

Ecology, Spirituality, and Ethics
Part Two
Exemplars of Virtue Ethics in Resonance
to Contemporary Ecological Devastation

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Part One of this essay introduces three disciplines—ecology, spirituality, and ethics—that are also three components of a world view. **Part Two** introduces and make a case for virtue ethics as a way of bringing twelve spiritual thinkers and teachers to the attention of individuals devoted to ecology, most of whom have little or no awareness of the thinking, not to mention the virtue, of these spiritual thinkers. To this end I will explore ways in which these moral, religious, and spiritual teachers can provide insight and supply practices for more efficacious ways of responding to the ecological crisis and the need for greater social justice. These thinkers have been part of my thinking and aspiration for decades. It is only recently, in concert with the two groups of colleagues listed above, and due to the growing urgency of the ecological situation facing humanity daily, that I have begun to turn my affinity with these thinkers to ecology and ethics.

I treat these thinkers (at very unequal lengths and specificity) in the context of, and service to, ecology and ethics. This is a very personal list. Other sources, such as Native American leaders and writers or Zen Buddhists teachers, could be introduced. Strangely, I have not included Joanna Macy or Susan Griffin, both of whom I admire tremendously. I could write at length of the contributions of thinkers influenced by Rudolf Steiner, including Owen Barfield, and especially Marko Pogacnik.¹ If I would write at greater length I would include a discussion of all five of the classical American philosophers—William James, John Dewey, and Alfred North Whitehead, in addition to Emerson and Royce.² I do plan to write at greater length on “Royce’s (Virtue) Ethics Turned to Ecology.”

My purpose in introducing these twelve sources is to bring my Steiner-based but profoundly pluralistic intellectual and spiritual commitments to bear on the unprecedented challenge of ecological devastation. Here is the list.

1. The critique of both theism and secularism by the ecologist Thomas Berry
2. Spirit and nature according to Goethe
3. The ecology, spirituality, and ethics of Ralph Waldo Emerson
4. Loyalty and the Beloved Community of Josiah Royce
5. The Integral Yoga spirituality of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother
6. The non-violence of M. K. Gandhi, M. L. King, Jr., and H.H. the Dalai Lama
7. The I-Thou philosophy and practice of Martin Buber
8. The Sophianic tradition according to Baring and Cashford
9. The Christian feminist ecology of Rosemary Ruether and Sally McFague

¹ See Marko Pogacnik, *Gaia’s Quantum Leap: A Guide to Living through the Coming Earth Changes* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2011).

² For my affinity with these thinkers, see *Rudolf Steiner and American Philosophy* (Great Barrington, MA: Steinerbooks, forthcoming).

10. The love of nature and Catholic spirituality of Thomas Merton
11. The science and Catholic spirituality of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin
12. The esoteric/anthroposophical spirituality of Rudolf Steiner.

My point is to show that although most of these teachers precede the ecological crisis and generally use language that is very different from either ecology or standard philosophical ethics, with our assistance they nevertheless are able to contribute to deep and faithful approaches to the present ecological crisis. I am also conscious that there are ways in which, or reasons why, some parts of their writings might not be helpful for either ecology or ethics.

1. Thomas Berry

In addition to being one of the teachers I have admired most deeply and gratefully, Thomas Berry has been my primary source of ecological thinking, both positively and in a complex dialectic. He was also perhaps the first to use the term integral ecology: In the late 1980s, Berry told Brian Swimme that he considered the integral ecologist to be the spiritual teacher of the future. In the course of his long academic career, Berry pursued a wide range of intellectual subjects and disciplines, but for the last several decades of his life his central concern was the fate of the Earth and the redefinition of the human as an Earth being.

Berry's writings on ecology constitute a *cri de coeur* concerning what he called "biocide" and "geocide," the pathological destruction of Earth by the contemporary Western, now global, consumerist, extractive economy. In his view, the only hope for the future reversal of this process of destruction, now in an advanced phase, is the redefinition or reimagination of the human in order that the whole of humanity might begin to understand itself to be entirely a product of and increasingly a co-collaborator with the Universe.

In *The Great Work*, Berry recounts an experience at age nine, one that can only be considered mystical (though he refers to it as "magical"), where he lived in Greensboro, North Carolina. He viewed a field of "white lilies rising above the thick grass." Eighty years later, when writing about this experience, he confessed:

A magic moment, this experience gave to my life something that seems to explain my thinking at a more profound level than almost any other experience I can remember. ... Whenever I think about my basic life attitude and the whole trend of my mind and the causes to which I have given my efforts, I seem to come back to this moment and the impact it has had on my feeling for what is real and worthwhile in life. This early experience, it seems, has become normative for me throughout the entire range of my thinking. Whatever preserves and enhances this meadow in the natural cycles of its transformation is good; whatever opposes this meadow or negates it is not good. My life orientation is that simple. It is also that pervasive. It applies in economics and political orientation as well as in education and religion.³

³ Thomas Berry, *The Great Work* (NY: Bell Tower, 1999), p.13.

On behalf of ecology, and indirectly ethics, Berry levels a powerful critique of the four major contemporary institutions: government (particularly the United States), corporations, institutional religion (particularly the Christian church), and academia:

The deepest cause of the present devastation is found in a mode of consciousness that has established a radical discontinuity between the human and other modes of being and the bestowal of all rights on the humans. The other-than-human modes of being are seen as having no rights. They have reality and value only through their use by the human. In this context the other than human becomes totally vulnerable to exploitation by the human, an attitude that is shared by all four of the fundamental establishments that control the human realm: governments, corporations, universities, and religions—the political, economic, intellectual, and religious establishments. All four are committed consciously or unconsciously to a radical discontinuity between the human and the nonhuman.⁴

Berry considers both the Christian and the secular world views to be exhibiting a pathological rage against Earth. In his view, the Christian church continues to violate humanity by regarding it as fallen and in need of a divine rescue. Similarly, post-Christian secularity violates Earth by regarding it as a dead resource waiting to be exploited for commercial gain. Berry's *New Story* is intended to restore the sacred character of humanity and Earth.

Berry resisted Teilhard's claims for the Omega Point—a teleological future guaranteed by the incarnation and suffering of Christ—because he considered it dangerous to posit a final goal for Earth and humanity—even one without a predictable time or circumstance. For Berry, the future is radically undetermined and dependent, perhaps unfortunately, on human behavior. Human violence against Earth is due to a cultural coding that has separated humanity from Earth. This is a problem of a faulty assumption about the human-Earth relationship, one that views humanity merely *on* Earth, and not constituted *by* Earth. Mary Evelyn Tucker summarizes Berry's conviction, and the guiding commitment of the last thirty years of his life:

We are one species among others, and as self-reflective beings we need to understand our particular responsibility for the continuation of the evolutionary process. ... We have become co-creators as we have become conscious of our role in this extraordinary, irreversible developmental sequence of the emergence of life forms.⁵

According to Berry, current cultural coding must now be reduced in influence in favor of cosmic coding, i.e., the symbols, images, and dreams of the Universe as experienced in the intimate relationship between Earth and humanity:

⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

⁵ Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Editor's Afterword: An Intellectual Biography of Thomas Berry," in Mary Evelyn Tucker, ed., *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2006), p. 164.

Our genetic coding, through the ecological movement and through the bioregional vision, is providing us with a new archetypal world. The Universe is revealing itself to us in a special manner just now. Also the planet Earth and the life communities of the earth are speaking to us through the deepest elements of our nature, through our genetic coding.⁶

Berry is calling for an end to what he regards as an “autism” that has characterized human consciousness during the past several centuries. The Universe is calling to humanity, through the ecological movement, “to renew our human participation in the grand liturgy of the Universe.”

There is eventually only one story, the story of the universe. Every form of being is integral with this comprehensive story. Nothing is itself without everything else. Each member of the Earth community has its own proper role within the entire sequence of transformations that have given shape and identity to everything that exists.⁷

As these texts show, Berry’s mature world view, both his critique and recommendations concerning ecological devastation, affirms a symbolic and sacred depth, a third alternative to traditional Christian theism and a flatland secularism. Berry sometimes located his position by criticizing these two positions, and other times he used Confucian humanism as a description of the position with which he most easily identified. In his last several decades he seemed to me to resemble, above all, a Confucian sage.

2. Nature, Spirit, and Universe according to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Goethe’s “gentle empiricism” provides an excellent method for ecological analysis. Goethe himself might seem, at least initially, less valuable than most other great naturalists as an exemplar of virtuous service to ethics; his life and writing seem not available as a model of ethical thinking or behavior. He clearly is a model, however, of devotion to nature. He reverently asks nature—whether the leaf, or the skeleton, or light, to mention only three of many possible examples—to reveal itself to his highly developed intuitive capacity.

As many ecologists agree that the current ecological problem issues from a faulty worldview, what could be more important than a worldview that restores humanity to an intimate, and noetic, relationship with the natural world? Quite simply, Goethe’s method of knowing the natural world, i.e., his intuition of the process of transformation by which natural phenomena reveal their essential reality, overcomes the disenchanting worldview that followed from Cartesian separation of human consciousness (*res cogitans*, myself as an unextended thinking substance) from the natural world (*res extensa*, the extended world that is not my consciousness). Goethe’s “gentle empiricism” overcomes equally well the Newtonian conception of nature as dead bodies with no living interior and

⁶ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), p. 211.

⁷ Swimme and Berry, *The Universe Story*, p. 268.

governed by impersonal laws.⁸

3. The Ecology, Spirituality, and Ethics of Ralph Waldo Emerson

For Goethe, nature is characterized by, and with effort is knowable as, creative patterns. Emerson read all fifty-five volumes of Goethe's collected works and transferred countless ideas from them to his journals, and then to his essays. America's unofficial but uncontested sage, its first post-Calvinist free-thinking philosopher, was steeped in the writings and naturalistic empirical practice of the foremost European Romantic poet and naturalist of the 19th century. To his great credit, Emerson went against his deeply embedded introverted temperament in publicly opposing slavery more than two decades before the Civil War. It was his integrated moral sensibility that forced him to suppress his intense opposition to group thinking (a negative characteristic he initially attributed to the abolitionists) sufficiently to join the moral crusade against slavery.⁹

When one thinks of ecology in mid-19th century America, Henry David Thoreau automatically comes to mind; in late 19th and early 20th century, one thinks of John Muir; in mid-20th century, Aldo Leopold; in late 20th century, Rene Dubos, Rachel Carson, Thomas Berry, and Bill McKibben. But for a spiritual perspective on ecology (and ethics) we would do well to consider the thought, and manifestly integrated virtue, of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Berry could have based his entire ecological critique and vision on Emerson's conception of humanity as a manifestation of the cosmos.

Emerson's essay, or rather small book, *Nature* (1836), his first important work, celebrates the inseparability of spirit and nature. Again with Goethe, as well as with Steiner, he sees the whole of nature as an invitation to the inexhaustible mystery of spirit. It is by human imagination and creativity that spirit is experienced; it is by nature that the spirit is to be known and loved.

No less than Goethe, Emerson responded to the natural world with reverence. He was less devoted than Goethe to knowing nature scientifically, or perhaps as devoted but not as generative and prolific, but as much as Goethe Emerson embodies and espouses a moral relationship to the natural world.¹⁰ More importantly perhaps, Emerson exhibits the virtues that make him and his writings not only ideal for an ecological and socially

⁸ Obviously, this discussion of Goethe's naturalism and its implications for ecology could be greatly expanded, and would be based on the following: Douglas Miller, ed., trans. *Scientific Studies, vol. 12: Goethe: The Collected Works* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); David Seamon and Arthur Zajonc, eds., *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998); and Henri Bortoft, *The Wholeness of Nature: Goethe's Way toward a Science of Conscious Participation in Nature* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 1996).

⁹ See Len Gougeon and Joel Myerson, eds., *Emerson's Antislavery Writings* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995). Emerson's first public ethical action was his letter to President Martin Van Buren, 23 April 1838 against the law to remove the Cherokee from their land.

¹⁰ See Gustaaf Van Cromphout, *Emerson's Ethics* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999); for Emerson as natural scientist, see William Rossi, "Emerson, Nature, and Natural Science," in Joel Myerson, ed., *A Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 100-50.

just worldview but show him to be the kind of person who would turn his attention (i.e., his genius) to the crucial tasks of the time. As he lamented the beginning of rapacious exploitation of nature in the mid-19th century, he would surely see, and vigorously oppose, the same attitudes that are now leading to far more disastrous damage to nature than in his time.

4. Loyalty and the Beloved Community of Josiah Royce

If it is possible to miss Emerson in relation to ecology and social justice, it would be even easier to miss Josiah Royce (1855–1916), the younger colleague of William James at Harvard at the end of the 19th century and early years of the 20th. Royce grew up in Grass Valley, in a mining town at the foot of the Sierras, immediately following the Gold Rush of 1849, as he said “in a community only five years older than myself.” For Royce, every ideal has an individual and communal context and meaning. Consequently, with Emerson, he saw every thought and decision surrounded by concentric circles of significance, and in fact, of influence. For him, as for Emerson, the Absolute Ideal, the largest and most ideal community of value, calls to each individual, and each thought and action, to read and implement the fullest, most loyal expression of each. Royce’s admonition to loyalty reaches to the cosmos: “I can be genuinely in love with the community only in case I have somehow fallen in love with the universe.”¹¹

Royce’s ethical writings, which follow directly from his vast metaphysics and profound account of religious insight, require each individual to think and act in the largest intelligible context. Each ideal participates in larger ideals, in the personal character of the ultimate ideal reality, the Logos-spirit, also rightly called the Beloved Community. For Royce, a community is beloved to the extent that it is comprised of free, loving, individuals committed to the good of the whole. This means a willingness to carry faithfully, or loyally, the pain and suffering of the individuals in the community. If Royce were facing the extent of contemporary ecological devastation he would immediately and convincingly, indeed heroically, react loyally to the needs of Earth. This is what a loyal and faithful person—not just a person able to act loyally on occasion—would necessarily do: such persons would react faithfully because they have developed loyalty to loyalty as the defining quality of their character.¹²

5. The Integral Yoga Spirituality of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Westerners who are enthusiastic about the Integral Yoga teaching of Sri Aurobindo and Mirra Richard (The Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram) tend to focus on its prediction that the descent of Supramental consciousness will bring about the spiritualization of all matter, including the human body. According to Aurobindo, the past, present, and future of nature evolves by the creative power of spirit—specifically *Satchitananda* (*Sat*: Being; *Chit*: consciousness; *Ananda*: bliss). While the evolutionary character of nature, according to Sri Aurobindo, would likely be well appreciated if it were familiar to a secular or naturalistic ecologist, the primacy and ultimacy of spirit over matter renders

¹¹ Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 269.

¹² For Royce’s ethics, which I consider inspiring and insightful, see several volumes by Frank M. Oppenheim, S.J., especially *Royce’s Mature Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993).

this world view somewhat suspect: most ecologists view nature as a value unto itself and not as a handmaiden to spirit.

Sri Aurobindo's view resembles the view of nature and spirit offered by all of the Christian worldviews discussed in this essay, particularly those of Royce, Teilhard, Merton, Anne Baring, and in this respect, Steiner. But due to its Vedantic vocabulary and the evolutionary force that it attributes to spirit, particularly at the level of Supermind (a level of transformation above mind), Sri Aurobindo's worldview, and especially his view of nature, is closer to monism than to theism, and is best described as panentheist.

Why include Sri Aurobindo—beside my having written extensively on his teaching?¹³ The reason is simply that India, with a population of more than one billion, needs to be introduced to its most illustrious, vast, profound, and inspiring patriot, cultural interpreter, spiritual philosopher, mystic, and poet who has brilliantly rescued the Vedantic tradition from a negative view of nature. In Aurobindo's integral view, spirit is ultimate but nature and history both count as real and meaningful. Of course, they are also *maya* (not quite real). This is the complexity and subtlety of Aurobindo's integral philosophy: nature absolutely counts within and by virtue of spirit—and spirit, or the divine (whether conceptualized as Brahman or *Sat-Chit-Ananda*) counts by virtue of Itself.

There is a second reason to include Sri Aurobindo among thinkers and persons available for ecology and ethics: he is an absolutely extraordinarily accomplished individual with a teaching that offers a path for every aspiring person. Aurobindo is a model of the four yogas of the Bhagavad Gita—knowledge, action, love, and meditation—as well as a visionary who experienced the full range of earthly and human evolution. His elegantly articulated insights (including an epic poem, *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*, the longest in the English language) came directly from his spiritual experience. While it would not be worthwhile to approach him for help with the poor, it seems likely that he would attend to the suffering Earth as he attended to the liberation of India from British colonial rule. (Prior to Gandhi's return to India from South Africa in 1914 Aurobindo Ghose was a revolutionary hunted and jailed by the British Government of India.) More importantly, if any of us would have his powers of insight and expression, we would instantly be a towering asset for both ecology and justice.

6. *The Non-violence of M. K. (Mahatma) Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and His Holiness the Dalai Lama*

M. K. (Mahatma) Gandhi

The virtuous character and thought of both Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and His Holiness the Dalai Lama, have been influential for the improvement of thinking and action in many spheres of human life but they have exercised very limited direct influence on ecology. As they are synonymous with non-violence and the struggle for human rights, as well as every aspect of social justice, it would be valuable to show that their lives, ideas, writings, and influence are available for the cause of ecology. To the extent that they can be thought to be important for the cause of ecological justice it would be because they possessed a sufficiently empathetic character to attend to one

¹³ See Robert McDermott, *The Essential Aurobindo* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 1987).

problem, one cause, after another.

Gandhi was not focused on ecological devastation but in the course of 45 years of statements collected in 90 volumes he nevertheless made the following statements, among others, in his weekly newspaper column:

If our sense of right and wrong had not become blunt, we would recognize that animals had rights, no less than men.

I do believe that all God's creatures have the right to live as much as we have.

We should feel a more living bond between ourselves and the rest of the animate world.¹⁴

As a Hindu, Gandhi had a strong sense of the unity of all life. For him, nonviolence meant not only the non-injury of human life, but as noted above, of all living things.

As is well known, Albert Einstein wrote of Gandhi: "15Arne Naess, primary exponent of Deep Ecology, explains that "Gandhi made manifest the internal relation between self-realization, non-violence, and what sometimes has been called biospherical egalitarianism."16 According to Naess, "Gandhi's utopia is one of the few that shows ecological balance, and today his rejection of the Western World's material abundance and waste is accepted by progressives of the ecological movement."

Naess remarked that the clearest indication of Gandhi's respect for nature comes through his interpretation of the Hindu worship of the cow. Gandhi saw cow protection as one of the most wonderful phenomena in human evolution. He wrote: "It takes the human being beyond his species. The cow to me means the entire sub-human world. Man, through the cow, is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives."¹⁷

As this implies, for Arne Naess Deep Ecology is not fundamentally about the value of nature, it is about who we are in the larger scheme of things. He notes the identification of the 'self' with "Self" as taught in the Bhagavad Gita (that is, as the unity which is one) as the source of deep ecological attitudes. In other words, he links the tenets of his approach to ecology with what may be termed self-realization. And here the influence of

¹⁴ M. K. Gandhi, *Indian Opinion*, 1935.

¹⁵ Quoted in Louis Fischer, *The Essential Gandhi* (NY: Random House/Vintage, 1962), p. 369.

¹⁶ Arne Naess, *The Shallow and the Deep: Long Range Ecological Movements* (Oslo: Inquiry, 1973).

¹⁷ M. K. Gandhi, *India of My Dreams* (1947).

the Mahatma is most clearly discernible.

Such a new way of thinking will require, as is often said, that *we live simply so that others may simply live*. Further, as Jesus and Gandhi, King, and the Dalai Lama taught, there are no “others”: all persons are one’s neighbors, and in an important respect, oneself.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

In the United States in the last half of the 20th century the ideal of civil rights, social justice, and non-violence immediately calls to mind the leadership, inspiring words, and ultimate sacrifice of Martin Luther King, Jr. Toward the end of his tragically short life, at great expense to his work for civil rights, King began to focus on the unity of humanity, and the need to respect all peoples and individual persons. Certainly by 1967, and perhaps beginning with the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, his life work had evolved from a civil rights leader to a visionary activist for universal justice. He had become a teacher and exemplar of the virtues taught by Jesus and Buddha, and his Indian inspiration, Mahatma Gandhi. His passionate advocacy for the poor and oppressed and many other causes pursued at great price to himself issued from the compassion that had come to define him as an exemplary person and a leader.

Had Martin Luther King, Jr. seen the extent of the destruction of Earth currently underway, that same compassion would have found forceful expression in response to the ecological needs of humanity and Earth. He would have seen that pollution of air and water affects the poor first and most decisively. Desertification affects women in Africa who must walk miles for clean water. Tropical storms most disastrously affect those living in poorly constructed dwellings, such as in Haiti. Food shortages affect the poor, while unsanitary and non-existent hospitals cause uncounted deaths. King would have seen these causes and effects in the same way that he came to see the disastrous effects of the United States aggression in Viet Nam and the cruelty of economic imbalance in the United States and throughout most of the world.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

In the following Statement, the Norwegian Nobel Committee offered its reasons for awarding the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize to His Holiness the Dalai Lama:

It would be difficult to cite any historical example of a minority’s struggle to secure its rights, in which a more ciliatory attitude to the adversary has been adopted than is the case of the Dalai Lama. It would be natural to compare him with Mahatma Gandhi, one of the century’s greatest proponents of peace, and the Dalai Lama likes to consider himself one of Mahatma Gandhi’s successors.¹⁸

¹⁸ “Statement of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee,” in Sidney Piburn, ed., *The Nobel Peace Prize and the Dalai Lama* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1990), p. 18.

In his “Nobel Peace Prize Lecture,” His Holiness stated:

It also means that the values we cherish, in particular our respect for all forms of life and the belief in the power of truth, are today recognized and encouraged. It is also a tribute to my mentor, Mahatma Gandhi, whose example is an inspiration to so many of us. This year’s award is an indication that this sense of universal responsibility is developing.¹⁹

For the Dalai Lama nonviolence should be understood as a subset of compassion, the fundamental ideal that governs his entire life and teachings as a Buddhist monk. Note his words: “in particular our respect for all forms of life and the belief in the power of truth.” Whereas a saint might attain to heaven as a suitable reward for a virtuous life, a bodhisattva, if as virtuous as a Christian saint, would then forego Nirvana (somewhat comparable to heaven) in favor of returning to Earth to help all suffering sentient beings.

The Bodhisattava Vow,²⁰ often spoken by His Holiness the Dalai (as for example at the conclusion of his Nobel Peace Prize speech, and the conclusion of his commentary on Shantideva’s *Flash of Lightning in the Dark of Night* would seem to be the most compelling integration in a single statement of ecology, social justice, and, of course, profound spirituality—i.e., as an astonishing and ultimate example of compassion.

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.²¹

Could there be a stronger, more compelling commitment to the entire natural world, to the whole of creation, including bacteria and the cockroach? When the spiritual is truly universal, as evidenced in the bodhisattva vow, it can ideally serve the cause of ecology, of Gaia in its entirety and in the context of the Cosmos. Religions, by contrast, are often focused on the more local, limited to some extent by culture, language, and institutions. At the same time, these very limitations can help to focus and intensify the commitment of the faithful to a particular bioregion and particular behaviors either advantageous or deleterious to the natural world.

The Dalai Lama’s love of the natural world was embedded in him during his years in Lhasa until his historic escape to India in the face of the Chinese invasion of Tibet, but the love of the whole of creation, to the last suffering sentient being, is the result of his Buddhist spiritual practice. The bodhisattva vow is an expression both of the Buddhist conception of *dukkha*, the fact of suffering (the First Noble Truth), and the path to its eradication (the Fourth Noble Truth, essentially the Eightfold Path).

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁰ Shantidev, *Bodhicaryavatara (Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life)*, Ch. 10, v. 55; for The Dalai Lama’s commentary on this chapter, see his *Practicing Wisdom: The Perfection of Shantideva’s bodhisattva Way* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005).

²¹ His Holiness the Dalai Lama, *A Flash of Lightning in the Dark of Night: A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life* (Boston: Shambala, 1994), p. 126.

7. The I-Thou Philosophy and Practice of Martin Buber

One thinks of Martin Buber's well known concept I-Thou²² as applicable almost exclusively to person-to-person and person-to-community. The key to understanding and applying I-Thou is the hyphen, i.e., the relation. "I" fails to develop as a human character—I can fail to realize my personhood—to the extent that I respond to another as an "It," an object, instead of as a "Thou," a subject with its own integrity, uniqueness, and mystery. Manipulation and exploitation, or I treating something or someone as an It, is the opposite of an I-Thou relationship.

That Buber included an example of the I-Thou experience in reference to a tree seems almost an afterthought to his profound treatment of human relations. It is inviting, however, to extend, perhaps more than he intended, Buber's classic formulation of the I-Thou experience to the natural world, to Gaia, and to the cosmos. Buber's brilliant and tremendously influential description of a subject-to-subject relationship cannot be extended to nature as conceived in a disenchanted universe—but it can in a universe that is alive and creative. This is precisely where one's cosmology makes a critical difference: if soil, water, and sun, are experienced in their subjectivity, then their interiority can call forth from a person such love and reverence that it qualifies as an I-Thou experience. As a result, "I" in relation to this tree comes alive, and in that moment realizes its unique "I-hood."

That universe, and specifically nature, was not disenchanted for Buber is evidenced by his inclusion—admittedly in a very brief passage—of an I-Thou experience of a tree. Buber, after all, is an existential philosopher, with deep roots in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, a long way from Aldo Leopold. We might say, cryptically, in that passage his native Jewishness trumped his learned existentialism. But first he describes an experience of a tree as an "It." This passage is worth quoting at length because it makes perfectly clear in Buber's *I and Thou*, one of the most influential books of the 20th century, the possibility of moving from the usual mode of experiencing the natural world, in this case a tree, and the elevated, and increasingly necessary I-Thou mode of experiencing nature.:

I contemplate a tree.
I can accept it as a picture: ...
I can feel it as movement: ...
I can assign it to a species and observe it as an instance, with an eye to its construction and its way of life.
I can overcome its uniqueness and its way of life...
Throughout all of this the tree remains my object and has its place and its time span, its kind and condition.

And then Buber describes an experience of a tree as an I-You relation:

But it can also happen, if will and grace are joined, that as I contemplate the tree I am drawn into relation, and the tree ceases to be an It. ...

⁽ In his overlong introduction to Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (NY: Scribners, 19..), Walter Kaufman argues that Buber's iconic term, "I-Thou" should be translated "I-You."

Whatever belongs to the tree is included: its form and its mechanics, its colors and its chemistry, its conversation with the elements and its conversation with the stars—all this in its entirety. ...

What I experience is neither the soul of a tree nor a dryad, but the tree itself.²³

In the Afterword to *I and Thou*, Buber returns to the tree, and establishes the condition for an I-Thou relation not only to a tree but the whole of nature incapable of the reciprocity of person-to-person, the primary and almost exclusive concern of his profound text. He considers a human relation to animal less mutual than as a person-to-person relation (a claim that some animal loving humans would probably dispute), and calls the human-animal sphere “the threshold of mutuality.” He then turns to the experience of plants:

It is altogether different with those realms of nature which lack the spontaneity that we share with animals. It is part of our concept of the plant that it cannot react to our actions upon it, that it cannot “reply.” Yet this does not mean that we meet with no reciprocity at all in this sphere. We find here not the deed of posture of an individual being but a reciprocity of being itself—a reciprocity that has nothing but being.²⁴

Here Buber is affirming the realm of nature as the possibility of a meeting “that which has being,” whatever it might be that elicits our openness. Such an experience provides an opportunity to realize myself as an “I,” a realization of my I-hood.

8. The Sophia Tradition according to C. G. Jung, and Baring and Cashford

C. G. Jung’s archetypal research has generated convincing evidence on behalf of a set of archetypes such as Mother, the wise old man, circularity, quarternity, and the Self. For Jung, archetypes which are wise and active, and manifest variously in all cultures. Jung argues forcefully that the failure of the West to attend to these archetypal myths and symbols is a function of, and reinforces, profound alienation from the living power of psyche. Jung does not trace the evolution of the goddess archetype but he reveals—not too strong a word—the reality of the psychic entity that appears in many cultures with various titles, most prominently the Great Mother. By denying life to Earth, Western humanity has in effect committed matricide: it has killed Earth as Mother. It has reduced Mother to a commodity.

Jung shows that archetypes such as the Great Mother provide Western humanity with an opportunity as well as a responsibility to reconnect the conscious, the level at which thinking dissects and attempts to control, and the unconscious which is the source of mysterious, creative wisdom, including profound processes governing individuals, humanity, and Earth.

According to Jung, the separation of the conscious from the unconscious, and particularly from the archetypes, functions in the natural world. He writes:

²³ Buber, *I and Thou*, pp. 57-59.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

Individuation is not only an upward but also a downward process. Without any body, there is no mind and therefore no individuation. Our civilizing potential has led us down the wrong path.²⁵

The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image,²⁶ by Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, two scholars of goddess literature from ancient to contemporary, is influenced by Jungian archetypal psychology, especially the archetype of the Mother, and by Owen Barfield's account of the evolution of consciousness. Baring and Cashford trace the concept, or rather the reality, of the goddess in her many manifestations from the Neolithic through Innana-Ishtar, Isis, Tiamat, Artemis, Athena, Persephone, Demeter, and Mary, to Gaia.

Admittedly, the connection to virtue ethics in this section, or more accurately, the application of virtue ethics to the Sophia tradition, is less than obvious but I am convinced that attention to Sophia has a virtue dimension. Because she embodies and solicits sensitivity and service, coupled with strength, as in the Magnificat of Mary, Sophia cannot, without contradiction, be reverently approached from an egomaniacal consciousness. Certainly not all advocates on behalf of Sophia are virtuous (any more than typical Christians or Buddhists are necessarily virtuous) but genuine devotion to Her and an attempt to realize her reality in earthly life, would seem to tilt toward virtue. Further, the kind of virtue that would be both required for and would follow from such devotion would seem to be a transformed person i.e., a virtuous character.

9. The Christian Feminist Ecology of Rosemary Radford Ruether and Sally McFague

Steadily since the 1970s, two interrelated movements, ecofeminism and feminist Christian ecology, led by Carolyn Merchant,²⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether,²⁸ Charlene Spretnak,²⁹ Susan Griffin,³⁰ Catherine Keller,³¹ among others, have collectively exposed the distortions in the dominant western and Christian view of women and nature. In one of the basic texts for this double movement, Rosemary Radford Ruether wrote that "the Western Christian tradition, with its roots in Babylonian, Hebrew, and Greek cultures" has exercised a profound, and disastrous, influence:

²⁵ Meredith Sabini, *The Earth Has a Soul: The Nature Writings of C. G. Jung* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2002), p. 155.

²⁶ Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image* (NY: Viking, 1991).

²⁷ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature* (

²⁸ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *God and Gaia* (NY: HarperCollins, 1992).

²⁹ Charlene Spretnak, *The Spiritual Dimension of Green Politics* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Co., 1986).

³⁰ Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (NY: Harper & Row, 1980).

³¹ Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web*:

It is the culture that has shaped and continues to shape (particularly in its secularized, scientific form) the rest of the world, through imperialist colonialism and neocolonialism. It is the major culture and system of domination that pressed humans and the earth into the crises of ecological unsustainability, poverty, and militarism we now experience.³²

Another core volume in this double movement is Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature*, the first line of which reads as follows: “The thesis of this book can be stated simply: Christian practice, loving God and neighbor as subjects, as worthy of our love in and for themselves, should be extended to nature.”:

A Christian nature spirituality is not nature romanticism. Nor is it very optimistic about the future (the planet may well deteriorate). It is, however, determinedly realistic: it begins and ends with a hymn to the things themselves. A Christian nature spirituality praises God for the wonder of the ordinary and promises to work on behalf of the sick and outcast wonderful, ordinary creatures. A Christian nature spirituality is also determinedly hopeful because it believes that the creator of these wonderful, ordinary creatures is working in, through, and on behalf of us all.³³

In its final chapter, “Caring for the Others,” this book brilliantly integrates the three topics of this essay: it urges a Christian love of nature, an ethics of care, and a “Horizontal Christian Sacramentalism”

10. The Love of Nature and Catholic Mysticism of Thomas Merton

Although a Roman Catholic monk who lived in Gethsemani Monastery near Louisville, Kentucky, Thomas Merton (or by his religious name, Father Lewis) was a passionate advocate for social justice. From 1965 until his untimely accidental death in Bangkok at age 53, Merton wrote forcefully against the United States aggression in Viet Nam and in support of the Vietnamese Buddhist peace activist, Thich Nhat Hanh. His essay, “Nhat Hanh is My Brother,”³⁴ is typical of his informed criticism of United States militarism and his support of victims of aggression world wide, including particularly the Vietnamese.

Merton was also a devoted Gandhian. He edited a collection of Gandhi’s statements on non-violence and contributed a brilliant introductory essay, “The One-eyed Giant,”³⁵ in which he described the United States in particular and Western culture more generally as capable of seeing only with rational intelligence (though often neither rational nor intelligent) and infrequently with other ways of knowing such as intuition and compassion. It is too little known that Merton, presumably because of his being an

³² Ruether, *Gaia and God*, p. 10.

³³ Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997), p. 1.

³⁴ Thomas Merton, *Faith and Violence: Christian Teaching and Christian Practice* (Notre Dame, IN: Univeristiy of Notre Dame, 1968), pp. 106-08.

³⁵ Thomas Merton, *Gandhi on Non-Violence* (NY: New Directions, 1964), pp. 1-22. See also: Gordon C. Zahn, ed., intro., *Thomas Merton on Peace* (NY: McCall Publishing Co., 1971).

artist and a mystic, and a person of accomplished virtue, had a deep appreciation of the natural world.

In his essay, "Hagia Sophia," he writes:

There is in all things an inexhaustible sweetness and purity, a silence that is a fount of action and joy.... This is at once my own being, my own nature, and Gift of my Creator's Thought and Art within me, speaking as Hagia Sophia [Holy Wisdom], speaking as my sister, Wisdom. I am awakened, I am born again at the voice of this my Sister, sent to me from the depths of the divine fecundity.³⁶

As Thomas Berry notes in the conclusion of his Foreword to *When the Trees Say Nothing: Writings on Nature by Thomas Merton*, Merton's gift is his "sense of the sacred throughout the entire range of the natural world."³⁷ We can say that Merton, in his words, married the forest in order to hear and sense the divine presence, but we can equally say that Merton was able to marry the forest because of the hours he spent with his face on the floor, saying the psalms, "alone in the silence of the night."³⁸ For Merton, listening to the natural world—"Seasons, Elements, Firmament, Creatures, Festivals, Mountains, Forest"—was as revealing, and as worthy of his artistic and spiritual genius, as were the poor of the American cities and the Vietnamese victims of American bombs. He considered integrity, compassion, unity, and mystery to be characteristics of the mystical, and specifically monastic, life. He was known for his critique of American militarism and imperialism, and his advocacy of peace, but he was also devoted to the forest, to snakes and to bees.

11. The Science and Catholic Spirituality of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S. J.

For Teilhard, the beauty and creativity of the natural world is the direct expression of the overflowing love of God for creation; it is particularly the object of the love of Christ, the divine being devoted to humanity and Earth. I have been convinced that the way to join Christianity and ecology is to advance the conception of the cosmic Christ found in the writings of Steiner, Teilhard, and Merton. Teilhard's Christology is rooted about equally in his own mystical experience of nature, of the Earth and the universe, and in the Catholic mystical tradition. He is steeped in the New Testament, in the Fathers of the Church, in Aquinas, and the Jesuit spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola.

Teilhard sees Christ as caring for the Earth, and active on behalf of Earth evolution. He sees the Earth and humanity struggling toward a fuller realization of the wisdom and love that is Christ.³⁹ Teilhard does not quite reject orthodox Roman Catholic theism but he gives a much stronger emphasis on the intimate relationship between Christ and the

³⁶ Christopher Pramuk, *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009).

³⁷ Kathleen Deignan, ed., Thomas Merton, *When the Trees Say Nothing: Writings on Nature*. Drawings, John Giuliani. Foreword, Thomas Berry (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2003).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁹ See Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Science and Christ*, (NY: Harper & Row, 1968); Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "The Christic," in *The Heart of Matter* (NY: Harcourt Brace, 1978); and Christopher Mooney, *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ* (NY: Harper & Row, 1964)., and

evolution of the Earth than is usual among Catholic thinkers. (Merton offers an inspiring account of Sophia as the expression of Christ in creation but I cannot find an explicit affirmation in his writings of the evolution of consciousness.)

For Teilhard, God is throughout creation, guiding its evolution, and Christ is active on behalf of humanity and Earth. This conception of God is not pantheist: he does not limit God to His creation, nor Christ to the Earth. Teilhard is offering a spirituality that is both Gaia-centric and Christ-centric. Significantly, it is also Trinitarian: Father/ Ground of Being, Christ/Logos, and Holy Spirit.⁴⁰ The Earth, filled with Christ's love and aspiration, is to be revered and loved. Christ is not absent, Christ is here, in the plants and animals, in the rivers and oceans, in photosynthesis, in humanity both individually and collectively, and in planets and stars. At his death in 1955, Teilhard did not know about ecological devastation but we can be sure that he would have offered profound antidotes, most particularly his evident love of the world.

12. The Esoteric/Anthroposophical Spirituality of Rudolf Steiner.

During Steiner's lifetime the ecological movement had not emerged as a necessary force for sustainability against ecological devastation. Steiner's life preceded by two generations Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, and Earth Day in April 1970, the two events generally credited with launching the ecological movement. However, many lectures that Steiner delivered almost a century ago provide a solid, and perhaps necessary foundation for what might be called an esoteric ecology. Ever prescient, Steiner lectured on the eventual collapse of bee colonies,⁴¹ the deteriorating state of the soil, and the overall fate of Earth. Steiner's entire worldview, after all, emphasizes Earth as a living being, as Gaia, an etheric (life giving) force as well as a complex physical reality. Further, in his view, humanity is made of a combination of four components inseparable during life: physical, ether, soul, and spirit. As he affirms, and carefully describes, the deep interdependence of every organism and a vast array of cosmic forces and cosmic beings, we can regard Steiner's esoteric research as a foundation for spiritual ecology and a corrective worldview for recovery from ecological destruction.

Steiner's cosmology, and particularly his account of the living Earth, now appropriately called Gaia, deepens our understanding of the human-Earth relationship. From myriad angles, and at several levels, he celebrates the wise and creative Earth, including rocks, minerals, chemicals, plants, animals, and humanity, as well as the creative spirit that drives these to their maximum collaborative expression. When Steiner looks at bees (on which he delivered nine lectures), or the eye, or human blood, he simultaneously sees their exterior by sense perception and their interior by intuition.

⁴¹ See Rudolf Steiner, *Bees* (Great Barrington, MA: Steinerbooks, 1998). This volume also includes an introduction by Gunther Hauk who featured prominently in the documentary, *Queen of the Sun*, and an afterword by David Adams, "From Queen Bee to Social Sculpture: The Artistic Alchemy of Joseph Beuys." See also: Gunther Hauk, *Toward Saving the Honeybee* (Junction City, OR: The Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, 2002), and Erik Berrevoets, *Wisdom of the Bees: Principles of Biodynamic Beekeeping* (Great Barrington, MA: Steinerbooks, 2009).

Steiner's appreciation for Earth significantly includes his detailed esoteric knowledge of the influence of the nine hierarchies, from cherubim to angels,⁴² and heavenly bodies, including the evolution of the solar system. He sees the continuing guidance of angels and archangels, of Buddha and bodhisattvas, and of Christ and Sophia. Perhaps most significantly, he sees the etheric body of Christ (which I take to be His resurrection body) surrounding the Earth, permeating its etheric envelope.⁴³ Consequently, Steiner's contribution to ecology is thoroughly esoteric: it issues from a higher knowledge and focuses on the sources of, as well as possible solutions for, the current threat to the health and survival of Earth.

Steiner offers a history, or evolution—which is also a devolution—of human thinking, feeling, and willing leading humanity from intimacy to alienation, from worship to control. This partly downward process, proceeding simultaneously with the positive evolution toward freedom and love, includes the eventual separation of humanity from Earth. It is important to emphasize that according to Steiner this separation of humanity from Earth is not to take place for many hundreds of thousands of years. Steiner is very clear that it is the current task of humanity to love the Earth so thoroughly that Earth and humanity will be spiritualized together. From his perspective, it would be catastrophic for humanity (as well as for Earth) if Earth were not to attain its full spiritualized destiny. He writes:

The mission of our Earth is the cultivation of the principle of love to its highest degree by those beings who are evolving upon it. When the Earth has reached the end of its evolution, love should permeate it through and through. Let us understand clearly what is meant by the expression: Earth is the planetary life-condition for the evolution of love.⁴⁴

This passage can stand as the goal of this essay, namely that love is the source, active instrument, and goal of Earth evolution. It was love, working with divine hierarchies such as Form and Movement that brought the Earth into existence 4.5 billions years ago. Further, according to Steiner, the purpose of the Earth is to manifest love. When the Earth will be no more, love will remain, and will carry into eternity the love of Earth first by the divine hierarchies and then by humanity.

Steiner recounts the entwined history of Earth and humanity, emphasizing their current challenging relationship. By analogy, he views this history as a story like that of a young person who must separate from his or her parents in order to establish a mature adult-to-adult relationship. In this sense, it is appropriate that humanity should find itself rather homeless, merely living on Earth, rather than, as in the past, from, in, through, and of Earth. As a result of the process of objectification and alienation characteristic of modern Western consciousness, the human body has come to be alien to the individual soul, and even to the individual mind. For Steiner, humanity and Earth have a mutually dependent

⁴² This is a reference to the nine spiritual hierarchies, referenced throughout the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, as well as the western esoteric tradition. The hierarchies were first systematically delineated by Dionysius the Aeropagyte in the 6th century C.E.

⁴³ See Rudolf Steiner, *The Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric* (Great Barrington, MA: Steinerbooks, 1983).

⁴⁴ Rudolf Steiner, *The Gospel of St. John* (Great Barrington, MA: Steinerbooks, 1940), p. 46.

telos (purpose and goal). The double goal of humanity is freedom and love; the goal of Earth is to be transformed by love freely given to it by humanity.

Steiner's philosophy of nature is completely and emphatically evolutionary; in his view, humanity issues from Earth. Unlike most evolutionary philosophies of nature, however, he also sees Earth issuing from humanity, and more specifically from the ideal conception of the human, from *Anthropos*, the human as archetype. From the beginning of creation/evolution, or cosmogenesis, or as Brian Swimme says, from the "Primordial Flaring Forth," the archetypal human was and of course remains a reality in the mind of the Creator. Steiner does not as much speak of a Creator as he does of the Logos of the Prologue to John's Gospel "through Whom all things came to be". The Earth evolved with the ideal of the human as its inner reality, its presupposition and goal.

The ideal human, or Cosmic "I," as a manifestation of the divine Logos, both precedes and follows the early stages of Earth evolution. Earth is not an object at the end of a long umbilical cord connected to a distant creator; it is the manifestation of the Creator (or Logos) from the beginning and forever after. To see, to think, to love Earth is to see, think and love the divine expressing itself. According to Steiner, whose cosmology is properly called panentheist, there is divinity before creation (and presumably after, though he does not discuss that idea) but there is no creation without divinity, and more specifically without Logos and Sophia.

It follows from Steiner's affirmation of the spiritual reality of Earth that every individual human being needs to reconnect with Earth, not as an external object but as one's living body. Earth/Gaia, which of course is the mother of all mothers, and so of all bodies, is permeated and sustained by spirit—and more precisely by Sophia, the divine feminine. In this respect his ecology is close to Teilhard's and Merton's—i.e., it is Sophianic.

As humanity has become splintered into parts, each part of the human person has become alien to all other parts, and all parts alien to the total, resulting in an alienation of each person from Earth and Cosmos. Steiner writes: "The world around us is filled everywhere with the glory of God, but we have to experience the divine in our own souls before we can find it in our surroundings."⁴⁵ The great and urgent task at present is for each individual to so activate his or her own spiritual self to be able to see the cosmos and Earth as a spiritual self—exactly what Steiner intends by anthroposophy: "a path of knowledge to lead the spiritual in the individual to the spiritual in the universe."

In a way similar to the spiritual-scientific vision of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Steiner offers a vision of the Earth suffused with Christ. This union of Christ and the Earth is so thorough that actions against the Earth, which of course is the dominant character of human behavior at present, should rightly be considered deicide as well as biocide. This accusation of human deicide is the essential idea developed by Thomas Berry. Steiner offers many antidotes to this negative situation.

⁴⁵ Christopher Bamford, ed., intro., *Start Now! A Book of Soul and Spiritual Exercises of Rudolf Steiner* (Great Barrington, MA: Steinerbooks, 2004), p. 78.

Steiner's devotion to the Earth, and to the cosmos, is apparent in many series of lectures, each given in response to a request for help. Answering the plea of farmers, Steiner lectured extensively on a method of agriculture based on his supersensible knowledge of the etheric forces operative in the earth, plant, and animal worlds. This method of farming, called bio-dynamic, is an increasingly important agricultural alternative to chemically dominated farming now prevalent on the entire surface of Earth.⁴⁶

Surely, the deepest component of Steiner's ecological worldview is Goetheanism, his use of the natural philosophy of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Spiritual or meditative thinking applied to nature finds its fullest expression, prior to Steiner, in the writings of Goethe who developed what he referred to as a "gentle empiricism," especially as applied to his pioneering observation of the metamorphosis of plant forms. As noted above (Part II, section 2), Goethe conducted thousands of investigations into the world of plants as one of the many ways by which he developed living or imaginative thinking. He entered so deeply and sympathetically into the life of the plants he observed that he was able to see-think the plant's essential or formative idea. Goethe's highly conscious receptivity to the inner reality of what he termed the *Urpflanze*, or fundamental creating principle of the plant, is an example of what Steiner means by a path of knowing "to guide the spiritual in the individual to the spiritual in the universe."

While Steiner shared Goethe's interest in plants, and in fact shared virtually all of Goethe's interests, it was not in relation to plants that he sought to give imaginative thinking its most important role. Rather, Steiner claims to show that this kind of inner penetration of the natural world would reveal to the observer a capacity for thinking that is self-confirming. Steiner contends that individuals conducting such exercises as Goethe conducted on plants—though it would be equally effective on any object or on the process of thinking itself—would eventually begin to notice their own new, more highly developed capacity for the intuitive-seeing-knowing of interiors.

For Steiner, the human development of intuition will lead to an intimate knowing of the world, including the physical earth as archetypal living Gaia. Such inner knowing will lead the knower to recognize his or her capacity for higher knowing by a higher dimension of self. Not only is there no conflict between spiritual development and a cognitive relation to the Earth, they are both positive and reinforcing. He states:

We would have good reason to avoid spiritual study if it took away the meaning of all the beauty that flows into our souls when we observe the wonderful world of flowering plants and fruiting trees or any other aspect of the natural realm, such as the starry heavens and so on, and if, as a result, we were advised to abandon all

⁴⁶ See Matthew Barton, ed., *Rudolf Steiner: Spiritual Ecology—Reading the Book of Nature and Reconnecting with the World* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 2008).

this in favor of spiritual contemplation. But this is not at all how it is.⁴⁷

For the past several centuries, a large segment of humanity, particularly in the West, has experienced this separation of spirituality and love of the natural world. For Steiner, spirituality is cosmic—and Gaian:

We can penetrate to the depths of our planet Earth, to its veins of metal ores of lead, silver, and copper, to everything that lives as the metallic elements of the rocky Earth.... As you perceive inwardly the metallic veins in their wonderful speech, you feel united with the innermost soul and heartbeat of the Earth itself, and you become aware of the memories that are not your own. Memories echo inwardly; they are the Earth's own memories of its earlier states, before it was the Earth....

Thus the metallic veins in the Earth lead us to the Earth's memories. When we have this inner experience, we can understand very clearly why we are sent to the Earth by the divine spiritual beings who guide the universal order. Living in the Earth's memories like this causes us to gain a real sense of our own thinking for the first time.

Because we have comprehended Earth's memories, we feel how our thinking is connected with the Earth itself. And the moment we make the Earth's memories our own, we are surrounded by the beings of the second hierarchy (Kyriotetes, Dynamis, and Exusiai). This is how, even in earthly life, we may be surrounded by the beings who surround us at a certain time between death and a new birth, as described.

We fully realize that we contact beings of the second hierarchy while we are incarnated on Earth between birth and death. But these beings do more than work with us between death and rebirth to transform our being; they also play a role in forming the cosmos as a whole. Here we see how the higher cosmic order gives these beings the responsibility for everything in the Earth related to the influences of those veins of metal.⁴⁸

In addition to leading humanity to focus on possible natural catastrophies such as global warming and species extinction, Steiner's lectures more deeply urge humanity to restore its relation to the inner life of the Earth—and particularly to the Earth as a living expression of the inner life of the cosmos and the nine spiritual hierarchies. This is what it would mean for humanity, in Steiner's phrase, to be "at home in the universe."

Conclusion

As noted at the outset, this essay is intended as a progress report on my relation to the increasingly demanding fields of ecology (particularly Integral Ecologies and Religion and Ecology). In conclusion I am offering a brief summary of what I think I have learned

⁴⁷ Rudolf Steiner, *At Home in the Universe: Exploring Our Supersensory Nature* (Great Barrington, MA: Steinerbooks, 2000), p. 89, and Robert McDermott, ed., intro. *The New Essential Steiner* (Great Barrington, MA: Steinerbooks, 2009), p. 230.

⁴⁸ Steiner, *At Home in the Universe*, pp. 94-95.

and what I hope the reader has gained from my endeavor.

Collaboration. Perhaps the most obvious characteristic of this endeavor is the degree to which the learning has resulted from collaboration, and will continue to do so. Being a faculty member in PCC is an excellent education. Similarly, having to prepare an essay (of which this is expanded version) for a meeting of the group that has recently named itself Upaya Twelve, has been a powerful spur to reading, thinking, and writing. In both groups of faculty, conversations are high level, serious, collaborative, and non-competitive.

Virtue Ethics. I have interpreted a dozen exemplary individuals and their writings so as to show that they have served many causes because of their virtuous character. Like spirituality, Virtue Ethics is a life-long discipline. Spiritual (or religious) practices aid but do not guarantee moral behavior; spirituality must be built on top of a virtuous character—and when it is not, as when it is built on a psychologically flawed personality—the result can be profoundly distorted, worse than if that person had not taken up spiritual practice, and worse as well for such a person’s followers.

Ethics and Social Justice. There simply is no escaping the obligation to serve ecology and social justice. Even monks who meditate and pray in a community strictly separated from the world must meditate and pray for suffering souls in every location and every condition—including, presumably, for the dead and the unborn (those who will have to live on Earth that this generation has violated). At the present time and for centuries to come the great task of humanity will be to overcome the faulty thinking that is at the root of destructive behavior, and to continue the work of restoring to Earth its essential vitality and profound natural rhythms.

Religion(s). As Mary Evelyn Tucker has been heard to say, ecology must be brought to the attention of religious traditions because this is where the people are. The task of ecology (i.e., all of the ecological approaches and methods) require close contact with religions in order to find in each tradition the insights and ideals that will improve the fate of Earth. As Teilhard wrote in his inspiring essay, “The Heart of Matter,” “In a system of *cosmo-noo-genesis*, the comparative value of religious creeds may be measured by their respective power of evolutive activation.”⁴⁹ In attempting to establish a priority of methods, ideals, insights, and commitments, in my writing, lectures, and conversation, I generally eschew the words “only” and “must,” but I now regard the cause of ecology as an exception: religions *must* attend to the fate of Earth and deserve our support *only* to the extent that they do so. Religions can and should meet many other human needs but this one, the ecological, has emerged as the only absolute. Further, pragmatically, to the extent that religions serve other virtuous aspirations they will almost certainly bring believers and practitioners to the cause of Earth. Here again is the subtle working of Virtue Ethics.

Spirituality. Spiritual world views and practices, e.g. the yogas of spiritual knowledge, spiritual action (selfless, without attachment to rewards), and love (which is spiritual at core), all in the context of the evolution of consciousness, will inevitably result in service to Earth. It is the human responsibility, increasingly at this time and for the foreseeable future, to enable spirit (i.e. love) to manifest physically. This should be the Great Work

⁴⁹ “The Heart of Matter,” in Teilhard de Chardin, *The Heart of Matter* (NY: Harcourt Brace, 1978), p. 97.

and hope of contemporary spirituality.