obligation to Save the Family Farm?* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 416.
47. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), 6.

CHAPTER 11

Cardinal Environmental Virtues:
A Neurobiological Perspective*Louke van Wensveen*

"We know that there are four cardinal virtues, viz. temperance, justice, prudence, and fortitude," wrote Ambrose, bishop of Milan, almost two millennia ago.¹ The label "cardinal" may well have been Ambrose's invention.² Derived from the Latin word *cardo*, which means "hinge," it expresses the idea that the moral life hinges on these four virtues. The idea itself is much older, however, having already been championed by ancient Greek philosophers, including Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. They all agreed that we need to have the four cardinals or else our lives will turn to chaos. We will become failures in every personal and social respect. The cardinals bring our strongest passions in balance, these ancients would say. Only then can we begin to flourish, both internally and communally.³

The traditional list of four cardinals—practical wisdom, justice, temperance, and courage—has been stable for millennia.⁴ In Western ethics, its contribution to human life remains practically unchallenged today. However, pedigree provides privilege but not proof. Recently, the world has been changing under severe environmental stresses, and human beings are consistently falling short in responding appropriately. Hence one may begin to wonder: Do the old cardinals still provide adequate guidance in this unfamiliar situation? Has the time perhaps come to supplement or even replace these rusty hinges with a smooth-turning, new set, with some cardinals that are explicitly *environmental* virtues?

To underscore the urgency of the question, consider how we spend our days. Much of the time, we are so busy pursuing our daily happiness that we do not even notice the decay around us (and, indeed, *inside* us). If we do, we may become so frightened that we swing into denial. Even if we find ourselves strong enough to look again, we risk being flooded by outrage, frustration, and eventually despair, which turns us into the sorts of sour pessimists nobody likes to follow. In short, our emotions keep us from responding swiftly and adequately to our growing environmental challenges.

Does this mean that we are less moral than previous generations? Possibly. In our modern predilection for spontaneity, perhaps we have become too eager to ignore the time-tested tradition of cardinal guidance of the passions. Perhaps all we need is a good sermon, urging us to cultivate the old virtues, pulling us back in line. However, rebellion against sensible advice is not exactly a modern invention, and if today we fail to

come around, that may also be because under current circumstances we need *better* guidance than tradition now provides—and quickly too, because the stakes are so high.

Some readers will object at this point. Academic ethicists with solid grounding in Western virtue tradition may want to interpose that the cardinals express a truth for all times and that only the uninformed would undertake to doubt this. Meanwhile, environmental activists may want to suggest the opposite: that I just move on and not even frame the question in terms of a tradition that has so clearly proven obsolete (again, to all but the uninformed).

At the risk of alienating both sides, I intend to keep a middle course and *revisit* the tradition of the cardinal virtues from a biologically informed vantage point. Doing so, I contend, is neither so radical as to be unthinkable nor so backward as to be uninteresting.

Revisiting the tradition of the cardinals at this time is not unthinkable, if we consider that Western virtue ethics has traditionally taken its bearings from human biology.⁵ Just as we are beginning to understand the unprecedented impact of our actions on the biological systems of the Earth, we are also for the first time in history beginning to understand the biology of the human emotions that undergird these actions. Thanks to recent advances in neuroscience, we are in a better position than the ancients ever were to judge how well the traditional cardinals shape our emotions, allowing us to pursue our goals in ways that are appropriate within our particular environments. Not to entertain this question at this time of unprecedented challenge as well as knowledge would be plain unreasonable.

In contrast, to consider the question already answered would be equally unreasonable, for aside from agreement among many environmentalists that this ancient virtue tradition is flawed, no clear alternative has yet emerged from their ranks. Meanwhile, just about everyone seems to favor some virtue or virtues for cardinal status. In other words, the *idea* that hinges are necessary for the moral life has not gone out of fashion but only a particular classical *model* of hinge. This begs the question: What makes the latest models better, apart from looks? And besides, how many hinges do we need to do the job? Apparently, not all is obvious. A philosophical inquiry therefore seems in order.

Back, then, to my question: *Do the four traditional cardinals provide adequate guidance in the face of current environmental challenges, or does the moral life now require explicitly ecological hinges?* Although I shall eventually develop my own systematic, philosophical approach to this question, I hope to do this in a way that broadly incorporates the intuitions and arguments of other environmental ethicists. Let me begin by outlining what they have been saying about the key attitudes belonging to an ecological way of life.

The State of the Art

First, there are some odd and misguided statistics. When I began to track the emergence of ecological virtue language more than a decade ago, it seemed like a good idea to count how many times, and in how many different sources, any particular virtue

was mentioned in a representative sample of environmental literature. The combination of these figures, I thought, would show which virtues might be heading for cardinal status among the ecologically minded (who themselves seemed remarkably reluctant to use the label “cardinal” or even “virtue” plain and simple). Not that I saw cardinal status as a prize for the greatest number of sound bites. However, I had little else to work with, and it made sense to believe that if, for example, many environmentalists repeatedly urge, “Let’s be humble!” this might be an indication of a key moral attitude for an ecological age.

Table 11.1 shows what I found.⁶ That is an odd list. Although the top seems intuitive, the bottom does not. Try asking any ecologically minded person if those trailing virtues are indeed so negligible as to be effectively dispensable in an environmental ethic!

As the discrepancy indicates, we run the risk of missing some candidates if we approach the search for environmental cardinals as a popularity contest. This is actually not surprising (and I should have known better at the time). After all, quantity has never been a good measure of quality. Also, insofar as “hinge” habits are typically part of other praiseworthy character traits, they may be so obvious as not to require mentioning. Moreover, people are sometimes reluctant to put into words those basic attitudes that lie closest to their hearts, perhaps because they do not want to defame them, or make themselves vulnerable to judgment, or blunt their listeners’ receptivity through overexposure. (At home, in order to prevent a reaction from my family, I usually do not advertise my love of simplicity. Recently, however, assuming myself alone, I did respond to a telemarketing survey from the auto industry in that spirit. When I put down the phone, my daughter emerged. “But Mom, we sound *Amish!*” she protested. So it goes.) Finally, like all of us, ecologically minded people may on occasion be unaware that they espouse certain core attitudes; they may even be self-deceived and deny it. By taking the approach of a popularity contest in search of cardinal environmental virtues, we may be blind to all these possibilities.

Table 11.1. Frequency of Virtue Terms Found in a Review of the Post-1970 Environmental Literature

Rank	Virtue	Frequency	Sources
The Winner	Care	79	17
The Runner-up	Respect	65	12
Third Place	Love	54	12
Fourth Place	Compassion	34	12
	Reverence	29	12
	Humility	34	9
	Creativity	33	10
	Hope	29	9
	Sensitivity	29	6
	Also Ran	Identification (with nature)	21
Acceptance (of limitations)		20	9
Barely in View	170 other virtues		
	Diligence, Efficiency, Endurance,		
	Forgiveness, Gentleness, Humor, Sincerity, Tolerance		

More than a decade has passed since I aborted my statistical efforts. In the meantime, some environmental ethicists have begun to identify one or more virtues as particularly important for inclusive, ecological flourishing. As a group, they give us quite a smorgasbord. At the risk of somewhat oversimplifying, I see their prime choices as falling into four irreducible groups (indeed, the number is no coincidence, and I shall come back to that), namely, virtues of position, care, attunement, and endurance. Let me provide a brief overview of these favorites and their supporters.

Virtues of position are constructive habits of seeing ourselves in a particular place in a relational structure and interacting accordingly. Environmental ethicists commonly argue that an ecological way of being and acting rests on seeing ourselves as responsive nodes in a complex network, rather than as overbearing top dogs in a linear hierarchy. In taking this view, they share the spirit of visionaries such as Francis of Assisi, Albert Schweitzer, and Aldo Leopold. Already in the 1940s, for example, Leopold suggested that each of us consider ourselves nothing but a "plain member and fellow citizen" in a larger ecological community.⁷ Such a view implies a style of interaction that holds the middle between slavishness and bullying, namely, a dynamic process of listening, cautious trying, looking for feedback, and modifying when necessary.

Among modern environmental ethicists, Thomas Hill was the first to highlight virtues of position, recommending that we cultivate *humility, self-acceptance, gratitude, and appreciation of the good in others*.⁸ That was back in 1983, when most environmentalists focused on a control-minded combination of voluntary simplicity and fixing problems through alternative technology. Hill's prophetic message has since found wide support among ecologically minded ethicists. For example, Bill Shaw enriches our understanding of virtues of position by exploring *respect, prudence, and practical judgment* (all also central attitudes in Aldo Leopold's land ethic).⁹ Lisa Gerber, though not satisfied with a land ethic approach, nevertheless converges on the view that *humility* helps us overcome self-absorption; connect to a larger, more complex reality; and develop a sense of perspective on ourselves and the world.¹⁰ A similar message is linked to the biblical *wisdom* tradition by Susan Power Bratton and Celia Deane-Drummond, both ecotheologians with backgrounds in biology.¹¹ The style of interaction that matches these habits of appropriate self-placement has typically been called *sensibility* or *sensitivity*. For example, John Rodman recommends "ecological sensibility," and Holmes Rolston speaks of "the sensitivity of the naturalist."¹²

Virtues of care are habits of constructive involvement within the relational structure where we have found our place. How widely do we cast our sensors in order to learn what is needed around us? How well do we understand various kinds of need? And at which setting have we chosen to begin receiving signals of need and become positively engaged? As Geoffrey Frasz points out, a mere attitude of humility is not enough as an ecological way of being. Only by cultivating a sense of *friendship* with the natural world do we begin to notice and address the needs around us.¹³ Lisa Gerber similarly highlights *attentiveness* as a key environmental virtue.¹⁴ According to Jennifer Welchman, the "stewardship virtue" of *benevolence* is an essential disposition for developing environmentally sensitive character.¹⁵ Jim Nash advocates an attitude of *loving* nature.¹⁶

Virtues of attunement are habits of handling temptations by adjusting ("tuning") our positive, outgoing drives and emotions to match our chosen place and degree of constructive, ecosocial engagement.¹⁷ This is key because without such personal adjustments, all our humility and respect, our wisdom and sensitivity, our attentiveness and friendship, may still amount to nothing. For example, what good does it do to the frog (or, indeed, myself) if I teach my children to love endangered amphibians only to turn around and satisfy my desire for a picture-perfect family home by moving into the new development that sits on what used to be prime frog habitat? For this reason, Jim Nash has become increasingly vocal as a defender of the central role of *frugality* in any environmental virtue ethic, that is, of "morally disciplined production and consumption for the sake of the social and ecological common good." Nash warns, however, that frugality must not be confused with sour self-denial. Although self-limiting, it is "an enriching norm that delights in the less consumptive joys of the mind and the flesh."¹⁸ Phil Cafaro and Lisa Newton sound a similar tone by stressing the importance of *simplicity*.¹⁹ Again, this is not a matter of bleak living but, rather, of rejoicing in the discovery that "less is more."

Finally, *virtues of endurance* are habits of facing dangers and difficulties by handling our negative, protective drives and emotions in such a way that we can sustain our chosen sense of place and degree of constructive ecosocial engagement. Again, this is crucially important if our commitment to a vision of ecological flourishing is going to be worth its salt. Life is full of obstacles, and if we do not have the character strength to face them, going instead with whichever wind blows the hardest, then we cannot be said to have an ethic at all. This is why Randy Larson argues that *tenacity*, a habit that holds the middle between apathy and obsession, must be added to Aristotle's list as a key virtue for environmentalists.²⁰ Similarly, Jennifer Welchman singles out the "stewardship virtue" of *loyalty*, which enables us to stand by our commitments in the face of challenges.²¹

Although some environmental ethicists emphasize one or more virtues in only a single group, others identify favorites in several categories. Few, however, stress key virtues across the entire range. In my book *Dirty Virtues* I argue that we can distinguish four cardinal virtues in the work of Thomas Berry, namely, reverence, attentiveness, creativity, and critical reflection.²² These in fact correspond closely with the four categories I propose here. Stephen Bouma-Prediger, a Christian environmental ethicist, also covers all the bases in his discussion of fourteen ecological virtues, although he does not specify whether he considers all of them to be equally important.²³

These virtues are the favorites among environmental virtue ethicists. Although no one has highlighted the entire batch, each virtue's essential goodness and importance are pretty uncontroversial. Together, they provide a rich picture of key ingredients for the moral life in an ecological age. We would likely do well to cultivate them all.

Does this mean that we may now identify these as *cardinal* virtues? Here I hesitate, for two reasons. First, rarely do environmental ethicists use the label "cardinal" themselves.²⁴ This may be an oversight, but it could also mean that something about the idea of cardinality does not sit well. Perhaps it has too strong an overtone of tradition, and tradition is a mixed blessing if you are looking to articulate new ways of being for an age marked by new challenges. Perhaps it sounds too hierarchical, as though

the moral life consists of a ladder of virtues, with the elite on top.²⁵ Such an image might grate on your sensibilities if you espouse an egalitarian, inclusive worldview. Substantive reservations of this sort warrant careful reflection.

Second, even if we decide simply to attach the cardinal label to the environmental favorites, this would raise more questions than it appears to settle. For example, would it mean that some, or perhaps all, of the traditional four cardinals have been displaced? If so, then why? (Their dethronement, after more than two millennia of elite status, would deserve at least an explanation.) And if not, then what are the connections between the new, environmental cardinals and the traditional ones? Moreover, what exactly do we stand to gain by using the cardinal label? If it is just a fancy way of saying "crucial," then why not stick with the simpler term? If not, then what does the label add—and do all the environmental favorites indeed meet that criterion, whatever it may be?

A Proposal

These questions spur me to consider carefully, with an open mind as well as an eye to tradition, what might be the distinguishing mark of a cardinal virtue, the mark that sets it apart from other virtues. It cannot be the number of citations, as we saw. Nor can it be the production of the best end results in terms of our actions and their effects on the environment, for that is already one of the reasons why favorites tend to be favored, so it would not be a *distinct* mark of cardinality. Moreover, though the proof of the pudding is indeed in the eating, tastes differ, and what I might consider a culinary highlight a gourmand might rate as just slightly better than burnt porridge. And if the gourmand were to change my mind by claiming extensive experience and a seasoned attitude toward food, then we are back to square one, for in trying to distinguish cardinal virtues by their results, we would be judging those results by means of certain virtues.

Perhaps though, more subtly and with an eye to tradition, we might consider a virtue cardinal *if its cultivation provides a prerequisite for virtuous agency in general*.²⁶ Such a definition would in fact honor a central environmental concern, namely, that human agency be sustainable. Cardinal virtues would be those character traits without which our overall ability to act virtuously cannot be sustained. Elsewhere, I have used a synonymous definition to argue for the cardinality of temperance (renamed "attunement"): "The traditional idea that cardinal virtues function as hinges for the moral life suggests that they are necessary conditions for moral agency. . . . [E]cojustice is also a necessary condition for moral agency. . . . By contributing [in a necessary way] to ecojustice, namely through the adjustment of desires, attunement takes on a kind of cardinal significance that has been overlooked by the tradition."²⁷ This I would call *the broad definition of cardinality*. It does set cardinal virtues apart from just any intuitive favorites. However, many more virtues than the traditional four could meet the criterion. For example, humility, respect, cautiousness, cooperation, care, and benevolence would all be likely candidates for cardinality by this account. In the context of an ecojustice-based environmental ethic, one could think of such a broad group of cardinals as a safety net, "spun to help the Earth hold itself together."²⁸

However, we may find the broad definition too broad to be useful. After all, it elevates any virtue that provides even the smallest prerequisite for general virtuous agency (or makes even the minutest, but essential, contribution to a prerequisite for virtuous agency, et cetera, ad infinitum) to the status of a cardinal virtue. Worse yet, *all* virtues would be cardinal by this criterion if we subscribe to the idea that the moral life represents a unity, which unravels as soon as we miss even a single virtue.²⁹

Instead, I can see a more specific and interesting use for the idea of cardinality, one that I shall pursue here. It is based on *a narrow definition of cardinality*, which is consistent with (1) the broader, environmentally sensitive definition (that is, contained therein); (2) ancient Western virtue tradition; and (3) recently discovered constants of human neurobiology that are key to the moral life. To be specific, I propose that we understand cardinality in terms of those habitual (conditioned) neurobiological processes that are *always* part of an agent's virtue cultivation. We might then consider a particular virtue cardinal if its cultivation consists of *conditioning a particular type of neurobiological system that plays a pivotal role in processes of emotional fine-tuning by which agents are enabled to flourish and let flourish under changing circumstances*.³⁰

This narrow definition of cardinality is consistent with the broader, environmentally sensitive definition insofar as "processes of emotional fine-tuning by which agents are enabled to flourish and let flourish under changing circumstances" belong to virtuous agency and insofar as playing a pivotal role in these processes fulfills a prerequisite for virtuous agency. Moreover, the narrow definition of cardinality avoids the objection of elitism because, from a process perspective, role fulfillment is not a hierarchical concept. Even a pivotal role only makes sense within a structure of embedded holism. Thus, this definition of cardinality would fit well with virtue theories developed in conjunction with ecological principles, including egalitarian theories.

The proposed narrow definition of cardinality is also in line with the tradition of understanding cardinal virtues to be *necessary constituents of all other virtues*.³¹ In fact, the two definitions are substantially equivalent, the difference being only a matter of vocabulary. Why should this be an advantage? First, by honoring the history of a concept, we reduce the chance of confusion, which to my mind is a good thing. If we want to specify something else, we can always come up with a new name. (Perhaps we should start using the term *virtuous agency sustaining*, or something similar, for the broader definition outlined above.) Second, I believe that even today we can get a lot of benefit from the old idea of cardinality. After all, is it not extremely useful to search for, discuss, cultivate, and generally focus on those core character traits that belong to *any* virtuous pursuit? If we do not get *these* right, then we will never get anything right—except perhaps by luck. And the luxury of luck is decreasing proportionately to the rate of increase in environmental stresses. I propose, therefore, that we follow the ancients in asking what the necessary constituents of all other virtuous characteristics are—even if we translate the question and do not take their own answers a priori as given.

Finally, my proposed definition of cardinality is consistent with and draws attention to those recently discovered constants of human neurobiology that are key to the moral life. This is an advantage for three reasons. First, it too fits the traditional intuition that cardinal virtues are what they are because of basic structures of human biology.³²

Although we might today reject the ancients' understanding of this biology, or focus more on the brain, it is easy to see the wisdom in the general idea that an ethical theory should pay heed to the biological givens of agents. How else can such a theory hope to provide realistic guidance? Second, by drawing our attention to the internal, biological systems of agents, the narrow definition of cardinality reminds us that humans too are *animals* and that their agency always involves a dynamic linkage between their internal biology and external social and ecological systems. Such a perspective on moral agency is a *sine qua non* for a consistent environmental—that is, systems-based—virtue ethic. Third, it also powerfully zooms in on previously unknown or neglected building blocks of human action. In fact, the neurobiological systems perspective on moral agency promises to do for the advancement of virtue cultivation what the microscope once did for the advancement of science.³³

I propose, then, that we consider as the distinguishing mark of a cardinal virtue that its cultivation involves the conditioning of a particular type of neurobiological system that plays a pivotal role in any other process of virtue cultivation.³⁴ In taking this perspective, we honor modern ecological sensibilities as well historically acquired wisdom. We also position ourselves to make the most of recent work in neurobiology, which stands to revolutionize the human animal's potential to live a life of virtue.

The Blessed Brain: A Model

Which of the favorite environmental virtues deserve cardinal status? In order to answer this question, I must first show you what, in a nutshell, goes on at the level of neurobiological systems when humans cultivate virtues. Let me do that by gradually leading you down from the level of ecological systems to the level of the human brain with the help of an extended illustration.

Imagine that we are visiting a rather funky exhibition of modern art. I am your tour guide. We stop at what looks like a triptych, the kind of three-panel, gilded painting you may have seen on a prior visit to a collection of medieval Western art.³⁵ This particular triptych is called *The Blessed Brain* because of the portrayal of a human brain—medial (internal, vertical) and axial (internal, horizontal) views, both with haloes—on the main panel. It is flanked by a lush and sunny landscape on the left panel and a picture of two tiny campers under an expansive evening sky on the right.

We first take a closer look at the painting on the left. The landscape scene is teeming with life. Among lush greenery and fanciful flowers in the forefront, we see birds of multicolored plumage, tree mammals large and small, reptiles with shiny scales, and, between molding leaves on the mossy ground, a frog on a mushroom. Rays of sunlight playfully invite us to peek through the foliage. At a slight distance we discover a clearing in the forest, where hooved and clawed animals forage and hunt among the high grasses. One herd has adorned itself with garments, pigments, and ornaments. We catch its members staring and pointing in the direction of the sun—and then we see it too, as though simultaneously through a microscope and a telescope: the sky, full of gaseous atoms, swirling in four colored streams. And further behind these, much further, our moon, the familiar seven planets plus Pluto, the Milky Way, and then galaxy

upon galaxy and clusters of galaxies, like shining soap bubbles in the unfathomable but finite darkness of an unlit stage.

This, you may have guessed already, is the artist's rendition of a just community. In a medieval triptych, the panel would have shown the New Jerusalem, shining on a distant hill. The vision before us looks more like a return to Paradise, also a biblical theme, yet with the realistic twist that hunting, death, and decay continue—presumably as long as planetary conditions remain favorable to carbon-based life.³⁶ Nor do the humans end up climbing to the top of the hill. They stay put as one species of earthlings among others. Given their particular mental capacities, however, they can from that humble vantage point appreciate the beauty of the whole arrangement, from microcosm to macrocosm.

As we shift our attention to the panel on the right, we realize from the fashion of their outfits that the two small campers under the broad evening sky belong to the adorned herd of animals. Relaxed in front of a shallow cave, a dwindling campfire and several chewed-off ears of corn between them, they are enjoying the last bites of their evening meal. Their bodies are slightly inclined toward each other, and their faces appear to be smiling. Perhaps they are a couple? We will never know; the artist does not care to give us any further clues.

In fact, the artist seems to have been more interested in painting the expansive sky above their tête-à-tête. Again unusual things are happening in the heavens. (We notice this only now, preoccupied as we were at first by the more recognizable dynamics between the two people.) Rather than hanging loose in the firmament, all the stars are placed on clusters of five thin, parallel lines. It looks as though we are witnessing what the ancients would have called the music of the spheres, portrayed as a grand orchestral score with a complex rhythmical arrangement. Far on the left, past the key signatures, small icons indicate the instrumentation. Surprisingly, the instruments only play as pairs, each couple having to share a single system of notes: oboe with flute, piccolo with French horn, cymbals with xylophone. Even more surprising, their notes are very measured: usually one shining star per system, often only in comfortable range for one of the two instruments. In this snapshot of cosmic harmony, apparently half the orchestra is keeping quiet or just barely whispering along!

I point out a sign on the wall, next to the triptych, on which the museum curators provide us with an interpretive key to the instrumentation. The cosmic score actually symbolizes the internal, affective state of the two happy campers. Each instrument represents a human emotion; its partner, an opposing emotion. Oboe and flute stand for sadness and joy; piccolo and French horn, for fear and daring; cymbals and xylophone, for scorn and wonder; and so on. Moreover, from the placement of the stars we can deduce that, in their peaceful after-dinner setting, the two people experience mostly positive, outgoing emotions. Just like the outer world in its peaceful evening manifestation, their inner worlds are molded constructively. They are in a state of virtue. Again, we are reminded of the common medieval practice to portray, on a side panel, the financial sponsor(s) of the triptych in a state of blessedness.

Finally, I draw your attention to the central panel, to the "Blessed Brain" itself. Though pictured as it might have been in an anatomy textbook, with medial and axial views, this is no ordinary brain—or so we are inclined to believe, for we find ourselves blinded by the thickly gilded rays of its double halo, rays that fan out all the way

across the triptych's fold lines, onto the side panels. A bit overdone, perhaps? Indeed, a bit *anthropocentric*? Not so, the museum curators again inform us on their sign. Not today. It might have been in the Middle Ages, when the human footprint on the environment was still small enough for people to believe in a more mystical balancing force (for example, the "Blessed Heart") and consider trust in human powers idolatrous. However, in these days of human-induced environmental stresses, the human brain is *the hinge* on which the whole picture of harmony turns.³⁷ It connects inner biological dynamics with outer biological dynamics, emotions with ecology. If it does this well, then both dimensions can keep running harmoniously; if not, then both will falter and die.

I see you peer at the grayish cauliflower halves, unconvinced. Perhaps you are reminded of those shriveled-up body parts in gilded reliquaries that, belonging to an old tradition of saint worship, are believed to have magical powers. Let me quickly liberate you from that queasy association by drawing your attention to some down-to-earth details of anatomy and physiology, subtly highlighted by the artist in this rendering of the living brain.

In the medial view, our attention is drawn to a border region at the very bottom of the brain, just behind the brain stem. That is the *cerebellum*. It is the general coordinating center of a multicomponent system that fulfills a key role in the human ability to match external, situational features with internal, emotion-based responses.³⁸ The cerebellum contributes the capacity to ensure a *high-quality* integrated emotional response by applying quality standards learned from experience.³⁹ This involves the ability to pair external, situational features (communicated to the cerebellum by perceptual regions in the cerebral cortex) with remembered profiles of successful emotional responses in similar situations. Based on this pairing, the cerebellum then sends signals to the systems that are generating, at default levels, various components of the relevant emotions, affecting for example their trigger sensitivity or the intensity and duration with which they operate.⁴⁰ The entire process continues in the form of a feedback cycle as long as the situation (which will begin to include the effects of human action!) continues to trigger default emotional reactions that need to be modulated into a high-quality, integrated response.

In the Blessed Brain all of this works very well—hence the halo. We are, in fact, looking at a picture of excellence: at a *virtue* dedicated to ensuring the high quality of emotion-based human responses in specific situations. In fact, if we think about it, we are looking at not just any virtue but a *cardinal* virtue: at a conditioned biological process *that is a necessary ingredient of all other virtue cultivation*. After all, can you imagine doing anything well without the ability to judge how to strike the right tone in particular situations? Lacking that ability, you might have all sorts of lofty, cerebral goals, but you would never be able to implement them, for you could not select the circumstance-dependent means to get there. This is exactly what classical Greeks and Roman philosophers had in mind when they described *practical wisdom* and identified it as a cardinal virtue.⁴¹ The artist of *The Blessed Brain* is thus suggesting that we associate the cerebellar feedback system with this ancient hinge of the moral life.

The artist goes further, however. As though it were a cartoon, the cerebellum of the Blessed Brain emits not only a golden halo but also a spray of tiny pearls, symbol-

izing the sweat of healthy effort. The artist wants to suggest that the cerebellum operates at a high level of sensitivity and activity, matching, and checking, and adjusting, and rechecking constantly—yet smoothly, without overexertion—to ensure the highest degree of attuned response. This is because the Blessed Brain belongs to a member of the adorned herd of animals, who see themselves as one species among others, which means that they typically have to keep close track of how they fit in. Had they thought of themselves as Kings of the Field (assuming they had the features to pull it off), they would have been much more likely just to go with their gut feelings, lording it over others as seemed convenient. They might have needed their cerebella to keep track of in-group competition, but otherwise this part of their brains would not have to be very highly sensitized. Thus, where one places oneself in terms of social relationships affects one's style of interacting. By seeing oneself as a responsive node embedded in a complex network, like the adorned herd, one becomes generally both more sensitive and more cautious—and thus more inclined to monitor and modify.⁴²

Moving to the axial (horizontal cross section) view, we notice a central region at the very bottom of the frontal lobe. That is the *ventromedial prefrontal cortex*, a coordinating center in a multicomponent system that undergirds the human ability to respond *constructively* to complex social situations.⁴³ For example, the ventromedial prefrontal cortex plays a key role in enabling appropriate feelings of compassion, embarrassment, and mourning.⁴⁴ It ensures the fittingness of such responses by triggering the relevant emotional circuits precisely at those times and levels that match stored profiles of successful social reactions in similar situations.⁴⁵

Again, in the Blessed Brain all of this works optimally. We are looking at a *virtue* dedicated to ensuring a *high quality* of social responsiveness, based on prior experiences and reflection on those experiences. Moreover, this too is a *cardinal* virtue, a conditioned biological process that is a necessary ingredient of all other virtue cultivation. After all, can you imagine functioning well as a social animal, a *zoon politikon*, without having the ability to empathize with your mates or to feel when you may have offended them and must make amends? The artist of *The Blessed Brain* wants us to associate the neurological underpinnings of this ability with the ancient cardinal virtue of *justice*. Justice's primary function has traditionally been understood as ensuring a balance of well-being in the world.⁴⁶ This necessarily involves the well functioning of an agent's ability to be triggered into reacting by perceptions of external imbalance.

Less traditionally, however, in the Blessed Brain the system has also been conditioned to respond to an *extended* range of triggers, predisposing its owner to care about the needs of organisms outside his or her own group. Again, this is because the Blessed Brain belongs to a member of the adorned herd of animals, who have developed a highly compassionate culture.⁴⁷ When we look again at the left panel, we notice how young children are affectionately held by their parents. By choosing this symbol of compassionate behavior, the artist hints at a reputed correlation between child-rearing practices and cultural levels of compassion.⁴⁸ Had the adorned herd of animals instead thought of themselves as Terminators, they would have exhibited the evolutionarily much more common pattern of limiting their compassion to group members while approaching strangers with default xenophobia and aggression. By seeing themselves from an early age as embedded in an extended network of nature, the adorned herd's

members have become more socially sensitive to the larger community of life. Thus, they are more inclined to respond considerately to a wide circle of organisms.

Finally, back in the medial view, we notice what looks like a jumble of circular wires, some green and some red. They wind all over the place, from the brain stem through the midbrain (where it gets really tangled) into various areas of the cortex and back again, in greater and smaller loops. The curators tell us that the green wires, like green traffic lights, stand for neural circuits dedicated to goal-directed, positive emotions, popularly known as desires.⁴⁹ The red wires, like red traffic lights, stand for neural circuits dedicated to protective, negative emotions, such as fear, anger, and disgust. Together, these green and red wires fulfill a key role in the human ability to produce just the right sort of emotional mix to ensure personal flourishing in different situations.⁵⁰ Thus, they correspond with the pairs of instruments that play the music score representing the balanced inner state of the campers on the right panel. Each wire serves as a trained musician, primed to play his or her instrument masterfully and to respond individually to the needs of the moment—but always within the larger balance of the composition (cerebrally articulated, normative directions) and the conductor's integrating, situation-sensitive interpretation (cerebellar guidance).⁵¹

The green desire wires represent various brain systems dedicated to what neuroscientists call "pre-goal attainment positive affect." One wire is drawn more prominently than others: the artist of *The Blessed Brain* wants to focus our attention on a system characterized by the neurotransmitter *dopamine*. This system is symbolic for what goes on in the green zone because it gets us up and moving, instead of just daydreaming about what we would want to do.⁵² (Other systems include those dedicated to testosterone, estrogen, and phenylethylamine, a key neurotransmitter in romantic love: all powerful movers as well!) The artist has highlighted two processing centers in the dopamine circuit: a region of the brain stem called the *ventral tegmental area* and a region of the left prefrontal cortex called the *nucleus accumbens*. Together they constitute a feedback system that indicates how close we are to reaching a predicted goal. When things go better than expected, the nucleus accumbens communicates this to the ventral tegmental area, which releases a lot of dopamine back to the nucleus accumbens. We experience strong feelings of pleasure (a "rush," "butterflies," etc.). If things simply go according to plan, or worse than expected, no such boost occurs.⁵³ Doesn't this explain why it often feels better to desire than to possess, and why we keep shifting our gaze to new shores?

In the Blessed Brain, this system functions excellently in the sense that its settings have been conditioned such that, no matter what happens, it tends neither to "overheat" nor to "freeze."⁵⁴ Within this comfortable range, it responds swiftly and effectively to signals from other parts of the brain (for example, the cerebellum), demanding upward or downward—usually downward!—adjustment of activity.⁵⁵ We are thus looking at a *virtue* dedicated to ensuring the *high-quality* responsiveness of pre-goal attainment affect. Moreover, this too is a *cardinal* virtue, for in order to do anything well, we clearly must have the ability to prevent our desires from undermining our plans and instead channel them into supporting paths. The ancients called this ability *temperance*, and the artist of *The Blessed Brain* suggests that the highlighted neurological system be associated with this ancient tradition.

Again, however, the artist does not exactly follow the traditional concept of temperance. The highlighted system of pre-goal attainment affect is based on dopamine, which facilitates desire in general. By contrast, temperance has traditionally been associated especially with the ability to moderate sexual desire (most vehement among the "desires of touch"), which would be facilitated more specifically by testosterone and estrogen.⁵⁶ The choice is a matter of where one believes the largest threat to rational action lies. In the judgment of the artist, the sustainability of human moral agency is most seriously endangered by general desire, which tends to be the driver behind unsustainable consumerist behaviors. The Blessed Brain, belonging to a member of the adorned herd, particularly excels in moderating general desire.

The red wires, dedicated to protective, "negative" emotions, also represent various systems. Again, one wire is drawn more prominently than others: the artist wants us to focus on a system in which *cortisol*, a steroid stress hormone, plays a key role. This system is symbolic for what goes on in the red zone because it gets us in gear for protective action, for fight or flight. And once more the artist has highlighted two processing centers in an intricate feedback loop: the *amygdala* and the *hippocampus*, both located in the temporal lobe. The amygdala receives visual and auditory triggers associated with danger and sets into motion a series of reactions that lead to the release of cortisol, which acts both in the body (e.g., by making your heart race, which also makes you *aware* that you are feeling afraid or angry) and on the hippocampus. The hippocampus in turn puts the breaks on the same system by signaling that the release of cortisol should be reduced. The ultimate degree of stress response thus depends on the relative strength of the messages from the amygdala and the hippocampus.⁵⁷

In the Blessed Brain, the excellence of this system again resides in the conditioned settings, which prevent the extremes of overactivity as well as underactivity. Within the resulting range, the system is trained to a high degree of responsivity to incoming signals demanding upward or downward adjustment of activity. Again, the specifics of the situation usually require downward modulation: we normally have to calm our fears or reduce our anger.⁵⁸ All in all, we are looking at a *virtue* dedicated to ensuring the *high-quality* responsiveness of defensive human emotions. This too is a *cardinal* virtue, for in order to do anything well, we must have the ability to channel our fears and aggressive impulses into helpful, supporting paths. The ancients called this ability *courage*, and the artist of *The Blessed Brain* clearly suggests that the highlighted neurological system be associated with this ancient tradition.⁵⁹

Once more, though, the artist modifies the ancient model by shifting the accent away from the traditional emphasis on personal death in battle as the trigger causing the most troublesome automated response that would call for moderation. Judging that people in modern times face an even more fear-inspiring prospect, namely, *species death through the death of nature*, the artist wants us to understand the courage that symbolizes excellence in all protective human responses, the courage portrayed in the Blessed Brain, as a constructive response to this ultimate possibility of environmental destruction.

We have come to the end of our tour. While you take a final look at the triptych, I sum up its basic message (like most medieval art, it contains a moral): Today, ecological flourishing, which includes human flourishing, depends on the fitting balance of a

may even support, one's overall plans. As in classical Western virtue tradition, the model especially focuses our attention on the ability to channel the fear of death—yet with the twist that we must also learn to handle the fear (plausible or not) that our entire species may die through the death of nature. For those whose lives derive meaning from a sense of commitment, whether to future generations or to a divine creator, the environmental favorite of *loyalty* then becomes a key aspect—a constituent—of cultivating courage.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, the cultivation of courage proper has become synonymous with the environmental favorite of *tenacity*: maintaining a steady focus on what matters in an ecological age, rather than slipping into the unhelpful extremes of either apathy (freezing) or obsession (blindly fighting) in the face of widespread environmental deterioration.

It seems, then, that by the criterion of cardinality that I have proposed, all of the environmental favorites discussed above can be considered either cardinals themselves (sensitivity, tenacity), or related to a cardinal virtue as constituents (humility, respect, gratitude, benevolence, attentiveness, loyalty), or particular instantiations of a cardinal virtue (friendship, love, frugality, simplicity). One caveat is in order, however. My suggestion, though philosophically grounded, still only has the status of a hypothesis. By making the operation of certain biological systems part of the definition of cardinality, I have introduced the need for scientific testing in order to move from a hypothesis to a solid model of cardinal environmental virtues. Here I must hand on the gavel, for I am not qualified to carry out such research myself. I hope, therefore, that in the future neuroscientists will become as interested in studying the pathways of virtue as they are currently focused on studying the pathways of pathology.⁶⁶

Pending such corroboration, I would argue that environmental virtue ethicists, as a group, have covered a wide spectrum of cardinal functions, subfunctions, and instantiations—at least as wide as the spectrum covered by the ancients of the West.⁶⁷ I do not think that this is just coincidence. Insofar as these cardinal aspects of virtue cultivation represent essential dimensions of human engagement with the world, based on our common biology as adaptable mammals, we may indeed *expect* them to turn up at the core of any virtue ethic, old or new.

Conclusion

With the emergence of environmental ethics, the classical list of cardinal virtues—practical wisdom, justice, temperance, and courage—has not been replaced; rather, it has been transformed for an ecological age. What was cardinal about the list more than two millennia ago, those core features necessitated by our biology, is cardinal now. Unless we radically evolve as a species (who knows how we will use genetic engineering?), we can expect this to remain the case for generations in the future. Nevertheless, accents and interpretations have shifted, and in their environmental articulation the cardinals have become explicitly responsive, not only to interhuman social relationships but also to broader ecological ones. Thus, along with genuine similarity, there is a real difference: not the sort of radical transformation that trashes what is old but, rather, the sort that rebuilds from the old root up, for that root contains the very systems by which we are able to respond to our ailing world—the biology of our brains.⁶⁸

Notes

1. Cited in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-I 61.1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948). The citation is from Ambrose's commentary on the Gospel of Luke. Note that the term *prudence* (*prudencia* in Latin) here indicates the classical virtue of "practical wisdom" (*phronesis* in Greek). It should not be confused with the popular, modern meaning of *prudence* as self-regarding, shrewd judgment.

2. See "Cardinal Virtues," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, available at www.newadvent.org/cathen/03343a.htm (accessed 22 January 2004).

3. See Plato, "The Laws," in *The Laws of Plato*, trans. Thomas L. Pangle (New York: Basic Books, 1980), I.631; Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, trans. W. D. Ross, in *Introduction to Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1947), 308–543.

4. Other leading philosophers and theologians who used this list include the Roman orator Cicero, Pope Gregory the Great, the Muslim scholar al-Ghazali, the Jewish scholar Maimonides, and the Christian scholar Thomas Aquinas. Their interpretations are often quite liberal, reflecting their times and particular concerns. Ambrose, for example, used the four cardinals very cleverly to argue that what pagan tradition had identified as essential to the moral life was nothing but the eternal Christian truth of the gospel. See Ambrose, *De Officiis*, trans. H. de Romestin, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church*, ed. H. Wace and P. Schaff (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 2d series, 10.

5. See Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, I.13.

6. The findings are based on eighteen environmental texts (monographs and anthologies) from the period 1970–92. The texts were selected to represent a cross section of authors from social ecology, land ethics, deep ecology, ecofeminism, creation spirituality, process philosophy/theology, mainstream Roman Catholic environmentalism, and mainstream Protestant environmentalism. The authors include Thomas Berry, Wendell Berry, Murray Bookchin, John Cobb, Bill Devall, Andrew Linzey, Jay McDaniel, Sean McDonagh, Joanna Macy, Arne Naess, James Nash, Rosemary Ruether, John Seed, George Sessions, and Charlene Spretnak. For the full list of virtues, see Appendix A in my book, *Dirty Virtues: The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Ethics* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000), 163–65. I thank my research assistant, Kim Christiansen, for helping with the tabulation.

7. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 240.

8. Thomas E. Hill Jr., "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments," *Environmental Ethics* 5 (1983): 211–24. Here I shall treat "self-acceptance" as an aspect of humility and "appreciation of the good in others" as synonymous with respect, rather than as separate virtues.

9. Bill Shaw, "A Virtue Ethics Approach to Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 19 (1997): 53–67.

10. Lisa Gerber, "Standing Humbly before Nature," *Ethics and the Environment* 7, no. 1 (2002): 39–53.

11. Susan Power Bratton, "The Precautionary Principle and the Biblical Wisdom Literature: Toward an Ethic of Ecological Prudence in Ocean Management," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Toronto, 2002; Celia Deane-Drummond, *Biology and Theology Today* (London: SCM Press, 2001), 89–90.

12. John Rodman, "Four Forms of Ecological Consciousness Reconsidered: Ecological Sensibility," in *Ethics and the Environment*, ed. Donald Scherer and Thomas Attig (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983), 88–92; Holmes Rolston III, *Conserving Natural Value* (New

- York: Columbia University Press, 1994). I take John Rodman's notion of ecological sensibility to be substantially the same as Rolston's notion of the sensitivity of the naturalist.
13. Geoffrey B. Frasz, "What Is Environmental Virtue Ethics That We Should Be Mindful of It?" *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 8, no. 2 (fall-winter 2001): 5-14.
 14. Lisa Gerber, "Environmental Virtues and Vices," Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Philosophy, University of New Mexico, 1999.
 15. Jennifer Welchman, "The Virtues of Stewardship," *Environmental Ethics* 21 (1999): 411-23.
 16. James A. Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon Cokesbury, 1991).
 17. Neuroscientists distinguish between positive and negative emotions. The terminology does not reflect a value judgment but, rather, describes the difference between leading the organism to reach out or to protect itself.
 18. James A. Nash, "The Old Order Changeth: The Ecological Challenge to Christian Life and Thought," *Virginia Seminary Journal* (December 1997): 11.
 19. Philip Cafaro, "Less Is More: Economic Consumption and the Good Life," *Philosophy Today* 42 (1998): 26-39; Lisa H. Newton, *Ethics and Sustainability: Sustainable Development and the Moral Life* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2003).
 20. Randy Larsen, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: Nature as Polis," M.A. thesis, Department of Philosophy, Colorado State University, 1996.
 21. Welchman, "The Virtues of Stewardship."
 22. Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues*, 66.
 23. Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 137-60. The fourteen virtues are respect, receptivity, self-restraint, frugality, humility, honesty, wisdom, hope, patience, serenity, benevolence, love, justice, and courage. For a helpful table of these virtues and their corresponding vices, biblical texts, theological motifs, and ethical principles, see Steven Bouma-Prediger, "Response to Louke van Wensveen: A Constructive Proposal," in *Christianity and Ecology*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 175.
 24. In fact, Bouma-Prediger draws many parallels between Aristotle's catalog and his own list of key virtues for (Christian) ecological ethics but does not choose to label any of the latter as cardinals. Wisdom, justice, temperance, and courage all appear on Bouma-Prediger's list, with explicit nods to their classical status as cardinals. However, he does not lift these four above the other ten virtues on his list. See Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 137-60.
 25. I have suggested this myself in "Attunement: An Ecological Spin on the Virtue of Temperance," *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 8, no. 2 (2001): 74.
 26. This would, by definition, also produce good because a (strong) concept of virtue implies that its results are what we call good—even if they may not be as planned, or desirable, by some external measurement. See Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 88-102.
 27. Wensveen, "Attunement," 74.
 28. Wensveen, "Attunement," 74.
 29. On the so-called unity of the virtues thesis, see Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, VI.13.
 30. This definition does not assume that moral agency belongs exclusively to human beings. In the remainder of my argument I shall, however, focus on human agency. Also, the definition does not deduce a normative category from biological processes but, rather, uses empirical knowledge about biological processes to arrive at the most precise and explanatory articulation

of cardinality, which I see as a descriptive (in the sense of empirically testable) qualifier of the normative concept of a virtue.

31. See, for example, Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-II 61.3-4.

32. Thomas Aquinas (see *Summa Theologica* I-II 61.2) associated prudence (practical wisdom) with the rational faculty, justice with the faculty of the will, temperance with the faculty of desire (the concupiscible), and fortitude with the faculty that resists evil (the irascible). He largely followed Aristotle in making these links to what they both understood as basic faculties of a biologically based human soul. Aristotle, in turn, had been influenced by the ideas of Plato and Socrates.

Today these links with human biology-based psychology are still widely acknowledged by neo-Thomist ethicists. Porter, for example, explains the historical staying power of the cardinals in terms of underlying psychological constants. See Jean Porter, "Perennial and Timely Virtues: Practical Wisdom, Courage and Temperance," in *Changing Values and Virtues*, ed. Dietmar Mieth and Jacques Pohier (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 60.

33. Two well-known scholars working on this frontier are Paul Churchland and Antonio Damasio.

34. Yet a note of caution is in order, for brain systems are typically widely interconnected, dispersed over several areas, and multifunctional. See Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2003), 165.

35. I focus on a Western art form because I want it to serve as a model for a concept of cardinality that stands in the Western tradition of Aristotelian ethics.

36. Planetary conditions will cease to be favorable to carbon-based life when the intensity of our sun increases to the point of evaporating the Earth's oceans. This is predicted to happen in roughly one billion years, well before the sun turns into a red giant, expanding to envelop the inner planets and then settling down as a white dwarf. See A'ndrea Elyse Messer and Vicki Fong, "Earth's Oceans Destined to Leave in Billion Years," press release, 21 February 2000, available at www.spaceref.com/news/viewpr.html?pid=908 (accessed 22 January 2004).

37. Many Christian theologians now also recognize this by stressing the theme of stewardship, which does not replace divine power but makes humans accountable agents on Earth. See, for example, Calvin DeWitt, *Caring for Creation: Responsible Stewardship of God's Handiwork* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

38. See Jeremy D. Schahmann and Deepak N. Pandya, "The Cerebrocerebellar System," *International Review of Neurobiology* 41 (1997): 31-60.

39. In humans, learning from experience can incorporate post-hoc reflection on experience, which may put the response in a more positive or negative light (i.e., by attaching positive or negative emotions to the memory), affecting the way it will be used as a guide in future situations. This process allows humans to marshal their "library" of experiences in the interest of more abstract, reason-based goals. See Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*, 146.

40. Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*, 78.

41. On practical wisdom, see, for example, Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, VI.5.

42. Increased triggerability and cautiousness may be associated with reduced levels of the neurotransmitter serotonin. Interestingly, serotonin levels are affected by social status, being generally higher in dominant individuals than in their subordinates. See M. J. Raleigh, M. T. McGuire, G. L. Brammer, D. B. Pollack, and A. Yuwiler, "Serotonergic Mechanisms Promote Dominance Acquisition in Adult Male Vervet Monkeys," *Brain Research* 559 (1991): 181-90. (The authors found consistent results in human males as well.)

43. See James K. Rilling, David A. Gutman, Thorsten R. Zeh, Giuseppe Pagnoni, Gregory S. Berns, and Clinton D. Kilts, "A Neural Basis for Social Cooperation," *Neuron* 35 (2002): 395-405.

44. On social emotions, see Jonathan Haidt, "The Moral Emotions," in *Handbook of Affective Sciences*, ed. R. J. Davidson, K. Scherer, and H. H. Goldsmith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 852–70. Key neurotransmitters for mediating social emotions are the pituitary peptides oxytocin (in the presence of estrogen) and vasopressin. See Thomas Insel, "A Neurobiological Basis for Social Attachment," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 154 (1997): 726–36.
45. Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*, 61–62. The left region seems to be instrumental in inducing pleasant social emotions, and the right region, in inducing unpleasant social emotions.
46. On justice, see Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, bk. 5.
47. Key aspects of such conditioning toward an extensively compassionate state of being include the ability to imagine how symptoms of need in others, including members of other species, would translate in terms of our own feelings, as well as personal memories of being treated compassionately while in need. Consequently, I think that we should not too easily dismiss "anthropomorphizing" as being opposed to environmental ethics. Insofar as we are enabled to care for others by projecting their perceived needs onto our own body maps, and their potential relief onto our own memories of relief, we actually *overcome* the anthropocentrism that makes us act as though the entire world turns around us. On the role of body maps in feelings, including empathetic feelings, see Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*.
48. See, for example, Michel Odent, *The Scientification of Love* (London: Free Association Books, 1999). Others suggest a correlation between compassionate cultures and some forms of religious belief, such as animism and Mahayana Buddhism. See, for example, Richard J. Davidson and Anne Harrington, ed., *Visions of Compassion: Western Scientists and Tibetan Buddhists Examine Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). See also the work of the Boston-based Institute for Research on Unlimited Love, available at www.unlimitedloveinstitute.org (accessed 22 January 2004).
49. R. J. Davidson and W. Irwin, "The Functional Neuroanatomy of Emotion and Affective Style," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 3 (1999): 11–21.
50. In this model, the ultimate mixing is done by the cerebellar system associated with practical wisdom.
51. Aristotle and Aquinas use the metaphor of free citizens, who are ruled by political (versus despotic) command. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I–II 56.4 ad 3.
52. This is one reason why rational arguments cannot motivate us to act independently of emotions. See Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*, 140–55.
53. See W. Schultz, P. Dayan, and P. R. Montague, "A Neural Substrate for Prediction and Reward," *Science* 275 (1997): 1593–99. See also R. A. Depue and P. F. Collins, "Neurobiology of the Structure of Personality: Dopamine, Facilitation of Incentive Motivation, and Extraversion," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 22, no. 3 (1999): 491–569.
54. Settings are determined by a host of factors, including the number and responsiveness of the receptors and reuptake pumps belonging to the neurons in the system. Neurons can grow or eliminate receptors over time.
55. Activity in this system can be decreased with a range of tricks, which over time can become second nature, including (1) removing external triggers that are firing up the system, i.e., the old advice to get out of tempting situations; (2) removing internal triggers that are firing up the system, such as memories or thoughts about desirables; (3) dividing the desirable into small and easily attainable subgoals, which will lower your excitability as you get used to meeting them (you may even lose interest in the desirable altogether); (4) raising your expectations so high that you set yourself up for disappointment whenever you get a glimpse of your desirable, which should also cool you down; (5) engaging in activities or thoughts that stimulate other neural systems with negative feedback links to the dopamine system. This is called reciprocal activation. See D. Watson, D. Wiese, J. Vaidya, and A. Tellegen, "The Two General Activation

Systems of Affect: Structural Findings, Evolutionary Considerations, and Psychological Evidence," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 76 (1999): 820–38. For more specific, science-based advice on channeling desires, see Terry Burnham and Jay Phelan, *Mean Genes: From Sex to Money to Food, Taming Our Primal Instincts* (New York: Penguin 2000).

However, too little activity in the system is not helpful either, for that would leave us in a state of apathy and blunted alertness. Some individuals are predisposed to a low baseline activation level, suffering from characteristically low states of enthusiasm and energy. See R. J. Davidson, "Affective Style, Psychopathology and Resilience: Brain Mechanisms and Plasticity," *American Psychologist* 55 (2000): 1193–1214. They can condition themselves to increase activity by taking opposite actions to the ones listed above. According to Davidson, "Of particular importance here is the ability to inhibit negative affect that may have a deleterious effect on the promotion of anticipatory positive affect" ("Affective Style, Psychopathology and Resilience," 111).

56. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II–II 141.4, 151.3 ad 2. Ironically, a hunger for touching may be the less vehement aspect of sexual desire; it is especially facilitated by oxytocin.

57. Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 241.

58. Different individuals have different baseline activation levels, affecting their characteristic states of anxiety and aggressiveness. As the successes of behavioral therapy show, however, many people can decrease activity in the stress system by using some of the following tricks, which over time can become second nature: (1) removing external triggers that are firing up the system; (2) removing internal triggers that are firing up the system, such as exaggerated fear-mongering scenarios that do nothing but paralyze us; (3) avoiding cortisone-conducive brain states, such as *prolonged* stress, which can damage the ability of the hippocampus to put on the breaks; and (4) engaging in activities or thoughts that stimulate other neural systems with negative feedback links to the stress system, such as exercising or confidence building. Crenshaw suggests that cortisol levels drop in response to pleasant music. See Theresa L. Crenshaw, *The Alchemy of Love and Lust: How Our Sex Hormones Influence Our Relationships* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 88.

Too little activity in the system is not helpful either, for then we will fail to react to real threats. We can try to avoid this other extreme by developing an opposite set of habits.

59. Insofar as the core of courage was traditionally believed to lie in providing resistance to fear (see Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II–II 123.3), one might particularly associate this virtue with the tempering function of the hippocampus in the stress system.

60. These subcategories are comparable to Thomas Aquinas's (see *Summa Theologica* II–II 48.1) integral, subjective, and potential parts.

61. The trick is, of course, to be able to see oneself in a humble position without getting depressed as a result. Humility as a virtue thus requires learning to associate a modest view of oneself with positive feelings, such as satisfaction and joy. However, there is a potential for irony here (a problem that has haunted Christian monks over the centuries): by feeling good about one's humility, one risks becoming proud of it—which means that one has lost it! This also implies that the good effects of humility on practical wisdom, such as increased triggerability and cautiousness, have disappeared.

62. In neurological terms, constituent virtues can be associated with subcircuits in the main system. In the case of humility and respect, I suspect serotonin circuits to be involved. See Raleigh et al., "Serotonergic Mechanisms Promote Dominance Acquisition in Adult Male Vervet Monkeys."

63. I suspect that both involve oxytocin-related subsystems. Benevolence may be associated with the ability to maintain generally high levels of oxytocin in the brain, along with the ability

to moderate interfering influences, such as dropping levels of serotonin or rising levels of cortisol and norepinephrine. Attentiveness may be associated with a trained ability to connect memories of personal need with incoming information about other organisms. As a result, oxytocin-based behavior would be triggered.

64. For the traditional connection between chastity and chastising, see Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II 151.1.

65. There may be a connection between loyalty as a character trait and the neural peptide vasopressin. See Insel, "A Neurobiological Basis of Social Attachment."

66. For an initial exploration in this direction, see Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*, 170-75. Neurobiological understanding of the pathways of virtue should also stimulate discussion about the potential role of therapy and medications in the cultivation of virtue and the overcoming of vice.

67. The question of whether there are additional cardinal functions, or different ways of characterizing the ones mentioned here, I leave open at this point. Certainly, the fact that the four main Confucian virtues of humaneness (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), propriety (*li*), and wisdom (*zhi*) do not seem to line up in any simple way with this model suggests that there is more to be said.

68. For an excellent discussion on method in comparative virtue ethics, see Lee Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 182-96.

PART 4

APPLYING ENVIRONMENTAL VIRTUE ETHICS

CHAPTER 12

Synergistic Environmental Virtues: Consumerism and Human Flourishing

Peter Wenz

There is no conflict at this time between anthropocentric and nonanthropocentric goals in the moral development of people in industrial countries. Exercising the traditional virtues of frugality, appreciation, temperance, self-development, dedication, benevolence, generosity, empathy, and justice fosters human flourishing around the world and protects nature. Traditional vices, on the other hand, including six of the seven deadly sins—greed, avarice, gluttony, envy, luxury, and pride—as well as intemperance, selfishness, and indifference, foster lifestyles among current industrial people that diminish human well-being and harm the environment. The linchpin is consumerism, as currently understood and practiced in industrial countries, because it relies on vices that harm both people and nature. Traditional virtues oppose such consumerism.

I begin by defining consumerism and illustrating its harmful environmental effects. I argue next that consumerism harms poor people in the Third World. I then contend that it harms industrial people. Finally, I argue that consumerism promotes and relies on the cultivation of traditional vices whereas traditional virtues foster human flourishing and environmental protection.

If I am correct about consumerism, then nonanthropocentric environmentalists have reasons to favor traditional virtues because their exercise tends to protect the non-human environment. Anthropocentrists have reason to support the same virtues because their exercise promotes human flourishing. Nonanthropocentric and anthropocentric considerations regarding human virtue and vice are thus mutually reinforcing. Each is stronger in combination with the other than alone, a relationship I define as synergistic.¹ In addition, if I am correct, defenders of traditional virtues have reason to embrace nonanthropocentric environmentalism because it supports many traditional virtues. I conclude by suggesting how synergistic environmental virtues should be manifest in practice.

Consumerism Harms the Environment

Current environmental problems stem largely from consumerism in industrial countries, such as the United States. Consuming goods and services is not the problem. Human beings, like all living systems, require material throughput. We need food, clothing, shelter, and, because we are culture-oriented primates, education. Many products of modern technology make life easier or more fun, such as washing machines, CD players, trains, and cars. Consumerism differs from the consumption of such items, however, in treating consumption as good in itself. Consumerism is the ideology that society should maximize consumption, pursue consumption without limit.

Consumerism dominates American politics. No candidate for national office ever suggests maintaining or reducing the American economy. Everyone supports economic growth. The economy is never large enough. Life would be better if more people had more jobs producing more goods and services and earning more money to spend on consumption. "Enough" is politically subversive in a consumerism-dominated culture.

Attempts at unlimited consumption, pursued as an end in itself, degrade the environment. Global warming, for example, threatens species with extinction because of rapid climate change.² The warming results primarily from increased emissions of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide. The United States, with less than 5 percent of the world's population, emits 24 percent of carbon into the atmosphere, caused significantly by consumer preference for gas-guzzling light trucks and sport utility vehicles (SUVs).³ Such vehicles promote economic growth more than efficient alternatives—fuel-efficient cars and public transportation—through increased gasoline sales and required expansion of parking facilities. Commitment to unlimited economic growth favors inefficient transportation that threatens biodiversity through global warming.

Consumerism harms nonhumans in other ways as well: "Aquatic songbirds, called dippers, for example, disappear from stream waters acidified by pine plantations and acid rain."⁴ Pine plantations are monocultures created to serve a growing market for wood pulp and building materials. The size of the average American home increased more than 50 percent between the 1960s and the 1990s, adding to economic growth and to the demand for building materials from pine plantations.⁵ Acid rain results primarily from burning fossil fuels rich in sulfur, most often to generate electricity to run increasing numbers of electric appliances and air conditioners. The economy grows when people build larger houses, buy and use more appliances, and use more air conditioning. But pine plantations and acid rain harm the environment and endanger many species.

Development economist David Korten explains why environmental decline tends to accompany the rise in production required by increasing consumption: "About 70 percent of this productivity growth has been in . . . economic activity accounted for by the petroleum, petrochemical, and metal industries; chemical-intensive agriculture; public utilities; road building; transportation; and mining—specifically, the industries that are most rapidly drawing down natural capital, generating the bulk of our most toxic waste, and consuming a substantial portion of our nonrenewable energy."⁶ Environmental researcher Alan Durning agrees that consumer-oriented societies are most

responsible for impairing environmental quality: "Industrial countries' factories generate most of the world's hazardous chemical wastes. . . . The fossil fuels that power the consumer society are its most ruinous input. Wrestring coal, oil, and natural gas from the earth permanently disrupts countless habitats; burning them causes an overwhelming share of the world's air pollution; and refining them generates huge quantities of toxic wastes."⁷

Consumerism Harms Poor People in the Third World

Anthropocentrists would not care that environmental decline accompanies consumerism so long as people flourish. Advocates of global free market capitalism, such as Thomas Friedman, believe that growing economies will help all people in the long run, so consumerism, the engine of economic growth in capitalist societies, is good for people. He writes: "When it comes to the question of which system today is the most effective at generating rising standards of living, the historical debate is over. The answer is free-market capitalism. . . . In the end, if you want higher standards of living in a world without walls, the free market is the only ideological alternative left."⁸ And all people can share in the cornucopia, according to Friedman:

Countries . . . can now increasingly choose to be prosperous. They don't have to be prisoners of their natural resources, geography or history. In a world where a country can plug into the Internet and import knowledge, in a world where a country can find shareholders from any other country to invest in its infrastructure . . . , where a country can import the technology to be an auto producer or computer maker even if it has no raw materials, a country can more than ever before opt for prosperity or poverty, depending on the policies it pursues.⁹

Unfortunately, Friedman is wrong. The whole world cannot consume at the level of citizens of industrial nations. Friedman seems to have missed the difference between *anyone* being able to do something and *everyone* being able to do it. If I order twenty texts for a class of twenty-five students, anyone could have bought the book at the university store, but everyone could not. Similarly, even if Friedman were correct that any country may become rich like industrial countries (which is already problematic), environmental limits preclude most of the world's people living consumer lifestyles. David Korten writes: "If the earth's sustainable natural output were shared equally among the earth's present population, the needs of all could be met. But it is . . . clear that it is a physical impossibility, even with the most optimistic assumptions about the potential of new technologies, for the world to consume at levels even approximating those in North America, Europe, and Japan."¹⁰ According to environmental researchers Mia MacDonald and Danielle Nierenberg, "If every person alive today consumed at the rate of an average person in the United States, three more planets would be required to fulfill these demands."¹¹

Korten cites a study by William Rees, an urban planner at the University of British Columbia: "Rees estimates that four to six hectares of land are required to maintain the consumption of the average person living in a high-income country—including the land required to maintain current levels of energy consumption using renewable sources. Yet in 1990, the total available ecologically productive land area (land capable of generating consequential biomass) in the world was only an estimated 1.7 hectares per capita."¹² What is worse, the world's human population is expected to increase more than 50 percent over its 1990 level by 2050, whereas Earth remains stubbornly resistant to growth.¹³

This environmental analysis suggests what international economists actually observe: economic globalization, intended to increase world economic growth so that everyone can be prosperous consumers, impoverishes many people in the Third World. Some examples illustrate how this occurs. One goal of consumer society is to grow food efficiently so that more resources are available for optional consumer items. The United States often claims to have the world's most efficient agriculture because less than 2 percent of the population is engaged directly in farming.¹⁴ Agricultural research to improve efficiency resulted in the high-yield varieties (HYVs) of wheat and rice behind the Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s.

Agriculture and food security are central to many Third World countries. HYVs were marketed to the Third World partly out of humanitarian concern for human nutrition and partly to make a profit from the sale of agricultural inputs. Such sales help the economy grow. The unintended result, however, was to impoverish many people in the Third World, explains Vandana Shiva, a physicist and the director of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy in India. HYVs yielded substantially more cash crops of wheat and rice per hectare than traditional varieties, which helped the economy to grow. But HYVs require much more water per bushel. Unfortunately, many poor countries, including India, suffer from water shortage. So HYVs required deeper wells, which only relatively wealthy farmers could afford. With more water being pumped, water tables lowered beyond the reach of poor farmers, who could no longer get enough water even for traditional varieties. Many farmers lost their farms and became landless peasants seeking work.

HYVs also need more artificial fertilizer than traditional varieties. This again helped the economy grow but limited access to poorer farmers who could not afford such fertilizer. Worse yet, the fertilizer made *bathau*, a wild plant freely harvested for its vitamin A, a weed that threatened cash crops. Herbicides, another bought input that spurs economic growth, became necessary. Not only could poor farmers ill afford herbicides, but the intended result of their application, killing *bathau*, deprived many poor people of a free source of vitamin A. As a result, tens of thousands of children in India go blind each year for lack of vitamin A.

Dependence on free sources of food and materials is common in the Third World. Equally common is their reduction by globalization efforts aimed at turning traditional societies into "emerging markets." Worldwatch researcher Aaron Sachs compares rural Thailand with areas in the Amazon rain forest:

Many of the villagers, like the peoples of the Amazon rainforest, used to derive their income from forest products—charcoal, bamboo shoots, wild

mushrooms, squirrels, even edible toads. Small-scale subsistence farmers also depended on the forests to provide breaks against soil erosion and to regulate natural irrigation systems.

Because they get much of what they need free, traditional peasants add little to the GDP of Thailand. In addition, they are too poor to buy goods produced in industrial countries, so they add little to the economic growth that consumerism requires. Thailand is better integrated into a consumer-oriented world economy when its land is taken from peasants, its trees are sold to logging interests, and its agriculture produces goods for export.

But logging projects . . . have laid waste to the area's hillsides over the last three decades. Economists often point to Thailand as a clear success—and the country's lucrative exports, consisting mostly of agricultural products grown on previously forested land, have certainly helped boost the Thai economy. . . . However . . . , the poorest people . . . lost . . . their livelihoods.¹⁵

Shiva similarly criticizes monocultural commercial forestry in India for depriving poor people of free forest products:

An important biomass output of trees that is never assessed by foresters who look for timber and wood is the yield of seeds and fruits. Fruit trees such as jack, jaman, mango, tamarind etc. have been important components of indigenous forms of social forestry as practiced over the centuries in India. . . . Other trees, such as neem, pongamia and sal provide annual harvests of seeds which yield non-edible oils. . . . The coconut, . . . besides providing fruits and oil, provides leaves used in thatching huts and supports the large coir industry.¹⁶

David Korten gives examples of Third World industrialization that fosters economic growth as measured in purely monetary terms, ties poor countries ever closer to global consumerism, and is supposed to help the world's poor. In each case, however, such development harms poor people more than it helps them. Japan, for instance, wanting to avoid domestic pollution from smelting copper, financed the Philippine Associated Smelting and Refining Corporation:

The plant occupies 400 acres of land expropriated by the Philippine government from local residents at give-away prices. Gas and wastewater emissions from the plant contain high concentrations of boron, arsenic, heavy metals, and sulfur compounds that have contaminated local water supplies, reduced fishing and rice yields, damaged the forest, and increased the occurrence of upper-respiratory diseases among local residents. Local people . . . are now largely dependent on the occasional part-time or contractual employment they are offered to do the plant's most dangerous and dirtiest jobs.

The company has prospered. The local economy has grown. . . . The Philippine government is repaying the foreign aid loan from Japan that financed the construction of supporting infrastructure for the plant. And the Japanese are congratulating themselves for . . . their generous assistance to the poor of the Philippines.¹⁷

When I was growing up in the sixties, my mom would often be at a neighbor's kitchen table having a cup of coffee at midmorning while the kids played. . . . The evenings would find half the neighborhood gathered on a deck or patio to enjoy a night of interaction. We camped together, the men fished together, and as a kid you could get your butt busted by any adult in the neighborhood. There was a real sense of community.

What has stolen our ability to find those luxurious hours to invest in family and friends? Several things have stolen that time. We are so marketed to that we have started to believe that more stuff will make us happy. But in this country, more stuff has resulted in more debt. What debt means is that we end up spending our every waking hour working to pay off our bills.²⁷

Vicki Robin and Joe Dominguez, authors of the best-seller *Your Money or Your Life* concur: "It would seem that the primary 'thing' many people have sacrificed in 'going for the gold' is their relationships with other people. Whether you think of that as a happy marriage, time with the children, neighborliness, a close circle of friends, shopkeepers who know you, civic involvement, community spirit, or just living in a place where you can walk to work and the beat cop is your friend, it's disappearing across the country."²⁸

The fruits of working outside the home often further impoverish family life and imperil human flourishing. As noted earlier, the size of homes increased in the late twentieth century. More children have their own bedrooms with their own TVs, computers, video players, and electronic games, decreasing the need to interact with other family members. For example, Robert Putnam reports in *Bowling Alone*, "The fraction of sixth-graders with a TV set in their bedroom grew from 6 percent in 1970 to 77 percent in 1999."²⁹

Consumer items can also impair the sense of community. Air conditioning is one example. Older homes had porches, which were the coolest spots on hot summer days. Neighbors talked or visited porch to porch while avoiding indoor heat. Now people remain in their houses, isolated from neighbors, to avoid the heat. Air conditioning is wonderful and a lifesaver for some, but it does detract from a sense of community.

The car is another example. Cars are here to stay, but that does not tell us how many we should have or how best to use them. Cars have enabled people to move to suburbs where they live farther from neighbors and where neighbors commute in different directions to their respective jobs. The economy grows because more production is needed per capita when each person has his and her own car. "By 1990," Putnam notes, "America had more cars than drivers." What is more, "the fraction of us who travel to work in a private vehicle rose from 61 percent in 1960 to 91 percent in 1995, while all other forms of commuting . . . declined."³⁰ Unlike private vehicle commuting, public transportation and walking foster the kind of community involvement that people need to flourish. As Putnam found:

The car and the commute . . . are demonstrably bad for community life. In round numbers the evidence suggests that *each additional ten minutes in daily commuting time cuts involvement in community affairs by 10 percent*—fewer public meetings attended, fewer committees chaired, fewer petitions signed, fewer church services attended, less volunteering, and so on. . . .

Strikingly, increased commuting time among the residents of a community lowers average levels of civic involvement even among noncommuters.³¹

Gary Gardner, the director of research for the Worldwatch Institute, cites research showing that consumerism does not foster human flourishing. He notes

the failure of advanced industrial societies to deliver widely their most hyped product: well-being, or happiness. Studies of societal happiness show that income growth and happiness, which once marched upward together, have been uncoupled. In the United States, for example, the share of people describing themselves as "very happy" declined from 35 percent in 1957 to 30 percent today [2001], despite a more than doubling of income per person. For many of us, it seems, the more we ask consumption to fill our lives, the emptier we feel.³²

Increasing rates of depression also show that the social isolation that consumerism fosters interferes with human flourishing: "Today, a quarter of Americans live alone, up from 8 percent in 1940, and at least 20 percent of the population is estimated to have poor mental health. By contrast, the Old Order Amish people of . . . Pennsylvania, who have a strong community life made possible in part by their car-free, electricity-free lifestyles, suffer depression at less than one-fifth the rate of people in nearby Baltimore."³³ Gardner also refers to a British study by Tim Jackson and Nick Marks released in 1999:

Their research analyzed the doubling of individual spending by Britons between 1954 and 1994, and found that most of the increase was an effort to meet non-material needs—needs for affection, leisure, and creativity, etc.—through the consumption of material goods . . . , needs that, in an age of fewer options and more social contact, had been met in their families and communities. But the literature on psychology is clear: we fool ourselves if we believe that nonmaterial needs can be met through the consumption of goods. Instead, love, self-esteem, and self-actualization are best gained through personal, social, and cultural interaction.³⁴

In a consumer society people look for love in all the wrong places and remain frustrated. This should come as no surprise. "Money can't buy happiness" is a common observation. The Beatles added "Can't Buy Me Love," and June Allyson and Mel Tormé sang "The Best Things in Life Are Free." So in sum, consumerism degrades the environment, further impoverishes poor people in the Third World, and impairs the ability of industrial people to lead fulfilling lives.

Consumerism Promotes Recognized Vices

In 1956 Lewis Mumford pointed out a transformation in accepted virtues and vices that accompanies industrial civilization: "Observe what happened to the seven deadly sins of Christian theology. All but one of these sins, sloth, was transformed into a positive

virtue. Greed, avarice, envy, gluttony, luxury and pride were the driving forces of the new economy: if once they were mainly the vices of the rich, they now under the doctrine of expanding wants embrace every class in [industrial] society."³⁵ Consumer society cultivates *greed*, the unlimited desire for more. Without greed consumer demand would flag, the economy would slump, and people would lose their jobs. *Avarice*, an inordinate desire for wealth, is implied by greed. People who want more and more of what money can buy desire unlimited amounts of money.

Gluttony is excessive food consumption. It seems that immoderate consumerism spawns overeating. Worldwatch researchers Gary Gardner and Brian Halweil report:

Today [2000] it is more common than not for American adults to be overweight: 55 percent. . . . Moreover, the share of American adults who are obese has climbed from 15 to 23 percent just since 1980. And one out of five American children are now overweight or obese, a 50 percent increase in the last two decades.

Treating the effects of obesity in the United States . . . costs more than \$100 billion annually—more than 10 percent of the nation's bill for healthcare.³⁶

In England adult obesity doubled during the 1990s to 16 percent.³⁷

Envy is essential in a consumer society. Advertisers portray people with a product as having a better life than those without it. Consumers must envy the life of those with the product, or they would not buy it. Envy must often be strong enough to motivate hard work or long working hours to afford the product.

Pride is a factor in such motivation. Advertisers invite consumers to take pride in their ability to afford expensive or attractive goods and services. Ads often show others admiring a new car, window treatment, or hair color. If the item is a true *luxury*, then pride is enhanced. Luxury is no vice in a consumer society because, after all, you are worth it.

In medieval times, the deadly sin of *luxuria* referred to sexual lust, not luxury in the contemporary sense. But sexual lust, too, is promoted in a consumer society because sex helps to sell products. Good-looking people appearing in ads are often posed and attired to suggest sexual interaction. It seems that the more clothing Abercrombie and Fitch sell, the less their catalog models wear. The woman posing by a new car is meant to suggest desirable sex for car buyers. Victoria's Secret ads are (nearly) soft porn.

Sloth is the only one of the seven deadly sins that is not considered a virtue in a consumer society, perhaps because people must work more and more hours to produce the increasing volume of goods and services that consumerism requires. In addition to making virtues of what medieval Christians considered vices, consumerism fosters character traits that most people consider vices today. These include intemperance, selfishness, and indifference.

Intemperance is a lack of moderation or restraint. Consumerism cultivates and relies on intemperate consumers when economic growth rests in part on rich people creating jobs for others by, for example, building \$2 million houses with six bedrooms for only two people. Even more consumers buy SUVs that are far larger than they need, cars with "performance" designed for professional racing, and mountain-climbing all-

terrain vehicles to use in the flat Midwest. (Whose corn or soybean field do they imagine driving through?)

Selfishness is insufficient regard for the welfare of others. Consumerism fosters selfishness along with envy and greed. Envious people want the jobs, income, luxuries, recognition, and so forth that others have. They habitually compare themselves with those who have more and lament or resent their inferior position. This catalyzes greed. Such people have little mental energy to compare themselves with those who have less, so they tend selfishly to ignore occasions for helping the poor: hence the continuing appeal of middle-class tax cuts that reduce government programs needed by poor people.

As the tax cut example suggests, *indifference* follows selfishness. As people become more preoccupied with themselves, they pay less attention to other people's needs. Dramatic evidence comes from First World consumer indifference to the plight of poor people in the Third World who increasingly produce what we wear. According to David Korten, the footwear company Nike, for example,

leaves production [of its shoes] in the hands of some 75,000 workers hired by independent contractors. Most of the outsourced production takes place in Indonesia, where a pair of Nikes that sells in the United States or Europe for \$73 to \$135 is produced for about \$5.60 by girls and young women paid as little as fifteen cents an hour. The workers are housed in company barracks, there are no unions, overtime is often mandatory, and if there is a strike, the military may be called to break it up. The \$20 million that basketball star Michael Jordan reportedly received in 1992 for promoting Nike shoes exceeded the entire annual payroll of the Indonesian factories that made them.³⁸

This is typical, yet American consumers are so preoccupied with "stuff" that they ignore information about the near slave conditions of production that keep prices low. At the same time, however, our culture condemns the indifference of Germans during World War II who failed to help Jews. This is perverse. Opposing Nazi policies could be harmful to your health; buying domestically manufactured clothing is perfectly safe.

Traditional Virtues Oppose Consumerism and Promote Human Flourishing

Traditional virtues inhibit the consumerism that impairs human flourishing and degrades the environment. Consider *frugality*, which is, write Robin and Dominguez, "getting good *value* for every minute of your life energy and from everything you *have the use of*. . . . Waste lies not in the number of possessions but in the failure to enjoy them. . . . To be frugal means to have a high joy-to-stuff ratio. If you get one unit of joy for each material possession, that's frugal. But if you need ten possessions to even begin registering on the joy meter, you're missing the point of being alive."³⁹ Such frugality is closely allied to *appreciation*, the ability to appreciate and enjoy what you have. People who joyfully appreciate what they have are less likely to envy people who have

more. They avoid the frustration and anger characteristic of envy and live happily without the compulsive consumption inherent in consumerism. Without compulsive consumption, they have fewer worries about money and more time to spend in meaningful relationships with family and friends. It is a win-win-win-win thing.

Temperance is another traditional virtue that opposes consumerism. When people have a sense of what is enough, they are more rational consumers. They have houses that are big enough but not so big as to waste space, money, and natural resources. Temperate consumers know when to stop eating, when they have enough clothing, and when a fancy wine is just too expensive. Advertisers and neoclassical economists oppose temperance. According to the economic theory dominant in consumer societies, people's wants are infinite, and there is no distinction between wants and needs, so any want can be considered a need. Hence, people are continually frustrated because they cannot have all that they are induced to think they need.

Practicing frugality, appreciation, and temperance creates opportunities to exercise another traditional virtue, *self-development*. At least some of the time saved from working to afford items that give little joy can be used to develop hobbies and skills. People can learn to play tennis, play the guitar, speak a foreign language, or knit. The sense of accomplishment from personal improvement in such pursuits cannot be bought. Of course, these pursuits also require some consumption, but it is not compulsive consumption. Practicing most sports and hobbies is much less expensive than acquiring material goods without sense or limit, especially when self-development is combined with frugality, appreciation, and temperance.

Dedication is another traditional virtue that stands between self-development and overconsumption. People who go quickly from one activity to another without the dedication needed for a reasonable chance of improvement or success may become major consumers of equipment, books, materials, and training. Embarking on a new activity often requires many purchases. On the other hand, those who, after some trial and error, dedicate themselves for years to one or more projects of self-development find long-term joy in the same books, equipment, and instruction. Such people tend to avoid overconsumption, especially, again, when their dedication is combined with frugality, appreciation, and temperance so that they avoid dedication to inherently wasteful or environmentally destructive pursuits, such as off-road racing.

People who avoid compulsive consumption find it easier to practice the virtue of *generosity* because they are not living on the edge of bankruptcy and can more easily live without the money and possessions that compete with generosity for personal resources. The possibility of generosity, in turn, promotes *empathy* with the plight of less fortunate people. Overspent and overworked Americans find empathy difficult because, lacking the means to be helpful (money and time), their insight into other people's troubles, which can be painful for anyone, is unrelieved by the joy of participating in improvement. Frugal, appreciative, and temperate people, by contrast, have the resources to be helpful and therefore the incentive to empathize with and help those less fortunate than themselves. The virtue of dedication can be used in projects of *benevolence* motivated by empathy.

Dedicated, empathic people engaged in projects of benevolence avoid the twin vices of indifference and injustice. Empathy itself opposes indifference. Injustice often

results from people taking advantage of others, directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly, as when Americans buy inexpensive clothing produced by child or near-slave labor. People whose sense of self-worth is tied to the amount of "stuff" they own resist paying the higher prices needed if workers are to receive just wages. By contrast, frugal, appreciative, temperate consumers can make justice a condition of purchase. Working conditions will improve in the Third World if enough consumers exercise these virtues.

Traditional Virtues and Environmentalism Are Mutually Reinforcing

I have argued that traditional virtues oppose consumerism and that consumerism is a major impediment to human flourishing and a major cause of environmental degradation. This makes traditional virtues an ally of both anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentric environmentalism. It means that anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism are mutually supporting through their different but complementary support for many traditional virtues and their different but complementary opposition to many traditional vices.

Imagine an anthropocentrist who is most interested in human flourishing. If the arguments given above are correct, such a person should promote traditional virtues as a means to human flourishing. At the same time, the exercise of these virtues will reduce human consumption and associated environmental degradation, a result favored on other grounds by nonanthropocentrists (who consider nature valuable in itself).

Now imagine a nonanthropocentric environmentalist who values nature for itself. She can argue that nonanthropocentrism among industrial people at this time calls for reduced consumption and therefore opposition to consumerism. If the arguments given above are correct, then consumerism is effectively opposed by traditional virtues, so the environmentalist has a nonanthropocentrically based argument for traditional virtues. These arguments reinforce anthropocentrically based arguments for these virtues. There is synergy here because the two sets of arguments for environment-friendly traditional virtues are stronger together than either set is alone.

An illustration may help to clarify the point. Consider nonanthropocentrists opposed to people driving gas-guzzling SUVs because such vehicles contribute greatly to rapid climate change that threatens many species with extinction. Such nonanthropocentrists have reason to oppose the vices of envy, pride, luxury, indifference, and selfishness because these vices are implicated in decisions to own SUVs. Advertisements for SUVs induce envy. Drivers take pride in owning a vehicle larger and more expensive than most others on the road. SUV owners seek the luxury of extra room in the vehicle and are selfishly indifferent to the effects of its greenhouse gas emissions on nature. So nonanthropocentrists oppose the traditional vices of envy, pride, luxury, indifference, and selfishness and support the traditional virtues of appreciation, frugality, and temperance, which incline people to reject SUVs in favor of more modest vehicles.

Anthropocentrists also have reasons to oppose SUVs on the ground that they promote climate change, which is likely to harm many poor people around the world by increasing vector-borne diseases and reducing food availability.⁴⁰ Domestically, SUVs endanger people in smaller cars. SUVs also exacerbate dependence on foreign sources of oil, which motivates attempts to control oil-rich areas of the world, resulting in conflicts that take human lives. Finally, people trying to find happiness and fulfillment in the kind of car they drive are doomed to frustration because human flourishing cannot rest on any such basis. So anthropocentrists have their own reasons to oppose vices that promote SUV ownership and to favor virtues that discourage the purchase of an SUV.

The two sets of reasons against SUV ownership are compatible, complementary, and additive, as they are mediated by opposition to the same vices and promotion of the same virtues. Together these two sets of reasons are stronger than either set is by itself. Thus, there is synergy between them.

Here is another example of synergy. Anthropocentrists have reason to oppose the typical American diet because it impairs human health. It is rich in saturated fats and calories that lead to heart disease and obesity. Anthropocentrists have good reason, therefore, to oppose gluttony and promote temperance.

Nonanthropocentric considerations, such as those concerning the welfare of animals on factory farms, support the same changes of behavior through appeal to different traditional virtues—empathy, benevolence, and generosity. Americans overeat partly because food is inexpensive. It is inexpensive in part because of cruel methods of food production on factory farms. Continuing to eat factory-farm-produced food once its associated cruelties are known displays the vices of indifference and selfishness. Nonanthropocentrists who avoid factory-farm-produced food out of concern for animal welfare display the virtues of empathy and benevolence. Because they knowingly pay more for food, their choice displays the virtue of generosity as well.

Here nonanthropocentric considerations support the same behavior as anthropocentric considerations—reduced consumption of factory-farm-produced food—but do so through appeal to different traditional virtues and opposition to different traditional vices. The two lines of argument are compatible, complementary, and additive. There is synergy between them.

Practical Implications

In light of the arguments above, the following questions must be addressed: How should we expect people with the traditional virtues discussed above to act differently from most other people in society? How thoroughly should we expect them to reject consumerism? Must a virtuous person abjure automobile ownership? Must a virtuous person be a vegetarian? What are the practical implications of synergistic environmental virtues?

If virtue is to promote human flourishing, it cannot often require lifestyles so out of harmony with mainstream social expectations that virtuous people lack the companionship and camaraderie that flourishing as a social animal requires. To promote human

flourishing, virtue must also avoid prescribing behavior that is impractical in the human-built environment, such as life without a car in many American communities.

I suggest addressing such matters with what I call the Principle of Anticipatory Cooperation (PAC). The PAC calls for actions that deviate from the social norm in the direction of the ideal that virtuous people aspire to for themselves and others but which do not deviate so much that virtue impairs instead of fosters flourishing. Consider, for example, car ownership and use. If life without a car is nearly crippling, the PAC does not require that virtuous people abjure car ownership and use. It requires only that they try to arrange their lives so that their car use and its adverse impacts are substantially less than is common in that society at that time. If most cars get twenty miles to the gallon, but good cars are available at reasonable cost that get thirty miles to the gallon, the virtuous person will, other things being equal, choose the more fuel-efficient car. She will also use public transportation and carpool more than is common when she can do so without bending her life out of shape. Her behavior anticipates more widespread participation in such practices and therefore helps to move society in a desirable direction.

If behavior like this becomes more common in society—average fuel efficiency approaches thirty miles to the gallon, for example, and car makers come out with reasonably priced cars that are even more fuel efficient—the virtuous person should, when finances permit, choose a car that is again considerably more fuel efficient than average. Absent some special need or problem, the virtuous person buying a new car today would choose a gas/electric hybrid that gets at least forty-five miles to the gallon. Similarly, if the transportation infrastructure changes to make public transportation more convenient and popular, the virtuous person will increase her use of public transportation so that it still exceeds the norm for people with similar transportation needs. A virtuous couple would likely be among the first to get by with only one car.

Virtuous people will try also to reduce below the common level their consumption of meat and animal products. Considerations of cruelty to livestock reared on factory farms may not require complete vegetarianism because in some places humanely raised livestock is available. But meat and animal products are nevertheless inefficient means of acquiring nutrition because livestock use most of nature's food-producing capacity for their own bodily maintenance. Only one-third to one-tenth of the nutrition that Earth produces reaches human consumers of meat and animal products. As people eat lower on the food chain they generally reduce the impact of their food consumption on the Earth and other species. The PAC requires, then, that people avoid the products of factory farms and reduce their consumption of meat and animal products below what is common in society, staying ahead of common practice as it (if it) moves toward a vegan norm.

The spirit of compromise in the PAC stems from two considerations. One, already mentioned, is that virtue should promote human flourishing; it would not if it required heroic sacrifice. The second consideration is justice. There is no justice in virtuous people trying to be perfect in social circumstances that make such attempts nearly self-destructive. Of course, the virtues considered here may require some short-term sacrifice. If my arguments are correct, however, the long-term result will be a better life. People who reject consumerism (without becoming utterly at odds with society) will flourish

better than people whose lives are dominated by envy, greed, work, money worries, and separation from family and friends. People who reject consumerism in favor of traditional virtues will also lead more environmentally friendly lives.

In conclusion, people in industrial, consumer-oriented societies should cultivate traditional virtues to benefit themselves, other human beings, and the nonhuman environment. Anthropocentric and nonanthropocentric arguments for cultivating and exercising these virtues are mutually reinforcing, and their combination is synergistic. However, because the arguments for this conclusion depend on the baleful effects of consumerism, I draw no conclusions about virtue in nonconsumer-oriented societies.

Notes

1. For a more complete exposition of environmental synergism, see Peter S. Wenz, "Environmental Synergism," *Environmental Ethics* 24 (2002): 389-408.
2. Linda Starke, ed., *Vital Signs 2003* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 84.
3. Starke, *Vital Signs 2003*, 40.
4. Starke, *Vital Signs 2003*, 82.
5. Dave Ramsey, *More Than Enough* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1999), 24.
6. David C. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World* (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1995), 37-38.
7. Alan Thein Durning, *How Much Is Enough?* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 51-52.
8. Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 85-86.
9. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 167.
10. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*, 35.
11. Mia MacDonald with Danielle Nierenberg, "Linking Population, Women, and Biodiversity," in *State of the World 2003*, ed. Linda Starke (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 43.
12. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*, 33.
13. MacDonald with Nierenberg, "Linking Population, Women, and Biodiversity," 40.
14. For a critique of this view, see Peter S. Wenz, "Pragmatism in Practice: The Efficiency of Sustainable Agriculture," *Environmental Ethics* 21 (1999): 391-410.
15. Aaron Sachs, "The Last Commodity: Child Prostitution in the Developing World," *WorldWatch* 7, no. 4 (July-August 1994): 26-27.
16. Vandana Shiva, *Monocultures of the Mind* (London: Zed Books, 1993), 36.
17. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*, 31-32.
18. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*, 42.
19. Sachs, "The Last Commodity," 26.
20. Starke, *Vital Signs 2003*, 88.
21. Gary Gardner and Brian Halweil, "Overfed and Underfed: The Global Epidemic of Malnutrition," in *Worldwatch Paper 150* (Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute, 2000), 7.
22. World Health Organization, *World Health Report 1998*, in Lester R. Brown, "Challenges of the New Century," *State of the World 2000*, ed. Linda Starke (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), 7.
23. Grover Foley, "The Threat of Rising Seas," *The Ecologist* 29, no. 2 (March-April 1999): 77.
24. Peter Bunyard, "A Hungrier World," *The Ecologist* 29, no. 2 (March-April 1999): 87.
25. Ramsey, *More Than Enough*, 234.

26. Durning, *How Much Is Enough?* 119-20.
27. Ramsey, *More Than Enough*, 22-23.
28. Vicki Robin and Joe Dominguez, *Your Money or Your Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 142.
29. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 223.
30. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 212.
31. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 213.
32. Gary Gardner, "The Virtue of Restraint," *WorldWatch* 14, no. 2 (March-April 2001): 14.
33. Gardner, "The Virtue of Restraint," 15.
34. Gardner, "The Virtue of Restraint," 18.
35. Lewis Mumford, *The Transformation of Man* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), 104-5.
36. Gardner and Halweil, "Overfed and Underfed," 14, 8.
37. Gardner and Halweil, "Overfed and Underfed," 14.
38. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*, 111.
39. Robin and Dominguez, *Your Money or Your Life*, 167-68.
40. See Paul Kingsnorth, "Human Health on the Line," *The Ecologist* 29, no. 2 (March-April 1999): 92-94; Bunyard, "A Hungrier World"; and Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*, 31-32.