Western Michigan University
ScholarWorks at WMU

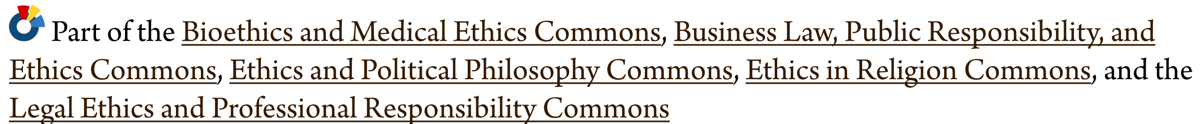
Center for the Study of Ethics in Society Papers | Center for the Study of Ethics in Society

3-1992

The Imperative to Restore Nature: Some Philosophical Questions

Lisa Newton
Fairfield University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/ethics_papers



Part of the Bioethics and Medical Ethics Commons, Business Law, Public Responsibility, and Ethics Commons, Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons, Ethics in Religion Commons, and the Legal Ethics and Professional Responsibility Commons

WMU ScholarWorks Citation
Newton, Lisa, "The Imperative to Restore Nature: Some Philosophical Questions" (1992). *Center for the Study of Ethics in Society Papers.* Paper 19.
http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/ethics_papers/19

This Complete Issue is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for the Study of Ethics in Society at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Center for the Study of Ethics in Society Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Center for the Study of Ethics in Society

[Papers published by the Center]
Volume 5, No. 2
March, 1992

THE IMPERATIVE TO RESTORE NATURE: SOME PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS

Lisa Newton
Fairfield University

Center for the Study of Ethics in Society
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI 49008

The purpose of WMU's Center for the Study of Ethics is to encourage and support research, teaching, and service to the university and community in areas of applied and professional ethics. These areas include, but are not restricted to: business, education, engineering, government, health and human services, law, media, medicine, science, and technology.

Founded 1985
Phone (616) 387-4380

Executive Board

Michael Pritchard, Center Director
Philosophy
James Jaksa, Associate Director
Communications
Ray Alie
Management
Shirley Bach
Philosophy
Robert Boughner
Industrial Engineering
Joseph Ellin
Philosophy
Paul Farber
Education and Professional Development
Philip Kramer
Social Work
Ron Kramer
Sociology
Gwen Raaberg
Women's Center

Publication Editor: Paul Farber

This booklet printed on recycled paper.

THE IMPERATIVE TO RESTORE NATURE: SOME PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS

Lisa A. Newton
Fairfield University

February, 1992

THE IMPERATIVE TO RESTORE NATURE: SOME PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS

Environmental philosophy, with special emphasis on the ethic of environmental preservation, is a field that grew out of public commitments well outside the academic discipline of philosophy. The imperative to preserve nature where possible, and to restore nature where it had been damaged, evolves from a growing public awareness of the fragility of the natural environment (fueled by public alarms that need not be reviewed here); a response to that awareness in the formation of public policy (or at least public rhetoric) forced the work to begin. We seem as a nation to have accepted, at least for talking purposes, the preservation and restoration of the natural environment as a national priority. Nor is it only, any longer, a matter of conserving natural resources just in order to have more of the world to exploit later. We are beginning to develop a true environmental ethic, in what Holmes Rolston calls a "primary, naturalistic sense" of the term, where "humans ask questions not merely of prudential use but of appropriate respect and duty."[1] We are being told that our whole relationship with nature must be reexamined and probably restructured, and we are listening. A new national goal has been adopted -- to preserve and to restore the natural environment -- and

philosophical reflection on that goal has really just begun.

If we accept that it must be done, that this end must be accomplished, then by the habits of our minds, we move automatically to the question of means. How shall the task of preservation or restoration be addressed? If we are engineers, we may ask after the technology and resources that will make the attainment of the goal possible. If we are philosophers, we will ask first how this end is even to be conceived, let alone accomplished. By now it should be no surprise that the environmental ethic poses problems for the traditional categories of philosophy. Following Aldo Leopold,[2] leading philosophers of the environmental field have initiated us into the many conceptual and ethical difficulties of the questions with which we will have to deal. (We may mention, as most central to the development of this paper, at least Paul Taylor,[3] Eugene Hargrove,[4] J. Baird Callicott,[5] and Holmes Rolston.[6] There are others; the field is growing and ramifying with speed reminiscent of the early years of medical and business ethics.) Besides containing difficulties in and for itself, environmental ethics throws into new relief central problems of ethics as a whole, especially in its contemporary applications in fields of practice like medicine or business. An exploration of some of these problems, then, may be of use to the

larger field of philosophy as well as to its newest entrant.

We will consider the problems raised by the environmental initiative in ethics in two parts. First, and for the bulk of this paper, we will discuss the difficulties that follow from the effort to define "nature," or "the natural," and to define it in such a way that we can distinguish it from whatever it was we wanted to oppose to it (intuitively, some human product: say, Shopping Malls); concomitantly, to discern its value, so that it will be clear why we ought to protect or restore nature when such care opposes ordinary human activity (say, building Shopping Malls). Second, more briefly, we will attempt to derive from the foregoing discussion some idea of the human fault that led to (or in some sense, defines) the environmental crisis that we now face, and corresponding to the fault, the general outlines of the remedy we ought to be pursuing; this attempt may take us to the boundaries of theology. The notable incoherence in our efforts to address the crisis follows in large part from dilemmas of diagnosis at this level. We will not be able to follow the discussion on to resolution, even if one appears; at the end of the second part, we will attempt to outline the difficulties entailed in discovering a coherent ethic for the future, a reasonable and

justifiable way of pursuing human good in the midst of conflicting imperatives.

A final restriction: we spoke above of the duty to "preserve and restore" nature as the central perplexity of this paper. For this discussion, wherever a chance to distinguish the two appears, we will concentrate on the duty to "restore" nature, simply because that duty forces the definition: if "preserving" nature (again intuitively, from human beings) is the objective, then we may treat nature as a conceptual "black box" -- we may not have the slightest idea what it is, but we know what to do with it. We can faithfully preserve nature, under whatever definition or evaluation, simply by keeping human beings away from it. But if we are to restore nature, as current national policy calls for the restoration of certain wetlands, we have to have an idea of what will count as restoration of nature so we will know where to stop, and we will have to have some idea of what makes it valuable so that we will know what features shall be central in that restoration.

I. Land Without Man: The Pursuit of the Natural

Central to the philosophical difficulties of the environmental movement is the problem of naturalism -- specifically, of the "naturalistic fallacy."

Biology is notorious for impaling philosophy on the Humean dichotomy of "is" and "ought."[7] The healthy natural creature grows, and in its growth it develops just as it ought to. When it is hungry, sick, hurt, or threatened, it fights to get what it needs to live, regain its health, survive attacks, and live life to the fullest. It is a teleological system from start to finish. The only evidence we have that it is doing what it ought to do, when it does all these things, is that the vast majority of its kind in fact do exactly what it does: from the "is" of normal growth and development we infer the "ought." In many cases, failure to act as teleological system -- to act in such ways as to survive, and to develop along the lines laid down by the vast majority -- tends to be correlated with conditions always held to be undesirable: death, of course, also pain, misery, and failure in functions important to the species. But the correlation is not universal; we cannot simply point to the pain, etc. as the disvalue marking subnormal development. If a member of the species fails to heal, grow and develop in the normal way, we assume that there is something "wrong" with that individual, and that it would be "better" for it to recover and be like the others, without looking for further disadvantages (much the approach we take to the growth of our own children).

All of this, of course, has been regarded as completely fallacious since G. E. Moore, following David Hume (and Plato, in the Euthyphro), pointed out that the logic of verification of the empirical observational statements is totally different from the logic of verification (if such there is) of normative claims, and labeled all systems that attempted to bridge from one to the other as so many cases of the "naturalistic fallacy."[8] If it makes sense to ask, in a particular case of development or growth to maturity, whether or not it was a good thing that the growth took place, and in the case of certain pesky things (tumors, etc.) it certainly does make sense to ask, then the blanket assertion that "growth to maturity is good" cannot be true.

Why do we insist (still) on understanding the living world teleologically? Because it makes no sense any other way. We learned that first from Aristotle, who in the Metaphysics draws the distinction between those things that have the source of their becoming outside themselves (houses, for example, which exist potentially in a pile of building materials as long as there is nothing to hinder a builder from making the house with them), and those things that have the source of their becoming within themselves.[9] Living beings have their becoming, their potential to be what it is they are determined to be and the motive force to impel them toward that

end, within themselves. Their mature form is in them at the start; their fulfillment, or actuality, is prior to their potential to attain it. "Also, everything that is produced proceeds according to its principle, for . . . its coming into being is directed by the end; hence the actuality is the end, and it is thanks to it that a power is possessed. . . ."[10] An animal is defined, recognized, understood, and its behavior guided and predicted, in terms of its mature form. If we move to the Ethics, we find that the happiness of humans, at least, and by presumption all living forms (i.e., all beings that have the source of their becoming within them), lies in the achievement of their nature and the fulfillment of their natural function.[11] Biology simply makes sense, for Aristotle, only as a goal-directed system.

At least one form, and the most plausible form, of the "naturalism" that G. E. Moore was attacking, then, is just the imposition of Aristotelian teleology on the natural world, and we can see why it is. In many ways the very intelligibility of the natural forms depends on our recognition of the fundamentally goal-directed, value-driven aspect of life. On that understanding, Nature is full of values long before we take human purposes or preferences into account, and no new values have to be adduced in an ethic of "respect for nature": to respect it is to let its potentialities actualize unhindered where

possible, and to help them become actual where previous invasion hinders their development.

Prior to any consideration of human use, need, or enjoyment, then, an Aristotelian environmental ethic begins with the imperative to leave natural systems alone, to develop as they will, or if necessary, to use human skills only to restore them to their natural condition, the condition they would have manifested had not some external agency, usually human, interfered. Intervention on behalf of the "natural," to restore nature by removal of the blight, disease, parking lot or other interference in natural function, is prima facie justified; other human intervention is suspect.

Philosophically relevant implications proceed immediately from the above. The viability of a value (the "natural condition" of any ecosystem) suspended from a counterfactual of unknown content ("had outsiders -- probably humans -- not interfered with it") may itself be problematic. Yet we have good experience operating with such "natural" concepts. In the practice of all health care professions, the value of "the health of this patient" is established in the same way: we attempt in each case to create or restore a condition, health, that would be there naturally if the disease (or gunshot wound, or whatever it is we are treating) had not intervened. Whatever faults we may lay at the door of the health

care system in this country today, we recognize its ability to cure disease and treat wounds.

Health care also gives us the framework for structuring the secondary values in the Aristotelian environmental ethic. The first practical implication of the adoption of any goal is the further adoption of a hypothetical (means-end) structure to achieve it. Clearly the necessary means to the ends of health and thriving of the individual will themselves be values (in the human case, "rights and liberties, opportunities and powers, income and wealth," including access to food and medical care, are universally held to be valuable).[12] By the same account, the conditions or enemies that blight growth to maturity will become disvalues (in the human case, we may include poverty, educational and cultural deprivation along with the standard predators and diseases). More interestingly, the habitat, ecosystem or "land" (as we shall generally be calling it) within which alone healthy development can be actualized will also become a value. The ecosystem is, of course, a means among other means: fish cannot live without oxygen in the water, so sewage-induced hypoxia is a disvalue for the fish; northern spotted owls cannot live without nesting areas in the snags of the old-growth forest, so clearcutting the ancient groves blights their development (and in this case wipes out their species). But the ecosystem is

also, in the wild, a densely populated and diverse system of interacting organisms that comes close to being an organism in itself. That aspect of it bears examination.

Among the internal (organic) "goals" of the living organism we may distinguish between ends of growth or actualization (progress over time from an immature specimen to a mature specimen of the species, with all attendant activities) and ends of maintenance or stability. The most observable activity of a growing organism is its change, from a beginning, through middle stages of development, to a predictable end as a mature (actualized) specimen, before beginning an inevitable decline to death. Within its constant change, however, there is much in the individual that must not change very much: body temperature, cell structure, and population of alien organisms come immediately to mind. The ends of actualization are in one sense prior to the ends of stability, in that the latter exist for the sake of the former, in order that the former may be achieved. But in another sense, the ends of stability are prior, in that they are tied directly to survival: if the underlying, unchanging structures of the body are badly disrupted, the organism dies. These goals of changelessness -- goals of integrity, stability, or homeostatis, we might call them -- are reproduced in the ecosystem. It is not just that if the individual is to

thrive, the ecosystem must, in general, remain whole and stable -- that the ecosystem's stability has instrumental value for the organism. More than that, ecosystem stability is structurally identical, as an organic condition, to organic homeostasis; if the survival of the organism is a candidate for value, then so is the survival of the ecosystem. Stability, or integrity, provides us with the conceptual framework to give a definition for the "good" of that ecosystem as a whole, and make it eligible to be a value in itself.[13]

Of course all is in ceaseless motion, change, and turnover in any ecosystem (or most: the "ecosystem" includes relatively changeless rocks and earth). But that is also true in any organism or organic system, in which individual cells, particles of matter, tend to endure relatively briefly. What is essential, if we are to talk about the integrity of the land or ecosystem, is that the fundamental relationships among the members of that community remain the same. Those functions that are necessary for the ecosystem to continue its activity, and to support the individual organisms within it, must be maintained in that relationship. Since Aldo Leopold, we have taken the preservation of the ecosystem as the fundamental value of environmental ethics. As he puts it, in his statement of the "land ethic": "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity,

stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."[14] Living organisms do their living, as it were, within larger organisms, preservation of which is essential to the survival of all their inhabitants, but which also have value in and of themselves.

As Leopold recognized, there is a strong difference between preserving or restoring a biotic community, full of competing organisms, and preserving or restoring a single organism (by feeding it or healing its injuries).[15] This difference permits us to articulate a true land ethic, distinct from various "animal rights" initiatives, which tend to muddy the environmental waters and confuse the environmental audiences. Yet the restorative imperative to both individual animal and to ecosystem is, for humans, the same: to discover its natural (uncontaminated) condition, to remove the hindrances to that condition, and to add what is needed to restore the original set of relationships for the self-sustaining ecosystem (as Aldo Leopold restored a portion of the prairie in the front yard of his "shack" in Sand County). We continue on the health care model.

Difficulties attend this simple analogy. First, in the health care cases we have a wealth of relevantly very similar specimens to compare with the present patient to determine what that desired

condition would be, and how we shall know it when we achieve it. "The Natural Ecosystem," understood globally, simply does not present us with such a neat paradigm. We still have a problem with criteriology: we simply do not know how to set the criteria for success in the restoration of the natural environment. And second, we are still unclear on the source of the value: in health care, we can always fall back on human preference, since most people prefer to be well than ill (and this preference can then be imputed to infants and other incompetents). There is no such fallback or imputational possibility in caring for the land.

In short, we are not yet sure that the land ethic can succeed in answering Hume or Moore. Whence the value, the "ought," of a collection of organisms that just *is*, just happens to have evolved one way rather than another? Holmes Rolston has an interesting suggestion along that line: that simply because the organism *has* developed as it has, it has value as "stored achievement,"[16] and in that complexity has a claim on our respect. Anything that has evolved is right and has rights, on his account, simply because it is the uniquely achieved organism that it is.

Baird Callicott's way over the is/ought barrier is even more intriguing for its use of Hume's own moral philosophy as its basis. Hume concluded, as

we recall, that the foundation of human morality lies not in reason or fact, but in the moral sentiments (passions, or warm feelings of approbation).[17] These moral sentiments, as natural to us as our hands and feet, can be directed to our own interests, to the interests of others, or to society as a whole. Then why not the environmental community as a whole? Facts can be used, as Hume pointed out, not to compel value judgments, but to call our attention to the appropriateness of some object for our approving sentiment. Ecology has done just that: the more we know, the more we see ourselves as members of a larger and more beautiful community, beholden to the biosphere, drawn to love it and to want to protect it. So we continue to teach, and learn, and love: and our positive attitudes toward the environment continue to increase, and we can ask for no more in the way of moral justification.[18]

Another interesting suggestion for the "is-ought" resolution in the environmental field comes through the very sciences that we employ in studying the natural environment. For a beginning, when we survey the facts, as scientists, our inquiry is far from "value-free." We bring to any scientific investigation the values of science: we aim to find order, law, regularity, predictability, if possible, quantifiability. When we find it, we make that in which the order inheres the focal point of what is "real" in the

phenomena we study, stripping away the idiosyncratic and irreproducible.[19] The simplicity of phenomenon achieved in this way is itself a value in science, and underlies the scientific epiphenomenon of "elegance," or beauty.

Simplicity is gained, for the biologist, when we consider the normal, repeatable, biological phenomenon: essentially, the birth, growth, reproduction and death of organisms. That which is idiosyncratic and various among individuals -- their peculiar blights, diseases, accidents, or other impediments to growth to full actualization -- is dropped out of the equation, to allow clearer focus on the normal individual. Then the phenomenon is orderly and lawful -- I defy you to pretend that those terms are not value-laden -- as soon as it is understood as scientifically explainable, and the beauty that Leopold referred to is patent in the phenomenon so explained. Holmes Rolston put it well:

> What is ethically puzzling, and exciting, in the marriage and mutual transformation of ecological description and evaluation is that here an "ought" is not so much *derived* from an "is" as discovered simultaneously with it . . . values seem to be there as soon as the facts are fully in, and both alike are properties of the system . . . unity, harmony, interde-

> pendence, stability, etc., . . . are valuationally endorsed, yet they are found, to some extent, because we search with a disposition to value order, harmony, stability, unity. Still the ecological description does not merely confirm these values, it informs them; and *we find that the character, the empirical content, of order, harmony, stability is drawn from, not less than brought to, nature* . . . the earlier data are not denied, only redescribed or set in a larger ecological context, and somewhere enroute our notions of harmony, stability, etc., have shifted too and *we see beauty now where we could not see it before.*[20]

In some fragile sense, we have here a resolution not only to the "is-ought" problem as it manifests itself in environmental ethics, but to the basic conceptual problems surrounding Aldo Leopold's land ethics -- the "integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community" are not arbitrary values, but actually present as conditions (virtues?) in well-functioning ecosystems, and the more we understand them, the more we see their value. In disrupted and destroyed ecosystem remnants, those conditions are no longer present, and they have less value. In some fragile sense, we have the foundations for our environmental ethic, to ground

decisions about what is worth restoring (and preserving) in the land and what is not.

How fragile? Very fragile. Consider this comment from George Gaylord Simpson's Attending Marvels: A Patagonian Journal:

> Like almost all wild creatures, ostriches are always diseased. In every one of the many we opened, the intestines were choked with worms, and external parasites are equally abundant. Since this condition is the rule, perhaps it should not be considered as a sort of disease but as a normal ostrich condition, and the animals may be thought of as small migratory worlds, densely populated.[21]

What, exactly, is the individual, and what the community? And where are the values? Following Aristotle, we can make sense of the value of a "healthy, thriving ostrich," growing from egg to maturity well-nourished, active, free of all parasites or other disease, happy and beautiful, to complete the picture. Curing disease or eliminating other individual conditions that get in the way of that goal is no more than realizing, or actualizing, the natural ostrich. We would be doing no more than restoring nature if, discovering a diseased ostrich, we gave it medicine for worms, flea power for its skin, and extra vitamins and antibiotics to fend off any

remaining ailments. Then it could present itself as "healthy ostrich," pure and simple.

Or could it? Apparently the "rule" here is that when we see an ostrich, we are actually looking at a traveling ecosystem for smaller forms of life. No doubt they have subsisted there for much of the ostrich's life. What is their moral status? Are they not as natural as the ostrich? And are the worming tablets, then, not the moral equivalent of clearcutting an ancient grove, destroying habitat in the name of some value that has nothing to do with what is natural for this bird? Our preference for ostriches with bright eyes and clear intestines, over the sickly ones found in nature, may be simply the naturalist equivalent of our historic preference for manicured parks over wilderness. It may be that we just need education: not to prefer ostriches to worms, or worms to the microbes that eventually destroy them. Perhaps there is no place to draw the line between the individual and the ecosystem. Where is the "natural" place to stop?

But that kind of thinking, of course, opens of a Humean Pandora's Box. Beavers are evolved beings, their legendary skills and industry one of the finest of the "stored achievements" of the natural world. And their dams are as natural as they are; beavers that did not build dams would not, in essence, be beavers. But we have exactly the same

evidence (no more than prolonged observation of the normal behavior of the species) to conclude that the Shopping Mall is natural, as one of the natural constructions of a species (humanity) that has equally evolved over time. It is essentially human to build, something; we cannot be sure than a humanoid species that had no conception of the Shopping Mall would for that reason alone not be human, but we can say with certainty that the Mall (along with the acres of asphalt parking lot surrounding it) is as natural a part of the human condition as any Amazonian Indian Village or neolithic farm.

The attempt to establish a foundation for the discussion of the environmental ethic, then, ends in a paradox. We wanted to conduct this inquiry in two steps: first, what is "natural"?, and the second, more difficult, why should we value it? We have obtained, somewhat to our surprise, several decent accounts of why we should value it: we should value it for the complexity of its accomplishment, which commands our respect; for the beauty discovered in its complex order, which informs and raises our standard of beauty generally, for the love we have for it as our own community, and for its general instrumental value to all organisms, including ourselves, in making possible our functional integration and our survival. We value *in* nature

what we value it for, and try to preserve and restore: its stability and its integrity.

What has eluded us to this point is an account of the "natural" that might be put on an objective basis. We have, at the present stage of the search, no way to distinguish in respect to "naturalness" between the ostrich and its worms, or, for that matter, between a cathedral grove of redwoods and a Shopping Mall. We may be reduced to saying that the beauty found in certain orderly natural systems just *is* the value we were looking for, and we will judge all purportedly natural systems by the criterion of beauty. The criterion of "beauty," of course, if not carefully defined for the purpose, throws us back on subjective grounds. Is "unspoiled" nature, i.e., whatever there was before humans tampered with it, more beautiful than a planned and tended park? I doubt that the majority of the human race would say that it was. Experience suggests, in fact, that a certain amount of educational experience is essential even to find the woods more beautiful than the Mall. The criterion of beauty does allow us to prefer the ostrich to its worms, of course. But is even that preference only learned, and would not further education show us the loveliness in worms? As our understanding of the beautiful is contracted to Malls by lack of education, so it can be extended to worms by further education.

This is an odd home to reach after an odder odyssey of values. We started (as a species) seeing nature only as matter without form -- structureless building materials waiting for us to create form, to put the materials to use in agriculture and industry. At some point within the last century, we began to study nature through the eyes of biologists and ecologists (recovering an Aristotelean perspective), as a house already built, whose architecture we meant to understand. "Nature" became a magnificent pattern to be appreciated by the observant scientist, even if, as above, much of the order, integrity, beauty and stability that the scientists found was imported from the founding assumptions of the sciences themselves. And the sciences did not have the only or last word on the subject. "Nature," artifact of scientific method, became equally an artifact of literature, poetry, and ultimately philosophy, a construction worthy of admiration, preservation and restoration because of its richness (diversity), its beauty (order), and above all its primeval innocence. In the absence of the human imprint, the Romantics found freedom from the bustle, greed, and exploitation of industrial life -- in a real sense, freedom from sin. Nature, from being merely a pile of raw materials for human use, became for the Romantics (and remains for us) worthy of

reverence just because of, and insofar as it retains, its freedom from human influence and control.

Then what is "natural," deserving of preservation and restoration? At least two meanings of the term, equally justified, are held in tension at this point: (1) whatever *is*, human or otherwise, since all is of nature, including the Mall; (2) what is *except* that which is human, i.e., natural creatures exclusive of humans, whose existence represents an achieved value and who deserve our help, or at least forbearance, for that reasons; the land, itself, natural ecosystems, *exclusive* of human artifacts. Given that humans, and human activity, are as natural as anything else, excluding them is irrational. But including them, Malls and all, leaves us with an environmental ethic empty of content.

Let us review. When we started out to examine our commitment to the restoration of nature and the ethics of environmental relations, we assumed that by "nature" we meant to exclude at least the Shopping Mall, and it is not reassuring to find it rearing its head in that first ethic as candidate for protection. The second is certainly in accord with our intuitive starting point, for we surely assumed that preserving and restoring nature meant keeping or reviving animals and environmental structures that interest us -- that structure our history as a people and fire our imaginations -- and that *humans have,*

verifiably, disturbed by poaching, clearcutting, or infringement of habitat. We want the restoration of (for instance) whales and big fish, wolves, ostriches, salt marshes, redwood forests, prairies and buffalo.

But a justification for this position is very elusive, absent some subjective standard of beauty to human eyes or interest to small children. For now it seems that Nature cares not whether the bays and sounds of the coastal waters are populated by large interesting fish or the swarms of microbes that take over when sewage destroys the oxygen supply, and is just as happy with the variety of fresh water plants that take over when the salt marsh has lost its saltiness, and hence its peculiar natural community. Nature is indeed bioegalitarian, and we cannot derive from the succession of organisms and ecosystems any point which is approved, or good, toward which we might aim our efforts to "restore" it. Let us add one correction: Nature is *eco*egalitarian, indifferent among states of being; we cannot even find in Nature an injunction to rescue living things, of any kind, from a forest fire or volcano, for that is how populations decrease, leaving niches for others. In short, from the above, nature stubbornly *is*, resisting all attempts to find oughts anywhere.

Then the second position -- Nature is whatever is, whatever happens, however it happens, *except for the effects of human presence and activity,*

which are not natural, or anti-natural -- is our only alternative. Note that it is no more tenable than anything else, if we focus on the land only. Whatever the state of the land just before human beings tromped all over it, we have no reason to select *that* condition of the ever-changing land as "natural," more than any other of the thousand states of the land before the humans got there. To get to the "land ethic," we must, apparently arbitrarily, adopt misanthropy itself as our focus and touchstone: Nature is, in the end, defined in terms of the *un*natural, that is, *as contrasted to* human activity and effect. [22] Whatever human beings can be kept away from, is nature preserved; restoring nature means removing or eradicating the signs of human presence, whatever they may be.

The imperative to restore nature, then, in order to make sense at all, commits us to the claim that human presence by itself, whatever its causes, is taint. Entailed is the conclusion that all human activity (save that of restoration) is *ipso facto* evil in the sight of Nature. Then humans, when they touch nature, sin; and the drama of restoration is one of repentance and, just possibly, redemption. Our next task is to analyze that sin.

II. Sin

The logical entailment of the imperative to restore nature, then, is the conviction of sin for all the human race. Nature is pristine, in this reading, when it is untouched -- specifically by humans. No other species is similarly excluded, save those particularly associated with human operations (dogs, etc.), and only because of that association. Nature is pure, and humans, sinful, taint it. What is the nature of that sin? There are three possibilities.

(1) We have sinned through ignorance. We had no idea how our natural activities were damaging nature; what we needed was more scientific information. We are now bending every effort to redeem the damage that was inadvertantly done, and to adopt new, wiser, ways of using nature's resources in the future. The goal is one of "sustainable development," a condition which, unlike the uncontrolled growth of the past, will allow us to live without harming natural structures or using resources faster than we can replace them. This goal will have to be achieved by conservation (an end to wasteful practices in acquisition of natural materials, taking no more than grows), recycling (an end to wasteful practices in the disposal of trash, reusing everything that can be reused), development of substitutes for products that damage the environment (CFCs, carcinogenic chemicals), and above all

development of alternatives to fossil fuels for energy. The technological demand is very high, but should be our first priority. Once the technological breakthroughs have been achieved, we will be able to live indefinitely in harmony with nature.

The message here is unremittingly hopeful: we just made a mistake, we're learning how to do better, and next time we will get it right, through the achievements of science and technology. This analysis of the sin that led to the paving of paradise is, as we would expect, the favored one for the halls of government and the business community, especially since it calls so clearly for the exercise of our ancient virtues, technical ingenuity and a cheerful activism.

(2) On the second analysis, that last is precisely what is wrong with the first analysis. On this understanding, we have sinned through *hybris*, pride, arrogance, the use of power -- specifically *male* power -- to exploit. It is the exploitative and power-wielding androcentric society itself that must be stopped. We will not be able to address human exploitation of nature until we stop all the other forms of careless and brutal exploitation: the exploitation of third world countries by first world countries, of peaceful countries by warlike ones, of people of color by white people, of the poor by the rich, of animals by humans, and centrally, of women

by men. Until we do, all technological fixes will only land us deeper in environmental destruction. The remedy for exploitation is not more manipulation, but respect. All of these exploitations, by the way, are connected. The same characters continually reappear as the exploiters: the white European/North American men who effectively ran the world until the present day. It is their dominance that must be broken; the entire "ecofeminist" movement is dedicated to breaking it, and to establishing a new order of relationships among humans and between humans and others.[23]

Reformation in this case is considerably more elaborate than in the first analysis. It will entail at least an analysis of *hybris*, and a recognition on the part of the decisionmakers that *hybris*, not excusable ignorance, is the source of our difficulties with the environment. A call for revolution is futile, since the domination that must be abolished is a domination of *all* the powerless by *all* the powerful. No revolution could succeed under these conditions, especially since the powerful are quite willing to accept, and co-opt, any leaders who emerge among the powerless. So the powerful themselves, faced with the inevitable end of their empire in any case (environmental ruin will end their domination if nothing else does first), must come to the recognition of the exploitative and reactionary features of their

society, must renounce them, and cooperate in the restructuring of our institutions to abolish exploitation once and for all. An entirely new ethic of governance will extend equal respect to all, regardless of race, color, creed, gender, culture or preferences, wealth or species. Once that ethic, and the institutions appropriate to it, are in place, genuine progress can be made in preserving the environment.

(3) The third analysis goes to the heart of the matter: the problem is with the relationship of all humans to all nature, and the sin lies in loss of reverence for the natural world, loss of a sense of being a part of a larger -- and superior -- whole. The "deep ecology" movement springs from a profound sense of this loss, and an attempt to spell out what would be needed to recover the appropriate human-ecosystem relation. The platform of deep ecology is simple enough: "The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman Life on Earth have value in themselves. . . . These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes."[24] Included in that intrinsic value are "the richness and diversity of life forms; only vital needs give humans the right to reduce this richness and diversity."[25] The implications of "flourishing," in the steps that are to be taken -- including a significant "reduction of the human population, decreased interference with the nonhuman world, a change in

economic and technological structures, and an ideological change in the direction of an emphasis on life quality" -- are nothing short of staggering.[26] Yet they are worth examining, if only for the illumination they throw on the real state of environmental philosophy.

For this school, or rather, this informal collection of thinkers, both analyses so far are inadequate. The first, agreed, is simply more of the same exploitation, save more wisely applied so that it may last longer. The second, however, is not much better. It addresses only the issues among humans, then extends as an afterthought to the natural world.[27] Not surprisingly, when it includes the natural world it includes the wrong parts of it in the wrong way. It extends from rights of African-Americans to rights of Women to rights of Animals, as it were, in the same breath, and then is ready to extend to animals (farm animals and pets first) the same respect for individuality and rights that white American humans presently enjoy. But we never wanted to include animals individually. Protecting the individual animal (white-tailed deer, for instance) can be detrimental to nature as a whole, and protecting domesticated animals -- the artificially spawned cows, horses, and small predators of our houses -- is patently absurd. What needs protection is the whole of nature, the entire biosphere, of which

we are a part. Our dogs and cats do as much damage to that as they can, although not as much as our cars. We need to relearn, not equality of power, but subjection, *subjecthood*, as a precondition of citizenship, a sense of being a part, and a very inferior part, of a natural scheme to which we owe loyalty, respect, and deference. In that understanding we can reach that "self-realization appropriate to a part of a whole and a member of a biotic community."[28]

Given the scope, and kind, of the problem, the second analysis seems more adequate than the first and the third more adequate than both of them. Technology is, after all, more of the same kind of power that has brought us to this pass. If it resides in the same hands as before, we have no reason to think that, push come to shove, it will not be used to destroy nature in the name of human gain. So the first analysis is inadequate, even disingenuous: those who have done the harm ask for more time and money to spend on yet more expensive toys and means of modification of the environment, devices which, as the scientific experts in power, they alone will be able to use.

But from the perspective of the ecologist, the second analysis, the political diagnosis and prescription, is not much of an improvement. Surely, women feel oppressed, and maybe our

political structures should be modified to lessen that oppression. But political justice between the sexes, even world wide, would not change anything for nature. Possibly worldwide economic justice, a genuine sharing of the goods of this world among people of all colors, wealth, and state of technological advance, would indeed modify our impact on nature, but not for the better: the wealthiest people in the world have the worst environmental impact, and to turn the entire population of the world into equals of ourselves in standard of living -- i.e., in consumption and pollution patterns -- would destroy the earth's environment in much less time than it will take with the present injustices in place. From the perspective of Nature, the second analysis is so much political whining, addressed to the holders of power by those who would like to take their places, with no prospect at all of restoring nature, or even of addressing the problem of how to do it.

The third analysis rings true. Human sin is neither ignorance, nor the simple type of *hybris* that encourages the powerful to oppress the powerless by a simple logic of domination[29] of their own species. The sin must be identified as a peculiar form of matricide, or parasitic murder: we are children of earth, and can live only as a portion of the life of the land, yet we are destroying it for our own short-term

gains and short-sighted objectives. We are like the cancer, spawned within the body as a normal part of the body's community, suddenly gone berserk and destructive, displacing all other members of the community, depriving them of resources, strangling them with poisons. We have no right to do this. The only way to restore nature, from this perspective, is to retreat, and to withdraw our powers to do harm, like a cancer in remission. This will entail, over time (but not too long a time) a real reduction of the human population, the restoration of species to the fullest possible richness and diversity, a public policy of ecoegalitarianism. Strong measures must then be taken to cut human pollution to zero, end the use of fossil fuels, and recover an environmentally sound way of living, possibly by learning some of the lessons that the hunter-gatherers have to teach us. *So* drastic are the measures, as a matter of fact, that we can safely assume that no one will ever adopt them. But is this line of thought then condemned indefinitely to irrelevance or impracticality? For it would be a shame to lose track of its insights.

From the point of view of adequacy of scope, from the perspective of the land, then, the first analysis is worthless, the second wrongly aimed, and the third accurate. Yet from the point of view of workable solutions, the order is the reverse: the

technological improvements we can seek immediately, for whatever good they will do; political changes can be brought about more slowly, although, again, their effect is unclear. The deep ecology movement may have accomplished its only attainable objective just by pointing out to the rest of us that our "solutions" are not at all the promised panacea, but may be contributing more to the problems they were meant to solve.

It is not clear how the normative ethics of the environment might bid us to proceed in such compromised circumstances: to hold out for the truer vision, at whatever cost in time and money (and lost opportunities for amelioration)? Or to adopt the mildly ameliorative solution, risking distraction from the main problems? The situation is not unique to environmental ethics. It shows up in medical ethics, in the practice of less-than-ideal medicine: do you refuse to participate in surgery conducted in badly ordered circumstances, where sterility cannot be guaranteed, or in procedures like abortions where there may be powerful non-medical arguments against the procedure? Or do you participate, on grounds that your expertise can improve the patient's chances of recovery?

In the field of applied ethics, such dilemmas are known collectively as the dilemmas of "the Jesuits on the Beach": when the Yankee slave ship

captains met the Arab slavers on the beaches of Africa to carry on their wretched trade, the Jesuits were there to baptize as many of the Africans as they could, especially those that were near death, to argue for leaving women and children behind, and to lobby for better conditions for the captive slaves. The condition for their work was that they not ever, there or anywhere else, protest the practice of slavery itself. Given that they did good -- more good for the slaves, certainly, than anyone else was doing -- it is certain that their work could be justified. But was it the best that could be done? We did not know then, and we do not know now, whether that particular compromise was the right or best one. It would appear that the same uncertainty will torment the field of environmental ethics for the forseeable future.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988, p. 1.

[2] Leopold's A Sand County Almanac (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949) is acknowledged as the foundation, and inspiration, of the contemporary literature on environmental ethics.

[3] Paul Taylor, Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986.

[4] Eugene Hargrove, Foundations of Environmental Ethics. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989.

[5] The collection of essays by J. Baird Callicott, In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), is one of the most useful works I have found in this field.

[6] Holmes Rolston III, Philosophy Gone Wild. Buffalo: Prometheus Press, 1986; Environmental Ethics, op. cit. supra.

[7] David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, Book 3, part 1, section 1.

[8] Principia Ethica, 1903. See, for a clear exposition, Paul Taylor's Principles of Ethics, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1975, chapter 8, pp. 181 ff. J. Baird Callicott insists that Moore does not

mean (by his "fallacy") what Hume means by his objection; see Callicott, "Hume's *Is/Ought* Dichotomy and the Relation of Ecology to Leopold's Land Ethic," Environmental Ethics, 4 (1977): 163-174. He seems to be in a minority on that point. See John Rodman, "The Liberation of Nature?" Inquiry, 10 (1977), 83:131, who puts the point in its original metaphysical terms: "First, there is the powerful prohibition of modern culture against confusing 'is' and 'ought', the 'natural' with the 'moral' -- in short the taboo against committing 'the naturalistic fallacy.'" Objections to the confusion of nature with human prescription, *physis* with *nomos*, go back to Antiphon, and have little to do with peculiarities of Moore's systems.

[9] Aristotle, Metaphysics, Book Theta, 1049a 10 (tr. Richard Hope). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966, p. 190.

[10] Ibid., 1050a10, p. 193.

[11] Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1098a15 (tr. Martin Ostwald). New York: Macmillan Pub. Co., 1962, p. 17.

[12] See John Rawls, A Theory of Justice. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971, pp. 92ff.

[13] The parallel is similar (not identical) to that of Constitution (of the state) and life-principle (of the individual) traced in Plato's Republic.

[14] Sand County Almanac, pp. 224-225.

[15] See also Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair," in In Defense of the Land Ethic. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.

[16] Rolston, op cit., p. 128.

[17] A Treatise of Human Nature, Book 3, part 3, section 1.

[18] Callicott, "Hume's *Is/Ought* Dichotomy," op cit.

[19] For better or for worse, as far as the history of philosophy is concerned. See E. A. Burtt, The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science.

[20] Rolston, "Is There an Ecological Ethic?"in Rolston, op. cit., pp. 19-20. Emphasis added after first occurrence.

[21] G. G. Simpson, Attending Marvels: A Patagonian Journal (1934). Reprint edition, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. 199-200. Cited in Allen Carlson's book review of Rolston's "Philosophy Gone Wild," in Environmental Ethics 8 (2): 163-177 (Summer 1986).

[22] Baird Callicott suggested this at one point. ("Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair," in In Defense of the Land Ethic. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989, p. 27), but later reversed himself.

[23] The parallels between the exploitation (arrogant subordination, casual use, degradation and rape) of women and that of nature has received a fair amount of attention in the last decade. Two collections of essays focus on the connections between environmentalism and feminism, Leonie Caldecott and Stephanie Leland, eds., Reclaim the Earth: Women Speak Out for Life on Earth, London: The Women's Press, 1983; and Judith Plant, ed., Healing our Wounds: The Power of Ecological Feminism, Boston: New Society Publishers, 1989. Also, Val Plumwood, "Ecofeminism: An Overview and Discussion of Positions and Arguments," Australasian Journal of Philosophy, supplement to vol. 64 (June 1986), 120-137; Karen J. Warren, "Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections," Environmental Ethics, 9 (1987), 3-21; Warren, "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism," Environmental Ethics, 12 (1990), 125-146.

[24] Bill Devall and George Sessions, Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered. Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985, p. 70.

[25] Jim Cheney, review of Arne Naess, Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy (tr. and rev. David Rothenberg). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Environmental Ethics, 13 (1991), 263-273, at 264.

[26] Ibid.

[27] An interesting debate has already begun among the ecofeminists and the deep ecologists, on the relative inadequacy of their accounts. Ariel Kay Salleh, "Deeper than Deep Ecology: The Eco-Feminist Connection," Environmental Ethics, 6 (1984), 339-45; Michael Zimmerman, "Feminism, Deep Ecology, and Environmental Ethics," Environmental Ethics, 9 (1987), 21-44; Jim Cheney, "Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology," Environmental Ethics, 9 (1987), 115-145.

[28] Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary," Inquiry, 16 (1973), 95-100; "Intuition, Intrinsic Value and Deep Ecology," The Ecologist, 14 (1984).

[29] Karen J. Warren, "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism," op cit.

BIOGRAPHY

Lisa Newton is professor of Philosophy, director of the Program in Applied Ethics, and director of the Program in Environmental Studies at Fairfield University, Fairfield, Connecticut.

In addition to classroom teaching and professional research, she conducts an extensive practice in consulting, lecturing and writing. Her most recent projects are the preparation of the companion volumes and course work for the "Ethics in America" television series, the development of presentations on ethical dilemmas of the natural environment, and the editorship of Taking Sides: Controversial Issues of Business Ethics (second edition). Dr. Newton has authored more than 50 articles for professional journals, primarily in political philosophy, environmental ethics, business and professional ethics.

Dr. Newton graduated from Columbia University with a B.S. degree in 1962, Magna Cum Laude, with Honors in Philosophy, Phi Beta Kappa. Continuing at Columbia on a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, she received her Ph.D. in 1967. She has been a member of the faculty at Fairfield University since 1969.

CENTER PUBLICATIONS

VOLUME I

No. 1, October, 1987
Ethical Norms in Science
Rachelle D. Hollander
National Science Foundation

No. 2, January, 1988
Ethics in Academia
Diether H. Haenicke
Western Michigan University

No. 3, May, 1988
Thoughts on Keeping My Mouth Shut
David H. Smith
Poynter Center
Indiana University

No. 4, June, 1988
Affirmative Action Defended
Laurence Thomas
Oberlin College

VOLUME II

No. 1, November, 1988
Biomedical Ethics in the Soviet Union
Richard DeGeorge
University of Kansas

No. 2, January, 1989
Do Professors Need Professional Ethics as Much as Doctors and Lawyers?
James W. Nickel
University of Colorado

No. 3, February, 1989
Ethical Dilemmas in Health Care:
Is Society Sending a Mixed Message?
John V. Hartline, M.D.
Neonatology, Kalamazoo, Michigan

No. 4, March, 1989
Codes of Ethics in Busines
Michael Davis
Illinois Insititute of Technology

No. 5, May, 1989
Should I (Legally) Be My Brother's Keeper?
Gilbert Geis
University of California--Irvine

VOLUME III

No. 1, October, 1989
Surrogate Parenting: The Michigan Legislation
Lucille Taylor, Majority Counsel
Michigan State Senate
Paul Denenfeld, Legal Director
ACLU Fund of Michigan

No. 2, December, 1989
Morality Versus Slogans
Bernard Gert
Dartmouth College

No. 3, February, 1990
Ethical Reasoning and Analysis: The Elements
Martin Benjamin
Michigan State University

No. 4, April 1990
Women's Dilemma: Is it Reasonable to be Rational?
Harriet Baber
University of San Diego

VOLUME IV

No. 1, July, 1990
Higher-Order Discrimination
Adrian M. S. Piper
Wellesley College

No. 2, November, 1991
Television Technology and Moral Literacy
Clifford G. Christians
University of Illinois -- Urbana

No. 3, May, 1991
Virtue and the Health Professions
Janet Pisaneschi
Western Michigan University

VOLUME V

No. 1, November, 1991
Owning and Controlling Technical Information
Vivian Weil
Illinois Institute of Technology

WINTER 1992 PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

Jan 8 **Alasdair MacIntyre**
Department of Philosophy
University of Notre Dame
Truthfulness and Lying

Jan 31 **Alan Kogan**, Medical Director
Behavioral Medicine and the Delano Clinic, Borgess Medical Center
Kalamazoo, Michigan
Universal Health Care: Options from an Ethical Perspective

Feb 10 **John Baker**
Department of Philosophy
University College
Dublin, Ireland
Violence for Equality: A Machiavellian Perspective

Feb 18 **Daniel Coffey**, Ph.D., Broker-Owner,
RE/MAX Harbor Country
New Buffalo, Michigan
Ethics in Real Estate: Real World Dilemmas

Feb 25 **Charles Redding**, Emeritus Professor
Department of Communication
Purdue University
Ethics and the Study of Organizational Communication

Mar 19 **Jane Zembaty**
Department of Philosophy
University of Dayton
Lying: A Failure of Autonomy and Self-Respect

Mar 27 **Joseph Ellin**
Department of Philosophy
Western Michigan University
Should We Use Nazi Data?

Mar 31 **Matthew Seeger**
Department of Communication
Wayne State University
Crisis Communication: Bhopal-Union Carbide Industrial Accident

Apr 7 **Eva Mozes Kor**
How I Survived the Mengele Twin Experiments

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the Ethics Center is open to anyone interested. There is no membership fee.

======================================

Please enroll me as a member of the WMU Center for the Study of Ethics in Society.

Name__________________________________

Mailing Address____________________________

____

____

Institutional Affiliation_________________________

____

======================================

Send to: Center for the Study of Ethics in Society
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI 49008

The Center publishes papers of interest to its readers. Distribution is free to members. Additional copies may be obtained for $2.00 by writing to the Center.

Lithograph on Front Cover: The Oaklands, Western Michigan University

Center for the Study of Ethics in Society
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008-5022