

Ecology, Spirituality, and Ethics
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Part One

It is a great thing to do miracles,
but it is a greater thing to live virtuously.
— Thomas Aquinas

To understand the human being, we must reach into all the mysteries involved in the being of nature as well as in the spirit of the cosmos. Ultimately, human beings are intimately connected with all the mysteries of nature and universal spirit. The human being is in fact a universe in miniature.
—Rudolf Steiner

In a system of *cosmo-noo-genesis*, the comparative value of religious creeds may be measured by their respective power of evolutive activation.
— Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

There is in all visible things an invisible fecundity, a dimmed light, a meek namelessness, a hidden wholeness. This mysterious Unity and Integrity is Wisdom, the Mother of all, *Natura naturans*.
— Thomas Merton

And now as long as space endures, as long as there are beings to be found, May I continue likewise to remain, to soothe the sufferings of those who live.
— His Holiness the Dalai Lama

I have written this rather personal essay as a pay-back to two overlapping groups with and from whom I have been learning about ecology:

The CIIS masters and doctoral program, Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness/PCC (which I chair), and the dozen colleagues in the Mentoring Project created by the Fetzer Institute and completed (in May 2012) by Kalamazoo College. The PCC faculty are Richard Tarnas (founder and first chair), Brian Swimme, Sean Kelly (second chair), Elizabeth Allison (who is also in the Upaya group). Jake Sherman, who is also in the Upaya group, was a doctoral student in PCC before transferring to the University of Cambridge where he completed his doctorate. Jake teaches in PCC every semester while creating a CIIS program in religion, and

The Fetzer-Kalamazoo group, which now calls itself the Upaya Twelve, consists of five from the original Mentoring Project and seven colleagues whom the five invited to join in a continuing project devoted to “Ecology, Spirituality, and Social Justice.” It is this topic which led me to write this essay. It started off as an academic letter. I did not write it for publication so much as a way of finding expression for my thinking on ecology, and in the hope of contributing to the conversations underway in these two groups, PCC and the Upaya group. It has three core components.

Part One of this essay focuses on my effort to integrate three fields or disciplines, all in the plural: ecologies, spiritualities, and ethics (particularly virtue ethics).

Ecologies, including the cultivation of Integral Ecologies pursued at CIIS by Sean Kelly, and Religion and Ecology primarily created by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, and being advanced in PCC by Elizabeth Allison.¹ As cited countless times, Ernst Haeckel introduced the term ecology in 1866. It has been defined, refined, redefined to suit a wide variety of approaches, perspectives, and ideologies. Following the good sense of Sean Esbjörn-Hargens and Michael Zimmerman,² as well as by Sean Kelly his PCC colleagues, I am using the term in the plural: Integral Ecologies refers to the many ways in which ecology is being studied and served by a wide variety of ecological activists.

Spiritualities. The spiritual and religious thinkers from whom I draw insight and inspiration include Mahatma Gandhi and those he has influenced, Sri Aurobindo, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Thomas Merton, Thomas Berry, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, select feminist writers, and above all, Rudolf Steiner.

Virtue Ethics. I plan to use virtue ethics as a way of bridging secular ecology and spiritual world views. Virtue ethics was revitalized primarily by Alasdair MacIntyre (based on Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas) in the 1980s and has subsequently been developed by Rosalind Hursthouse, Julia Annas, and a burgeoning literature. After reading these sources I returned to Josiah Royce and Rudolf Steiner to explore ways in which their thought might be helpful to this endeavor.

While both Steiner and Royce incorporate some elements of Kant's categorical imperative ("So act that the maxim of your act could serve as a universal law," "treat another person only as an end and never merely as a means") they clearly offer an ethics with the advantages of virtue ethics. My close attention to Steiner for more than three decades and my recent return to Royce, and particularly to his ethics, have confirmed for me that although I have been using the term "virtue ethics" only very recently, I have been subscribing to the methodology and ideals of virtue ethics since I began teaching philosophy nearly fifty years ago.

Virtue ethics provides a way of understanding and implementing the core ideas and ideals of these thinkers: they typically exemplify the kind of character traits that a virtue ethicist would typically recommend. This would seem to be an inescapable circle, the very one that Aristotle was unable to break: virtue ethicists define wisdom and goodness; those who conform to these definitions are considered ethical. And yet, this effort on behalf of both models and definitions is more than a tautology: by a complex, admittedly tentative and fallible process, these two efforts are mutually confirming.

While virtue ethicists have applied their discipline to ecology, they have not turned to any of the individuals here recommended, or, so far as I have seen, any individuals noted for spiritual attainment. Understandably, virtue ethicists are focused primarily on raising the

¹ See Mary Evelyn and John Grimm, serious editors, *Religions of the World and Ecology*, ten volumes (distributed by Harvard University Press for the Center for the Study of World Religions, 1997ff). Elizabeth McAnally, a PCC doctoral student, is editor of the Yale Religion and Ecology Newsletter, and a member of Upaya Twelve. Elizabeth Allison is the author and coordinator of the CIIS concentration in Religion and Ecology, effective Fall 2012.

² Sean Esbjörn-Hargens and Michael Zimmerman, *Integral Ecology: Uniting Multiple Perspectives on the Natural World* (Boston: Integral Books/Shambala Publications, 2009)

level of daily moral life; this essay is focused more on inspiring exemplars of morality, religious life, and spirituality. I aim to show the ways in which the two approaches to ecology with which I am tangentially associated—Integral Ecologies; Ecology and Religion—can be deepened by moral-religious-spiritual exemplars when they are interpreted and assessed by the clear standards of virtue ethics.

Admittedly, the implications for ecology are not yet well drawn; this is an initial effort limited by separate vocabularies, methodologies, aspirations, and criteria. But I am convinced, and am here beginning to show, that from this time forward, true spirituality will almost automatically express itself ecologically, and particularly in service to the ethical dimension of ecology. Ethics traditionally has followed naturally from spirituality; Contemplation leads to compassion. And, there are also exceptions. In the other direction, various ecological disciplines should, and I believe increasingly will, look to a wide, deep, spiritual, and mysterious context for its most edifying long-term effectiveness.

Additionally, this essay addresses several dichotomies and unfortunate separations: ecology and ethics are primarily secular, usually in an uneasy relationship, when related at all, with religion and spirituality. Virtue ethics can serve as a unifying perspective between secular ecology and secular ethics on one side, and religion and spirituality on the other. Ethics, moreover, needs to be joined to ecology as well as to religion and spirituality, and both need to be more closely allied to religion and spirituality—which in turn need to be brought into closer alliance.

Prior to a discussion of virtue ethics, however, I will provide some autobiographical context which the reader might find interesting and revealing. At the least it will introduce my personal relationship, to Thomas Berry, as well as an account of the place of ecology in PCC and for Upaya Twelve.

Personal Background: Thomas Berry, PCC, Mentoring Project

As I explained in my memoir, “Lineage and Legacy,”³ from age fourteen until the 1970s I was an informal student and friend of Thomas Berry. Like Thomas,⁴ and under his direct influence, from the beginning of my full-time teaching career in 1964, I was a professor of comparative religion, especially modern Indian thought: Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, and S. Radhakrishnan (on whose comparative philosophy I wrote a dissertation). In the second half of 1970s, following the first Earth Day in 1970, the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972, and a series of U.S. bills intended to protect the environment, Thomas began to devote his intellectual and moral talents to ecological concerns—exactly the years when I was discovering and committing to the anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner.

In 1975-76, while living outside London with my wife Ellen and two children, as a senior Fulbright Lecturer at the Open University (on a grant that Thomas had been awarded and then arranged for me), I began to study Steiner. I have continued to do so for the

³ CIIS/PCC/faculty/Robert McDermott/publications.

⁴ In this personal section I refer to Thomas by his first name; in the discussion of his ecology, I switch to Berry.

past thirty-seven years, and always in relation to other modern spiritual teachers such as Sri Aurobindo, Thomas Merton, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and exemplars of social justice such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. In recent years I have begun to focus on ecology, as we all must, thereby adding a third commitment to spirituality and social justice, always in interdependent relationship.

As a result, I am back in conversation with Thomas by way of his books and three friends who have advanced his vision—Brian Swimme (in PCC), and husband and wife Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim (both at Yale). Due to this newly acquired sense of responsibility to attend to Gaia and to the ecological devastation that is already advanced, the years of my early friendship with Thomas (e.g., he officiated at our wedding and baptized our two children, the older one his namesake) have gained increasing significance. Consequently, at the risk of self-indulgence, I will continue with this account.

While Thomas was emerging as a powerful prophetic voice in service of Earth,⁵ I was assuming leadership of several anthroposophical institutions. Oddly, I was not especially close to Thomas in the 1980s while we both lived in New York but thanks to our mutual friends I reconnected to him during his last years when he lived in North Carolina and I lived in San Francisco. At the time of our gradual separation in the 1980s I certainly did not appreciate the ways in which Thomas' devotion to ecology and mine to anthroposophy could be rendered complementary. To a degree that I still find baffling as well as sad, neither of us made the effort to reconcile our respective commitments. More exactly, I missed an opportunity to have dialogued with Thomas concerning a larger spiritual and metaphysical framework that I consider important for ecology—and which, it seems, Thomas was increasingly willing to ignore in favor of the immediate task of reconceiving the human in terms of the earthly and the cosmic.

Steiner's characterization of anthroposophy—"a path to lead the spiritual in the individual to the spiritual in the universe"⁶—would appear to characterize equally well Thomas's ecological perspective. But unlike Steiner, Thomas espouses the sacred but not the spiritual. By spiritual I mean the transcendent as well as the immanent. I also mean a noumenal experience made possible by an objective ontological reality, a being, as well as a subjective or psychological experience. This difference might appear merely terminological, in which case it would be bridgeable, but it is in fact ontological—having to do with beliefs concerning what really exists and acts in the cosmos, through Earth, and in human affairs, both individually and collectively considered. Steiner's writings and lectures (thousands of them) clearly affirm the ontological reality of specific spiritual beings, including Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Sophia, the Archangel Michael, and the tempters Lucifer and Ahriman. Thomas ignored these beings in favor of advocating a humanistic (non-theistic), passionately ecological world view. Thomas' perspective and mine are equally evolutionary and pluralistic, and equally emphatically opposed to the exclusivist claims of Christianity. But beginning in the 1980s I began to take seriously Steiner's account of spiritual beings. By contrast, Thomas increasingly omitted,

⁵ In preparation for co-teaching a PCC course with Brian Swimme, "The Wisdom of Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry," in fall 2012, I read all of Thomas's published writings and wrote a 65-page summation and interpretation of their importance.

⁶ Robert McDermott, ed., *The New Essential Steiner* (Great Barrington, MA: Steinerbooks, 2009), pp. 9-10.

and perhaps opposed, the primary claims of the New Testament, theism, a spiritual hierarchy, and Christology.

Thomas began his career obviously devoted a Christian worldview—he was a Roman Catholic monk steeped in the New Testament, the theologies of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, the mysticism of St. Francis, and the poetry of Dante. Beginning in the early 1960s, Thomas was known as one of the primary interpreters of Teilhard de Chardin, the Jesuit, mystic, and world-class paleontologist. Thomas remained true to major parts of Teilhard’s evolutionary vision throughout his life but he expressed little or no affinity with Teilhard’s highly positive account of Christ.⁷ By contrast, under the influence first of Steiner, and then of Teilhard, I am increasingly affirming what seems to me a profound and mysterious relationship between Christ and Earth, including a “Mahayanist” (wide and transcendent path) conception of Christ—as well as a “Mahayanist” interpretation of Krishna and Buddha and many other spiritual beings. In this context, Mahayana means ontologically vast, often non-dual, but more importantly, more than human. One simple way to think about Mahayana, at least as I am using it here, is to think of Gotama as a manifestation of Buddha and Jesus as a manifestation of Christ.

Beginning in the early 1980s, as I was growing away from Thomas, Brian Swimme joined with him as his informal student, collaborator, and devoted friend. Brian’s books include *The Universe is a Green Dragon*,⁸ *The Universe Story* (with Thomas Berry),⁹ *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos*,¹⁰ and *Journey of the Universe* with Mary Evelyn Tucker.¹¹ Rick Tarnas, Brian Swimme, and I first met at the Esalen Project for Revisioning Philosophy, 1987-89 (sponsored by Laurance S. Rockefeller, who would become the primary donor to CIIS during my presidency in the 1990s). More than I realized when I joined my friends Rick, Brian, and Sean as a faculty member in PCC in 2000, I was joining a program committed primarily to cosmology, and from two complementary perspectives: Brian Swimme’s scientific-story approach and Rick Tarnas’s archetypal cosmology approach, both of which Sean Kelly shares.

⁷ At a seminar on “Hildegard of Bingen, Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart, and Einstein” taught by Matt Fox and Brian Swimme, May 2012 at Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, Matt offered what seems to me a surprising claim that Thomas Berry considered his thought closer to Thomas Aquinas than to Teilhard de Chardin. This reported preference for Aquinas even over Teilhard might be due to Thomas’ enthusiasm for Aquinas’ affirmation of God’s creation being the whole of creation. Thomas was certainly nervous about Teilhard’s anthropocentrism, and he did not follow Teilhard’s explicit affirmation of the centrality of Christ—but then neither did he follow Aquinas in this regard.

⁸ Brian Swimme, *The Universe is a Green Dragon* (Boston: Bear & Co., 1985).

⁹ Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era—A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

¹⁰ *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos: Humanity and the New Story* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996).

¹¹ Brian Thomas Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Journey of the Universe*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), a companion to the Emmy-nominated documentary by Swimme and Tucker, *Journey of the Universe* (2011).

With Hegel and Jung as a solid intellectual foundation, for the past five years Sean has emerged as the author of a distinctively integral approach to ecology.¹² I often wonder why I have not tried to learn all that he has learned during this same period. The answer seems to be intellectual passion. I am learning about ecology (as distinct from life-long passionately positive experience of the natural world) from a sense of obligation. By this essay, lecturing, other writing, and teaching courses that include ecology, I am trying to lift obligation to devotion.

Here are the two paragraphs that summarize the PCC program in a brochure for prospective students. The first is by Rick, the second by Brian:

In the past two decades the PCC program has emerged as an extraordinary learning community of committed students and faculty who have embraced a great task of our age: to develop a moral and imaginative vision for the future of our planetary culture that is connected to the cosmos itself.

Our new challenge is to reinvent our civilization...so that instead of degrading Earth's life systems, humanity might learn to join the enveloping community of living beings in a mutually enhancing manner.

When I joined PCC in 2000, I was conversant with neither Rick's nor Brian's approaches to cosmology, nor with any of the competing approaches such as Deep Ecology or Ecofeminism. I could have continued to focus exclusively on comparative philosophy and religion, or spirituality and social justice, but the fate of the natural world, and the intense ecological commitment of my PCC colleagues, both faculty and students, called me to bring to ecology what I have learned in other disciplines, especially philosophy, spirituality, and social justice.

One of the unmistakable calls was from my friend Arthur Zajonc who asked me to join a mentoring project sponsored (initially) by the Fetzer Institute. I agreed to join a group of senior professors willing to serve as mentors for professors at mid-career who had been selected based on their expressed desire to bring spiritual ideas, ideals, and practices into their scholarship and teaching.¹³ I did not realize when I accepted this commitment that it would involve a deepening of my involvement with ecology. During the past three years this project proved to be an ideal complement to my increasing work on ecology in PCC.

¹² Sean Kelly, "Integral Ecologies," in Sean Kelly, Sam Mickey, Adam Robbert, eds., *Integral Ecologies: Natures, Cultures, Knowledges, and Our Planetary Future* (SUNY, forthcoming).

¹³ This mentoring project was sponsored by the Fetzer Institute; in 2011 it transferred sponsorship to Kalamazoo College.

The Fetzer-Kalamozoo project led me to join with Paul Wapner, director of ecology and international relations at American University, and author, *Living Through the End of Nature*,¹⁴ as co-directors of a subgroup of five faculty committed to “Ecology, Spirituality, and Social Justice.” This group includes Becky Gould, professor at Middlebury and author of *At Home in Nature*¹⁵; Matt Jelacic, an architect who designs incredibly low cost, energy efficient dwellings for communities trying to recover from natural disasters; and Nawang Phuntsog, originally from Tibet, who teaches comparative education. When joined by our seven colleagues we constitute a tight knit group that plans to meet every summer under the name Upaya Twelve.

Both in collaboration with the total group of twenty five, and as part of the group of eleven,¹⁶ the core five professors that formed around the topic “Contemplation, Ecology, and Social Justice,” have met several times during each of the past three years. The five members of this group approach ecology from a wide variety of disciplines, including international relations, religion, architecture, philosophy, political science, sociology, and education. We also represent a variety of opinions concerning the degree and rate of deterioration of the natural world and the possibilities for a reversal. We are in general agreement, however, that the current ecological deterioration is due significantly to faulty human consciousness, to destructive and ultimately self-defeating behavior. We definitely agree that the urgent and profound task of the present is to overcome the lure of a consumerist, capitalist, extractive economy as well as, more generally, the autistic thinking and behavior (Thomas Berry’s phrase) that is destroying Earth. We all hold that the reality and tragedy of global warming and species extinction is ultimately due to psychological and spiritual factors.

On the opening night of our first five-day retreat at Lama Foundation in 2010, I lectured on the history of the concept of nature, drawing from R. G. Collingwood’s *The Idea of Nature*¹⁷ and Owen Barfield’s *Saving the Appearances*.¹⁸ My purpose was to trace the evolution of Western thought characteristic of contemporary consciousness. Last year, in 2011 at the Upaya Zen Center in Santa Fe, I lectured on the same topic as this essay, the integration of contemplation, spirituality, and ethics, for which I used the thought of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Rudolf Steiner, but at that time I had not conceived of the idea of introducing virtue ethics, nor the introduction of ten additional sources as way of integrating these three themes.

Virtue Ethics

¹⁴ Paul Wapner, *Living through the End of Nature The Future of American Environmentalism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010).

¹⁵ Rebecca Kneale Gould, *At Home in Nature: Modern Homesteading and Spiritual Practice in America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

¹⁶ This group of five has invited six colleagues from our home institutions to join us for three annual one-week meetings at Lama Foundation and Upaya Zen Center, both in New Mexico. We expect that these seminars will continue, and eventually open to a wider audience.

¹⁷ R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1945).

¹⁸ Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1957).

In this section I explain how virtue ethics effectively deepens and expands ecology and social justice, and renders more efficacious religious and spiritual ideals and practice. Because ecology is increasingly inseparable from ethics, religious and spiritual ideals need also be attentive to the needs of the billions of human beings, as well as animals who are suffering and increasingly being driven to extinction as a direct result of human behavior. Until the 20th century, religious and spiritual ideals need not have been devoted to ecology, but at this time in human and ecological history they must be positively related. While ecology, social justice, religion, and spirituality do not necessarily or uniformly implicate each other, when they are brought into harmony they are mutually enhancing.

A common (though not necessarily defining) characteristic of all of the influential individuals under discussion in the second half of this essay is simply that they can be understood as positive examples of the efficacy of virtue ethics: they are virtuous individuals at core and thereby effective in support of ecology and social justice as well as in their religious and spiritual attainment. While none of these individuals and schools of thought were familiar with the term virtue ethics, reflection on their lives and ideals show them to possess qualities that enable them to see problems and needs freely, that is, without ignorance born of fear or prejudice.

By bringing their life experience and ideals to bear on the latest manifestations of ecological devastation or social injustice we can see that their human capacities enable them to see the systemic causes of injustice and ecological devastation. They all possessed the mind and heart that can see to the core, and can follow through, again freely, in service to a solution within the full measure of their abilities. I am introducing for the reader's consideration, and edification, individual lives as well as ideals in the traditions of Confucius and Laotse, Jesus and Gotama, Shankara and Dogen—and the avatar of the United States, Abraham Lincoln.

As Virtue Ethics is recommended as a common and unifying (though not essential) element for ecology and spirituality, it is important to grasp the core and range of this approach to ethics. It is traceable especially to Aristotle but until recently it was largely ignored in favor of a great debate between two other approaches, Deontological (*deon*, rule), or rule ethics, first articulated by Kant,¹⁹ and Utilitarianism, first articulated by John Stuart Mill. With a mix of disadvantages, both focus on the morality or immortality or actions, deeds, or behavior, but almost not at all, or only very indirectly, on the development of a moral character. That said, in my attempt to live by the ideal of virtue ethics, I often act according to the Kantian categorical imperative, and at other times by the light of a utilitarian criterion.

1. *Utilitarianism*, of which pragmatism is a later variant, essentially looks to consequences. The moral deed is the one that is most likely to bring the greatest happiness (or least pain) to the greatest number of individuals and groups affected by one's action. This is the core idea of John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*; it was further advanced by William James' pragmatic method and John Dewey's instrumentalism. The obvious contemporary exemplar of a utilitarian-pragmatic ethicist is Peter Singer, whose writings on contemporary ethical problems (end of life, animal rights, etc.) are rightly

¹⁹ See Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Moral* (1997). Trans. Mary J. Gregors (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1991) .

influential and, it seems to me, entirely admirable.

To the extent that Singer's views would prevail, everyone would be both safe and free, with an increase in social justice. Furthermore, given the need to bring about positive consequences for Gaia, Utilitarianism would seem an especially useful (utilitarian) approach to ecological ethics. It is the dominant perspective of contemporary ethicists and the general secular population. Although neither utilitarianism nor pragmatism are necessarily contrary to religious or spiritual ideals, neither have they been well integrated with them. This seems to me a fascinating and important topic, one which I tend to view in the web of relations involving James, Dewey, and my favorite, Josiah Royce.²⁰

Because it is focused on results rather than on character development (which is the distinctive strength of virtue ethics), utilitarianism (like pragmatism) would seem a poor method by which to integrate ecology, social justice, and spirituality (for which Singer and Dewey, in contrast to Royce, have no affinity at all). As they are oblivious to a spiritual world view and spiritual practices, advocates of utilitarianism and pragmatism are more likely to miss the significant contributions of inspiring individuals who can be shown to be important for ecology and social justice. These great individuals bring what utility typically fails to bring: inspiration due to behavior worthy of imitation. James, who in addition to being the primary popularizer of pragmatism, was also the unsurpassed chronicler of the exceptional religious personality, recognized that mystics tend to reveal the best fruits that history has to show.²¹ Dewey and Singer offer inspiring, serious thinking and practical problem solving, but they do not recommend religious and spiritual thinking and behavior in response to injustice.

In a complex, perhaps ironic, reversal, Dewey seems to me a supremely moral person worthy of the devotion and imitation rightly addressed by the faithful to saints and spiritual teachers. For his own personal reasons, he was unable to see the positive side of religions and spiritual practices, and seems not to have needed them for his own inspiring life. Because of his devotion to democracy, which of course is to be admired and advanced, Dewey did not focus on the positive influence of individuals who attract the devotion of a faithful following. Most (and perhaps all) of the individuals discussed below deserve reverent attention. Some, particularly Steiner, Sri Aurobindo, Gandhi, and the Dalai Lama, are understandably the cause, or agent of *darshan* (the experience of presence).

2. *Deontological ethics* emphasizes that a moral action is one that creates and then conforms to a universalizable maxim, governing principle, or rule. The most influential example of deontological ethics is Kant's categorical imperative: so act that the maxim of your act could rightly serve as a universal law governing anyone in the same circumstance faced with the same decision. There would seem to be two difficulties with rule or deontological ethics: First, it would seem to provide an opportunity for rationalization. Kant presented a person in a difficult situation, having to choose between an action that is moral but disadvantageous and one that is immoral but advantageous.

²⁰ For the web of relations among these philosophers, see Frank M. Openheim's magnum opus, *Reverence for the Relations of Life: Re-imagining Pragmatism via Josiah Royce's Interactions with Peirce, James, and Dewey* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

²¹ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), especially the lecture on mysticism.

Most people would probably have little difficulty finding a maxim for a motive that would work to their advantage. Almost anyone could surely find the approbation of an imagined universal third party. Presumably, individuals of a virtuous character would be less likely to rationalize, so in effect Kant's categorical imperative gives way to virtue ethics.

Secondly, social sciences since Kant's time have shown the virtual impossibility of assuming a representative of a universal human construct. If by no other discipline, anthropologists have established repeatedly that there seems to be an exception to every possible claim on behalf of virtue. Despite this second difficulty, I consider Kant's categorical imperative to be available as a heuristic for positive ethical purposes, especially when joined to virtue ethics: as a way of developing a virtuous character, or being an increasingly virtuous person, I should try honestly to use the Kantian categorical imperative to test my action by the criterion of an imagined universal third party—what should a virtuous person do in this situation.

Most ethicists, it seems, adhere to a variety of consequentialism, whether of the original utilitarian variety or the American pragmatist variety. Rule or deontological ethics seems to be more of a learned position except when it is reduced to the golden rule translation: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. This version somewhat resembles Kant's categorical imperative except that Kant theorized that the human agent is a member of an ideal, moral, rational realm which he called a noumenal realm, which, when invoked, could enable a person to manifest a maxim which really would deserve to stand as a moral law, really would be moral in some universal sense. But Kant's categorical imperative, like the various versions of consequentialism, focuses entirely on the degree of morality of individual deeds without sufficient regard to the development of an agent's character. And yet, Kant would probably regard a person's fidelity to the categorical imperative as a sure way to character development—as do I. Further, I consider consequentialism, along with the Kantian categorical imperative, as a necessary component, and criterion, for the development of a virtuous character: how could I possibly become a wise and virtuous agent without regard to the effects of my action?

Virtue ethics, which has developed steadily since mid-20th century, is intended to shift the focus of ethics away from deontological and consequentialist ethics. "In 1958 Elizabeth Anscombe launched a scathing attack on both of these traditions [consequentialism and deontological ethics] simultaneously,"²² and offered in their stead a modern Western version of virtue ethics based on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. There followed a highly influential rendering of Aristotelian virtue ethics by Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* (1981), and important books by Philippa Foot, Iris Murdoch, Rosalind Hursthouse, and Julia Annas.

3. *Virtue ethics*. It seems to me that the ethical position best able to be extended to ecology, as well as to religion and spirituality, is virtue ethics, the approach that focuses on the development of the moral character of the agent, and on the moral development of the culture. Admittedly, we are in a circle, and perhaps an impasse. The wise and good person chooses what is wise and good, but how do we know who is wise and good, and how do we know that their behavior is wise and good? My colleague-friend,

²² Roger Crisp and Michael Slote, "Introduction," Roger Crisp and Michael Slote, eds., *Virtue Ethics* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), vii.

Don Hanlon Johnson, a leading exponent of somatics, offers a particularly clear account of this circle while at the same time leaving room for the efficacy of this approach:

When Aristotle asked himself which of many possible reasons for any course of action was right, he gave the strange reply, “the reason of the prudent man,” the “man of right reason. (Women were never at issue in these texts.) His reasoning was that ethical judgments are so complex that there cannot be a logical system for determining the goodness of any particular one. It takes a person who has become practiced in wisdom and goodness to make “right” decisions.²³

Johnson found that Thomas Aquinas advanced on Aristotle’s “man of reason”:

Saint Thomas interprets the so-called prudent man of Aristotle, the man of “right reason,” as the one who has learned to distinguish between ephemeral “socialized” desires, the deeper neurotic drives, and more basic tendencies, which exist in the region where the human hearts long for beauty, growth, unity and goodness.²⁴

Johnson further found, or relearned what he had known all of his life but had to rescue against authoritarian and rationalist traditions, that in response to “the most profound questions of life—illness, death, love, birth—the best teachers are not those with bright ideas, but men and women who have gained some wisdom by reflecting deeply on their life experience and who act out of compassion instead of narcissism.”²⁵ The implications for virtue ethics, and indirectly for spirituality and ecology, should be clear: Aristotle, and more convincingly Thomas Aquinas, the official theologian of the Catholic Church, advocate an ethics that is based not on authority or impersonal reason, but on personal experience, on the prudence of the person paying attention to his or her own experience. This is still a circle but it is one in which the person counts decisively. In my view, it is the individual person who must learn, by many disciplines and revealing experiences, the right mix of virtues, as well as when and the extent to which to include the Kantian categorical imperative and utilitarian pragmatism in the life-long task of developing a moral character.

I hope that the individuals recommended in Part II can be seen to be wise and good, men and women characterized by compassion. But ethics is a difficult discipline: given the variety of behavior and recommendations of these individuals, they are not entirely compatible. Virtue ethics (and indirectly the individuals under discussion in Part Two), calls for, and offers ways to develop, a variety of moral capacities—and thereby, the society. As the agent of *paideia* (the ideals of a culture), virtue ethics must include a wide variety of ways of personal development. Articulated first by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and significantly advanced by the Stoic philosophies of Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, virtue ethics can effectively join a spiritual worldview and social ethics, and in the long run realize positive consequences for Gaia, but it will need help from those of us who are committed to joining virtue and spirituality to ecology.

²³ Don Hanlon Johnson, *Body, Spirit, and Democracy* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1994), p. 62.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

Once informed concerning the fate of Earth and the suffering of individuals and groups due to ecological devastation (e.g., desertification, polluted water, disasters), an individual whose character is compassionate will almost automatically (there are surely exceptions) sympathize with the sufferers and strive to overcome the cause of these disasters as well as reduce their suffering. By contrast, a person who is incapable of compassion toward a hungry child or a victim of rape is not likely to feel the pain of Earth or the extinction of thousands of species. It is the *capacity* that is crucial. Individuals who are obsessively driven by the pursuit of money, sex, power, and prestige at the expense of others will, and do, pursue their goals irrespective of the cost to Earth.

Social justice would seem the obvious direct beneficiary of virtue ethics. Individuals, and whole societies, characterized by virtue, by positive personal qualities—integrity, compassion, curiosity, generosity—will exercise a positive influence on the whole society, and particularly on behalf of justice. As Aristotle explained in his classic texts on (virtue) ethics, individuals of a well developed character will seek true happiness—*eudaimonia*—in a way that benefits society as well as themselves. They will also avoid modes of thought and behavior, selfish actions and violence, deleterious to society. The predominance of such virtuous individuals will result in a virtuous society—just as both Plato and Aristotle argued, with quite different specifics, that a well ordered society will enable individuals to develop a virtuous a character.

Devotion to the ideals of social justice is a direct and necessary response on the part of the moral individual to the inestimable and horrendous inequality existing in virtually all nations (excepting perhaps the Scandinavian countries) that is one of the roots of violence, many forms of suffering, and destruction of Gaia. A person committed to social justice has the ability, and habit, of seeing and acting on behalf of connectivity, or relationality, where the less-than, or non-virtuous person sees only “the other,” separation, alienation, and competition. At its highest expression, social justice is essentially compassion or love; at its lowest it is legal justice. The merely legal is no guarantee of justice: Nazi German law, as well as racially biased laws in the United States, were obviously unjust. For true and lasting justice, virtue—the ability to discern just from unjust laws—is necessary.

At the present time neither the government nor the population of the United States has the will to pass laws that would dramatically reverse the current rate of carbon dioxide emissions. This lack of will is a legal problem rooted in an ethical failing further rooted in a profoundly faulty world view. False beliefs—philosophical, psychological, religious—have led to disastrous results for Gaia in general, and in particular for plants, animals, and humans. False beliefs themselves are the result of complex processes perhaps best understood in the context of the evolution of consciousness.

Ethical principles and behavior are in a profound evolutionary struggle. Ideals are in advance of practice: there are still millions in slavery (especially girls and young women in the sex trade), for example, but the almost universal abhorrence of slavery is clearly an advance upon the approval of slavery by government and religion just two hundred years ago. In the present phase of the evolution of morality, humanity is simultaneously more connected to Gaia by an increase in knowledge, and less connected in affect. Knowledge of Gaia without reverence, humility, and affection tends to lead merely to efficient (utilitarian) ways of exploitation.

Ecology, Virtue Ethics, Religion, and Spirituality

The home-base for religion is surely the great religious traditions, including the shamanic. The categorization of religions as “great,” or “world” is rightly contested: Are Jainism and Sikhism to be included, Bah’ai, Zoroastrianism, Gnosticism, Manicheism, etc.? There is also the endless argument about whether Confucianism and Taoism are religions or ways of life. Though those fascinating controversies are important for some purposes, for this essay we need only agree that these traditions include the commitments of the vast majority of humanity, and consequently the values and practices of these traditions have made and will continue to make a decisive difference to the double cause of ecology and social justice.

The term spirituality carries as much complexity, and is the subject of as much disagreement, as the other terms in this discussion. Like Integral Ecologies, the term spirituality is perhaps best understood in the plural. For my purposes, it refers to the many different ways of striving for, and to varying degrees of attaining, the unity that is love in its irreducible ontological significance. According to the first letter of John: “God is love and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God in him [her].”²⁶ Religions issue from spirituality, which serves as their source;²⁷ in its focus on the universal, spirituality transcends religions. At the same time, in spirituality, in contrast to some expressions of religion, love is not aimed at a community or culture, but is more individualistic. It is also true, however, that some spiritualities, in addition to their individualistic emphasis, aim at wide transformation.

Consequently, neither ecology nor social justice are as well served by spirituality as by religion. In their communal expression (rituals, texts, arts, lineages) religions have contributed to social justice (and, ideally, ecology) and many other purposes that are less well served by highly individualistic practices and attainments under the label spirituality. Of course, some great teachers, such as Thomas Merton (a Roman Catholic monk) and His Holiness the Dalai Lama (a Tibetan Buddhist), are both religious and spiritual.

Virtually all spiritual and religious texts and spiritual teachers place moral development—not utilitarian or deontological ethics—at the base of their teachings. The first two limbs of yoga as taught in Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* call for avoidance of misdeeds and the commission of positive deeds. The sayings of the Buddha recorded in the *Dhammapada* identify selfishness as the cause of suffering. In the New Testament, Jesus taught a practice of love that presupposed the practice of justice. The Dalai Lama’s sophisticated spiritual practices require as a prerequisite moral consciousness and consistent ethical behavior. In his basic book, *How to Know Higher Worlds*,²⁸ Rudolf Steiner cautions the reader to make three steps in moral improvement for every one step in esoteric development.

²⁶ 1 John, 4:16.

²⁷ See Henri Bergson, *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (NY: Doubleday/Anchor, 1956), p. 237.

²⁸ Rudolf Steiner, *How to Know Higher Worlds: A Modern Path of Initiation*. Trans., Christopher Bamford. Afterword, Arthur Zajonc (Great Barrington, MA: Steinerbooks, 1994)

In what follows I will try to establish, primarily by the unifying function of virtue ethics, the close relationship among ecology, ethics, religion, and spirituality. My task would be easier if there were no glaring exceptions, but it cannot be denied that some prominent atheists and agnostics, prominently anti-religious artists, activists, and intellectuals, from Emily Dickenson to Adrienne Rich, or Henry David Thoreau to John Dewey, certainly seem to be virtuous individuals who drew little or no sustenance from religious and spiritual sources. Despite these and countless other exceptions, there appears to be a positive relationship between virtue and both spirituality and vital religious traditions. The core of the relationship would seem to be neither consequences (as in utilitarian ethics) nor rules (as in deontological ethics) but the virtuous character of the spiritual thinker-leader that render them exemplars of spirituality, religion, and ethics.

It will be important to notice that not only do these categories positively implicate one or more of the others, the impressive individuals under discussion below, typically known for one category, can be appreciated as examples of one or more of the others. Thomas Berry evolved from primarily religious to primarily spiritual and ecological, and because his ecology is emphatically integral it includes spirituality and ethics; M. K. Gandhi, M. L. King, and the Dalai Lama are religious as well as social activists; Thomas Merton (though a monk in a monastery) was ecological and a social activist as well as religious and spiritual; Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was an orthodox Roman Catholic and equally a scientist devoted to the natural world; Rudolf Steiner was an esoteric researcher of nature and spirit, of humanity and Earth.

An essay on so many themes and thinkers is more complicated than I would like, but this is the state of my thinking on these themes at present. I believe that a multi-perspectival approach such as the one I have taken here is exactly what is needed for a fully integral ecological perspective, one worthy of the complex problems and solutions needed for the present and future ecological situation. The scientific approach to ecology is well developed in a library of books, articles, and journals, as well as in conferences and organizations devoted to research and advocacy, but it is not sufficiently, or beneficially, engaged with other perspectives, particularly not with spiritual perspectives. The remainder of this essay focuses on possible contributions from religious and spiritual thinkers and advocates.

See Part Two