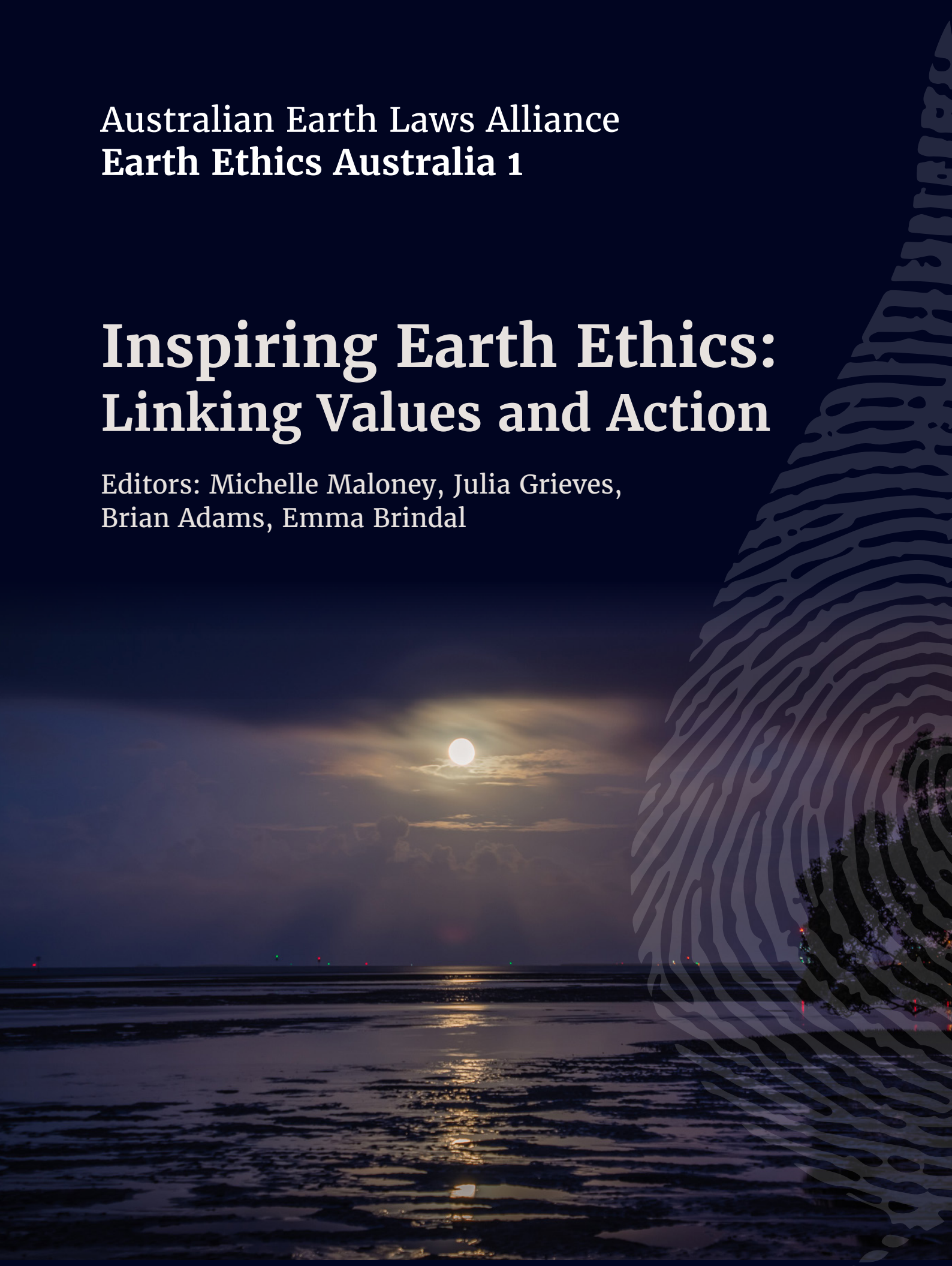
Australian Earth Laws Alliance
Earth Ethics Australia 1

Inspiring Earth Ethics: Linking Values and Action

Editors: Michelle Maloney, Julia Grieves,
Brian Adams, Emma Brindal



Michelle Maloney • Julia Grieves
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•Brisbane•

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Volume 1

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Foreward

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Australian Earth Laws Alliance

Around the world, more and more people are struggling with the impacts of climate change and escalating environmental degradation. For many, the most alarming element of this ecological crisis, and one that we are increasingly forced to deal with, is the frightening reality articulated by the now well-known 16 year old student Greta Thunberg; "everyone keeps saying climate change is an existential threat… and yet they just carry on like before"[1]. Similarly, as Freya Mathews states in her contribution to this collection: "we have had forty years of environmental ethics and the world is getting worse". Contributors to this publication have wrestled in various ways with this confronting predicament. They offer ways of meeting and responding to climate change and the ecological crisis, with creativity and insight through various articulations of Earth centred ethics.

This publication is the first produced by the Australian Earth Laws Alliance's "Earth Ethics Program", which offers a space for people to explore ideas and actions that stem from our interconnectedness with, and dependence upon, the living world. Our ethical values are critically important; the way we think about ourselves and understand our world informs the governance systems that guide our societies, so our ethical world view is a critical part of the roots for larger change. Earth ethics orient people towards recognising the interconnected systems of life that we are part of, and in turn help us reflect, make decisions and act in a way that nurtures rather than destroys the living world.

Our collective exploration of ethics is a path rich with potential for multi-site, cross-institutional dialogue, co-creation, experimentation and learning. We hope this publication may be an offering to this process and contribute to the search to reveal and live out answers to questions of how to be, how to organise; and increasingly, how to grapple with what has been lost and what is possible in these challenging times.

1 Greta Thunberg Speech; TEDex. https://www.ted.com/talks/greta_thunberg_school_strike_for_climate_save_the_world_by_changing_the_rules/transcript?language=en. Viewed 2 Aug 2019

In considering the question of what has been lost, many writers in this collection draw reference to the stark influence that dualisms - for example, humans/nature; nature/culture; mind/body - have had within post-industrial western settler-colonial society. In this context, we see that transgressions upon "nature" are much closer to home and that we are deeply implicated. These implications bring up fresh questions demanding new forms of social, political and structural redress. As suggested by Mary Graham, we have an obligation to find answers to ethical questions in a way that does not make people feel alienated, lonely and murderous.

This publication offers reflections from the areas of Aboriginal law and ethics, environmental philosophy, historical materialism, ecojustice, eco-spirituality, depth psychology, activism and the arts. We hope the collection stimulates new ideas and conversations.

Michelle Maloney and Julia Grieves

September 2019

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I

A Relationist Ethos: Aboriginal law and ethics

Mary Graham
Adjunct Associate Professor, University of Queensland, and a member of the Kombumerri Peoples

Australian Aboriginal peoples' culture is ancient[1] and has made certain observations over many millennia about the nature of Nature, spirit, and being human. This in turn has developed a unique Aboriginal logic and culture. The most basic questions for any human group, despite advances in technology, have not changed much over time; they include: how do we live together (in a particular area, nation, or on earth), without killing one another off? How do we live without substantially damaging the environment? Why do we live? We need to find the answer to these questions in a way that does not make people feel alienated, lonely or murderous.

Aboriginal law and ethics are intertwined, and Aboriginal law is very different to Western notions of law. As stated by eminent First Nations Law Professor, Irene Watson:

> "First Nations Peoples' law is of the beginning: of the first songs, sung by the ancestors. When the first steps were walked across the ruwe, country was sung into creation. Law conceived as a way of living is difficult to write about and cannot simply be described or easily translated into a foreign language that is empty of the ideas that our law ways carry. Our law was not written in the way in which the West conceives of writing. Law was painted in ceremonial design and symbols were marked on boundary markers, identifying traditional owners and their ngaitjis. *The differences between Nunga and non-Aboriginal legal systems are so extensive that there is no basis upon which comparison can be drawn* …… (Aboriginal) law is the essential basis of social conduct: respect, reciprocity and caring for country to name a few. These ethical principles convey the essential nature of the law."[2] (emphasis added)

1 Aboriginal people know they have lived in Australia since time immemorial. Current western scientific knowledge says Aboriginal people have lived in Australia for at least 60,000 years – around 2, 500 generations

2 Irene Watson, "Aboriginal Peoples, Colonialism and International Law: Raw Law", (Routledge 2015), p.22

A paper as short as this cannot hope to do justice to summarising the complexity of Aboriginal law and ethics, but it can provide a brief overview of key concepts. There are two basic precepts of Aboriginal law: the land is the source of the law and you are not alone.

"The Land is the source of the Law"

In Aboriginal law, the land is a sacred entity, not property or real estate; it is the great mother of all humanity and is the source of life and law.

In Aboriginal law, **the two most important kinds of relationship in life are, firstly, those between land and people and, secondly, those amongst people themselves, the second always being contingent upon the first**. The land, and how we treat it, is what determines our humanness. Because land is sacred and must be looked after, the relationship between people and land becomes the template for society and social relations. Therefore all meaning comes from land, or "country."

Non-indigenous people often know about our connection to country through a concept known as 'the Dreaming'. This English term – 'the Dreaming' or 'Dreamtime' - was created by Westerners studying Aboriginal people in Australia in the late 1800s.[3] Using this term to encapsulate the complexity of Aboriginal law, religion and culture is simplistic and insufficient, but the concept entered the English language through the work of English speaking anthropologists and has 'stuck'. 'The Dreaming' is often described as the time of creation, but as Nicholls explains:

> (it) isn't something that has been consigned to the past but is a lived daily reality … it incorporates creation and other land based narratives, social process including kinship regulations, morality and ethics. This complex concept informs people's economic, cognitive, affective and spiritual lives"[4]

Nicholls goes on to explain that there is in fact, no universal, 'pan-Aboriginal' word to represent the complex beliefs and legal systems of the nations and peoples in the continent now known as Australia. Before 1788, there were more than 500 autonomous nations across the continent, with approximately 250 separate Aboriginal languages and between 600 and 800 dialects.[5]

> The Warlpiri people of the Tanami Desert describe their complex of religious beliefs as the Jukurrpa. …. The Kija people of the East Kimberley use the term Ngarrankarni (sometimes spelled Ngarrarngkarni); while the Ngarinyin people (previously spelled Ungarinjin, inter alia) people speak of the Ungud (or Wungud). "Dreaming" is called Manguny in Martu Wangka, a Western Desert language spoken in the Pilbara region of

3 For an overview of how the term 'the Dreaming' entered the English language, see Christine Nicholls, *'Dreamtime' and 'The Dreaming': who dreamed up these terms?* The Conversation, 23 January 2014 – online https://theconversation.com/dreamtime-and-the-dreaming-an-introduction-20833

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

> Western Australia; and some North-East Arnhem Landers refer to the same core concept as Wongar – to name but a handful."[6]

It's important to acknowledge and respect the complexity of legal systems that have evolved across hundreds of nations over thousands of years, and rather than analyse the flawed concept of 'the Dreaming', I offer some key concepts that can build understanding of Aboriginal law and ethics.

A fundamental element of Aboriginal first laws, the laws between people and land, is the law of obligation. As the land created us, so we are always going to be obligated to it. Not just our life but our *existence*, the whole of our existence and all meaning that underpins and surrounds it, that lives through us. All the flora and fauna, every living thing, all the landforms and features of the land, they are all our ancestors, because they all came before us. They helped us emerge and helped us to become human and to stay human, to develop us further as human beings and to create culture. Literally the grass we walk on, the soil we walk on, the plants and animals we eat – these all made us human and gave us meaning and identity. And it all came about through our relationship with the land.

This deep relationship with the land created the fundamental nature of our law and culture, and our logic and way of thinking: **our relationist ethos**. Because we are always obliged to the land, always thankful for it, we are in turn obliged to look after it. This produces reciprocity – the land looks after us, we look after it, it looks after us, we look after it, and right across the country, North, South, East and West, all the different groups, they all have their own particular relationship with their particular part of the land, their country.

Although Aboriginal people across Australia are westernized to different degrees, our peoples' identity is essentially always embedded in land and defined by their relationships to it and to other people. The sacred web of connections includes not only kinship relations and relations to the land, but also relations to all living things.

"You are not alone in the world"

As noted above, the two most important kinds of relationship in life are, firstly, those between land and people and, secondly, those amongst people themselves, the second always being contingent upon the first.

These "second laws", the laws between people, are also built on the relationist ethos. Aboriginal Law is grounded in the perception of a psychic level of natural behaviour, the behaviour of natural entities. Aboriginal people maintain that humans are not alone. They are *connected and made* by way of relationships with a wide range of beings, and it is thus of prime importance to maintain and strengthen these relationships.

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6 Ibid.

Aboriginal people have a kinship system that was and still is organised into clans. One's first loyalty is to one's own clan group. It does not matter how Western and urbanised Aboriginal people have become, this kinship system never changes. It has been damaged by colonisation, which led to cultural genocide, Stolen Children and westernisation, but has not been altered substantially. Every clan group has its own explanation of existence – as mentioned earlier, this is sometimes referred to, simplistically, as the clan's 'Dreaming'. **In Aboriginal law and culture, we believe that a person finds their individuality within the group**. To behave as if you are a discrete entity or a conscious isolate is to limit yourself to being an observer in an observed world.

Over vast periods of time, Aboriginal people invested most of their creative energy in trying to understand what makes it possible for people to act purposively, or to put it another way, what is it exactly that makes us human? What Aboriginal people have done is to map the great repertoire of human feeling to such an extent that its continuities with the psychic life of the wider world become apparent.

There are four essential attributes to the relationist ethos – a custodial ethic, locality, autonomy and balance.

Custodial Ethic

Aboriginal law and ethics involve daily practice. They are not taught in abstract; they have to be applied to all aspects of life, every day. First, we look after the land – this is the template for society and how the law of obligation comes into being; and this is how we know how to look after each other. **Ethics only come from having empathy and from looking after something outside ourselves**.

The understanding that the land is the source of the law is so ingrained in Aboriginal law that much of the law known from stories, paintings and dance was actually devoted to "second laws"; teaching us how to live by the law and how to live together. Aboriginal law doesn't try to change human behaviour, it accepts the full range of human emotions, flaws and actions. But it does set out how it should all be handled, in order to build peace and stability.

Locality

The second element of the relationist ethos – locality – is interwoven with the first. Locality is everything for Aboriginal people. In European culture, Descartes said "I think, therefore I am". If there were an Aboriginal equivalent, it would be: "I am located, therefore I am."

Locality refers to peoples' connection not just to country or nature generally, but to the region they come from, the particularity of their land, the 'traditional estate' of a clan or language group. Identity and character come from the land itself, the shape and the form of it; whether it is desert, rainforest, saltwater, freshwater, mountains, or plains, every part of the land has its own character. So the character of the land is the basis of the character of the people, not just in terms of our relationist ethos, but in the actual character of the people.

Western science has now demonstrated what Aboriginal people have always known: that our people have an ancient connection to particular parts of the continent. Human genome testing has shown Aboriginal people have been continuously present in their home regions for at least 50,000 years. This is some of the longest continual connection to country known to exist anywhere in the world and has resulted in people developing specific characteristics connected to their regions – such as desert dwellers having a greater physical capacity to cope with freezing night-time temperatures than other peoples.[7]

This ancient, stable connection to country has many implications for our culture. An example that many European descendants find especially intriguing is that in Aboriginal law, there is no concept of long-term warfare, and there is no concept of taking another group's land. There were rules of engagement for conflict between families, between clans, between nations – there were even rules about how to manage your traditional enemies. But the idea of someone invading or taking control of someone else's country is totally unheard of. It is not even found in Aboriginal creation or 'Dreamtime' stories.

Autonomy

A third essential element of the relationist ethos is autonomy. The concept is connected to land, locality and other aspects of Aboriginal law. In Aboriginal law, every person is an autonomous being; no one can be enslaved or treated as a lesser being. And this extends into all aspects of society. So, for example, the argument goes something like: "My family, my community, is an autonomous one. The one next door is also autonomous, and our right to autonomy must not transgress the other one's autonomy". And while this didn't prevent conflict, the law contained the rules for handling conflict, without wiping each other out, and without taking each other's land.

This strong foundation of autonomy is responsible for an important element of Aboriginal governance and society – the absence of hierarchies. In clans and language groups, everyone had their place in the collective and no one was more important than anyone else. Governance structures included elders who had authority that was earned through proper conduct – by following the law. Authority and power were separated, so that the cohesion and strength of the group was always maintained.

Balance

Like many other ancient cultures, Aboriginal societies focussed on balance and harmony. People sought balance in everything: between people and the land; between men and women, with men's law and women's law; between different families and clan groups. In a relationist ethos, the task is to nurture, practice and grow this balance. In Aboriginal law, it is understood that you build,

7 See for example: https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2017-03-09/dna-confirms-aboriginals-have-long-lasting-connection-to-country/8336284

or grow, your knowledge and proper conduct every day; and you grow your attachment to place and personhood, your identity and your autonomy.

To work toward restoring and maintaining balance takes many complex rules of interaction and engagement. One rule that, in many ways, is in stark contrast to today's 'celebrity' or 'social media' culture, is the rule that ego must be managed. In Aboriginal law, ego is considered to be a volatile substance; one that should be respected and acknowledged (not suppressed as such), but which needs active management and containment. To allow an individual's ego to override the wellbeing of the family, clan or community, is to allow volatility, instability and unfairness.

Old Aboriginal people have often stated that non-Aboriginal people in Australia "have no Dreaming", that is, they have no collective spiritual identity, and no true understanding of having a correct or "proper" relationship with land, or Earth ethic. Many non-Aboriginal Australians recognise this themselves and are working, planning and creating, quite often in dialogue with Aboriginal people, to change this situation.

II

Understanding Historical and Contemporary Ethics and Earth Ethics

Graham Wood
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Introduction

This is an account of a journey from an ancient understanding of Earth Ethics, through a period of "forgetting" about the true nature of ethics by many within so-called "WEIRD" cultures, and back to a contemporary "remembering" of that ancient understanding of Earth Ethics. When compared to all of human history, the limiting of the sphere of ethical responsibility to humans is a relatively recent phenomenon. This phenomenon is due to the perceived diminishing of the connection between humans and their environment that emerged with the move from hunter-gathering to settled agriculture and the subsequent development of towns and cities that all began around 10,000 BCE. Before that humans existed in small egalitarian groups closely connected to their environment. Ethics among these humans incorporated the ethical status of the environment in which they lived. With agriculture emerged a period of human history in which the understanding of ethical responsibilities to the environment were forgotten among many humans. But other humans did not forget. Ancient understanding of humanity's ethical relationship to the environment is remembered among the Indigenous cultures of Australia, along with other Indigenous cultures of the world. Today as human impacts grow, some people are coming to realise that the perceived diminishing of the ethical connection between humans and their environment was just that, a perception, and more importantly a mistaken perception. Humanity has always been intimately connected with the environment within which it exists. Only now are members of "WEIRD" cultures realising that the sphere of ethical responsibility does not end at the boundary of the human world. Rather the sphere of ethical responsibility extends to the Earth as a whole. These humans are remembering a forgotten truth: a truth preserved by the custodians of this ancient wisdom, now being rediscovered by "WEIRD" culture under the name Earth Ethics.

WEIRD culture versus Indigenous culture

This account contrasts two ways of understanding ethics. These two ways are radically different, so much so that even the word "ethics" may not capture the meaning of both ways of understanding the subject. But one must start somewhere, so let us start with "ethics".

Ethics, as it will be understood here, is a product of what has been called WEIRD culture[1]. WEIRD culture is Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic. Members of this culture (specifically undergraduate students enrolled in psychology programs within Western universities) have represented the vast majority of participants in scientific research about human psychology, including moral psychology. The problem, as pointed out by Henrich et al, is that the moral psychology of WEIRD culture is far from representative of the moral psychology of humanity as a whole, particularly when that 'whole' is understood as including all of humanity's history.

WEIRD culture has a history, but it is a relatively short history in comparison to the history of Indigenous cultures.

As the "I" in WEIRD indicates, WEIRD culture dates back at least to the Industrial Revolution. But its ultimate origin dates back to the Neolithic Revolution with the origins of agriculture, around 10,000 BCE. It was with the beginnings of agriculture that humanity began to move away from its intimate connection with the land, and that process continued with humanity's ongoing movement into towns and cities through the industrial revolution, and up to the present day. This separation from the land is a contributing factor that has led to the creation of WEIRD culture.

In contrast to WEIRD culture are the traditional cultures of the world, and some of the oldest traditional cultures of the world are the Indigenous cultures of Australia. While WEIRD culture can be characterised by its movement away from connection with the land, the traditional Indigenous cultures of Australia have maintained a continuous connection with the land. And it is this continuous connection with the land that is at the foundation of the ethics of these cultures.

WEIRD ethics versus Earth ethics

Paralleling the process of moving away from an intimate connection with the land – that began with the Neolithic Revolution, continued through the Industrial Revolution, and is manifest today in WEIRD culture – is a change in the way the members of WEIRD cultures understand ethics. With the moving away from the land came an understanding of ethics that was human centred (or anthropocentric). Ethical relations that had previously been recognised were forgotten during this process of (perceived) separation. This human centred understanding of ethics has been expressed in a number of ways. But the common feature of them all is that the ethical realm is a realm that only concerns humans.

1 Henrich, Joseph, Steven J. Heine, and Ara Norenzayan. 2010. "The weirdest people in the world?" *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 33:61–135.

Utilitarianism is one such ethic. Utilitarianism, as characterised for example by Mill[2], is a consequentialist ethic, whereby the consequences of an action determine the ethical status of that action. Good consequences make an action (or rule) ethically right. Utilitarianism identifies the "good" with that which maximises "utility" for the greatest number of humans. Utility can be understood in a number of ways, including personal happiness or personal preferences, but Utilitarianism, is classically understood as maximising utility for humans.

Another version of human centred ethics is represented by Kant's "Categorical Imperative"[3]. In contrast to forms of "consequentialist ethics" like Utilitarianism, the Categorical Imperative is a form of "deontological ethics". It expresses an obligation that always obtains, no matter what the consequences. There are several versions of this imperative, but here consider Kant's "humanity" version: "Act in such a way as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of anyone else, always as an end and never merely as a means"[4]. Again, note that this version of the imperative only concerns humans.

A further example of human centred ethics is the "social contract tradition". The social contract as it is characterised by Hobbes[5] perhaps best illustrates the extent to which human centred ethics has lost touch with ancient understandings of ethics as involving intimate connection with the land. Hobbes' account of ethics is based on a contract made between human individuals. In order to motivate his account Hobbes imagines a "state of nature" where the life of individual humans is "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short".[6] In order to avoid this state Hobbes further imagines how individual humans choose to enter a social contract in which they give up most of their freedom in return for the protection of society. There are a number of particularly regrettable features of the Hobbesian account. First, it assumes an unrealistic picture of life in "the state of nature" as overwhelmingly negative. Second, it explicitly assumes the basis of ethics is a contract between humans, and thus excludes the non-human from ethical consideration.

There has been resistance from within WEIRD culture to conceptualizations of ethics as human centred, and two such efforts have used the rejection of the social contract tradition as a starting point. Singer notes that if the basis of ethics is the reciprocal relationship central to a contract, then one has no reason to act ethically toward entities with which one has no contract.[7] He goes on to argue that the authority of ethics should not be based on a reciprocal relationship, but rather it should be based on the "principle of the equal consideration of interest".[8] He further argues that all sentient beings have interests, and thus are all subject to the principle. But, although

2 Mill, J. S. 1987. *Utilitarianism, On Liberty and Considerations on Representative Government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Original edition, 1859.

3 Kant, Immanuel. 1785. *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals*. Translated by Jonathan Bennett: www.earlymoderntexts.com.

4 Kant, Immanuel. 1785. *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals*. Translated by Jonathan Bennett: www.earlymoderntexts.com. 29

5 Hobbes, Thomas. 1986. *Leviathan*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

6 Hobbes, Thomas. 1986. Leviathan. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 186

7 Singer, Peter. 1993. Practical Ethics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

8 Singer, Peter. 1993. Practical Ethics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 55

Singer attempts to extend the realm of ethical consideration to include all sentient beings, his approach is fundamentally incomplete. He starts with an incomplete understanding of ethics, and then attempts to expand the realm of ethics using that incomplete understanding.

The problem is that he starts in the wrong place. As mentioned above, with the movement away from a close and continuous connection with the land (associated with the transition from hunter-gatherer society to village and town-based society), came a more restricted understanding of ethics that was human centred (anthropocentric). Ethical relations that had previously been recognised were forgotten during this process of (perceived) separation. The problem is that Singer starts within that state of cultural forgetfulness, and assumes that ethics should be based on interests. Then reasonably enough, he attempts to expand the realm of ethics to all sentient organisms. But this understanding of ethics (based on interests, be they human interests, or the interests of all sentient organisms) - an understanding that might be called "sentio-centric" ethics - is still fundamentally incomplete. This is because it focuses on "interests" rather than a more ancient, and much broader, understanding of ethics.

Midgley[9] also rejects the social contract tradition but does not take the same path as Singer. Midgley understands the problem arises from a too narrow, and shallow, understanding of ethics. She recognises that the social contract tradition has effectively reduced the scope of ethics to encompass only human contractual relations, and while Singer attempts to expand ethics to include all sentient beings, Midgley recognises that the problem is much deeper. She sees that a new (or rather old) wider, and deeper, understanding of ethics is needed. Not one that understands ethics as a (contractual) duty "to" another person, but rather a (non-contractual) duty "of" living. She characterises this duty in terms of suitable and unsuitable ways of behaving, arising from an understanding of one's transitory and dependent position as part of a vast and irreplaceable whole. And importantly, she warns that one should not forget this relation.[10] This characterisation is important because "forgetting" is exactly what has happened in WEIRD culture. It is the voice of Midgley, and others like her, that reminds members of WEIRD culture of this broader, and deeper, ethical responsibility.

Of course, there is another source from which WEIRD culture can learn of the "forgotten" nature of ethics, and this is traditional Indigenus culture. I am not an Indigenous Australian so I do not presume to articulate Indigenous perspectives. Here I will simply offer the insights of Indigenous writers. Whitt et al[11] characterise a number of themes that demonstrate Indigenous ethics is not like the human centred ethics of WEIRD culture, rather it is all encompassing. One of the central themes of Indigenous ethical relationships is that of belonging: "The land and living entities which make it up are not apart from, but part of, the people. Nor is "the environment"

9 Midgley, Mary. 1995. "Duties Concerning Islands." In *Environmental Ethics*, edited by Robert Elliot, 89-103. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

10 Midgley, Mary. 1995. "Duties Concerning Islands." In *Environmental Ethics*, edited by Robert Elliot, 89-103. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 101

11 Whitt, Laurie Anne, Mere Roberts, Waerete Norman, and Vicki Grieves. 2001. "Indigenous perspectives." In *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, edited by Dale Jamieson, 3-20. Oxford: Blackwell.

something surrounding people. The relation of belonging is ontologically basic".[12] Another theme from Indigenous ethical perspectives is beholdenness: "Guardianship is a moral responsibility, an appropriate response to a sense of beholdenness .... It is the acknowledgement of a people that they are held by, and endebted to, their affiliational ties with the non-human world. These ties are as much prescriptive as descriptive: they suggest ways in which it is appropriate, or inappropriate to behave".[13]

While these ancient and ongoing ethical understandings are strong within Indigenous culture, there is recognition of these understandings in the words of Midgley:

> Duties need not be quasi-contractual relations between symmetrical pairs of rational human agents. There are all kinds of other obligations... there are suitable and unsuitable ways of behaving in given situations. People have duties as farmers, parents, consumers, forest dwellers, colonists, species members, shipwrecked mariners, tourists, potential ancestors, and actual descendants, etc. As such, it is the business of each not to forget his [or her] transitory and dependent position, the rich gifts which he [or she] has received, and the tiny part he [or she] plays in a vast, irreplaceable and fragile whole. It is remarkable that we now have to state this obvious truth as if it were new, and invent the word "ecological" to describe a whole vast class of duties.[14]

There is rich, complex, and ancient ethics at the heart of Indigenous culture. And that ethics, mostly long forgotten within WEIRD culture, is now being recognised, remembered, and heralded by the likes of Midgley. This long-forgotten ethics, re-emerging within WEIRD culture has a name: Earth Ethics.

12 Whitt, Laurie Anne, Mere Roberts, Waerete Norman, and Vicki Grieves. 2001. "Indigenous perspectives." In *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, edited by Dale Jamieson, 3-20. Oxford: Blackwell. 7

13 Whitt, Laurie Anne, Mere Roberts, Waerete Norman, and Vicki Grieves. 2001. "Indigenous perspectives." In *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, edited by Dale Jamieson, 3-20. Oxford: Blackwell. 9

14 Midgley, Mary. 1995. "Duties Concerning Islands." In *Environmental Ethics*, edited by Robert Elliot, 89-103. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 101

III

We've had forty years of environmental ethics and the world is getting worse

Freya Mathews
Adjunct Professor of Environmental Philosophy at La Trobe University

For many of us in the environment movement, it has long been clear that the ruthlessly instrumentalist and anthropocentric value-set that has shaped Western civilization and now directs the entire project of modernity around the globe is morally bankrupt, and that a more expansive, bio-inclusive and Earth-friendly moral orientation is urgently needed.

What we have *not* figured out yet is how to make this large-scale moral reorientation happen.

As a philosophical discipline, environmental ethics has, over the last forty years, played an important role in articulating and defending alternatives to the anthropocentric orientation that places humanity at the centre of the moral universe and makes human interests the yardstick for all moral considerations.

Environmental philosophers have rigorously laid out various versions of biocentrism or bio-inclusiveness in ethics, and the case for these positions has been detailed in a variety of ways - from arguments concerning the intrinsic value of non-human life to Kantian defences of living things as ends in themselves (rather than as mere means to the ends of others), to critiques of the human/nature, mind/matter, culture/nature dualisms that have framed most thinking in the Western tradition.

In addition to formulating new ethical categories such as biocentrism and the intrinsic value of non-human life, environmental philosophers in the 1980s and 1990s posed an array of foundational questions:

— Who or what is ultimately to qualify as morally significant? Living things?

— But if so, what counts as a living thing? Do individual organisms alone count as living things, or do larger living systems also count?

— In which case, how are we to decide who has moral priority when the interests of individual organisms conflict with those of systems - as when feral animals threaten the integrity of ecosystems?

— Should an environmental ethic cover *all* living things? Should plants and fungi count as morally considerable in their own right? And if so, how considerable? As considerable as animals?

— Should a distinction be drawn, morally speaking, between higher and lower animals? But which animals are higher and which lower?

— What about microbes? Single cells? Viruses? Species? And natural features of the landscape that are not alive, such as rocks and rivers? Should an environmental ethic also cover these?

Philosophers teased out such questions without, of course, reaching final agreement on them.

Meanwhile, the categories and arguments that had been developed in environmental philosophy were taken up across a range of academic disciplines. In the humanities, discourses such as ecocriticism, eco-cultural studies, animal studies, multispecies studies, biosemiotics, cultural geography and the new materialisms emerged, reconfiguring their disciplines-of-origin through the lenses of the new eco-ethical categories.

Social theorists had also, from the start, been working with these categories to develop new detailed blueprints for ecological societies. From Murray Bookchin[1] in the 1970s to bioregionalists and ecosocialists through the 1980s and 90s, to present-day theorists from the Biomimicry Institute[2] and Simplicity Institute[3], thinkers have been offering detailed scenarios for societies organized around bio-inclusive values. In the sciences, conservation biology has also (until recently) organized its research around this value axis.

But none of this visionary and revisionary thinking has availed. The eminent Jungian psychoanalyst, James Hillman, once remarked of his own discipline, "We've had a hundred years of psychotherapy - and the world's getting worse". We could say the same of environmental ethics. *We've had forty years of environmental ethics - and the environment's getting worse*. And it is not just getting worse

1 See Biehl, J. (2015) *Ecology or catastrophe : the life of Murray Bookchin.* New York : Oxford University Press

2 Biomimicry Institute, *The Biomimicry Institute,* [website], https://biomimicry.org/, (accessed June 1, 2019)

3 Simplicity Institute, *Simplicity Institute: Envisioning a Prosperous Descent*, [website], http://simplicityinstitute.org/, (accessed June 1, 2019)

– it is getting *catastrophically* worse. With climate change, the sixth great extinction event, the Anthropocene – how much worse can it get?

The "hard problem" of environmental reform

So why has all this ground-breaking thinking not availed? Why has reason done so little to shift the wider society off its anthropocentric axis? Why have the ecological counter-cultures of decades ago remained just that – counter cultures, despite their demonstrably sound rational credentials?

Thirty years ago, I personally thought that if we could only demonstrate that the anthropocentric bias of the Western tradition was rationally indefensible, a value reorientation would ensue. Environmental philosophers did, in my opinion, demonstrate this – but change on a significant scale has not occurred.

In light of this failure, it seems important to be clear about what is currently *not* needed. We do not need more pure reason, in the sense of philosophical argument for an alternative, bio-inclusive ethics. Reason has already made as strong a case as reason can and it is clear now that pure reason or argument alone does not mobilize change. Nor do we need more blueprints for an ecological society. Blueprints do not in themselves, as it turns out, bring about change, any more than philosophical arguments do. Nor does science. Existing environmental sciences, incomplete as they admittedly are, are already pointing to a planet ecologically *in extremis*. Yet this has not triggered a corresponding awakening.

What we do currently need more of, in my opinion, is social thinking about how value transitions occur. We have the philosophy, the science and the social blueprints. But we don't have the uptake. And the reasons for this are not yet understood.

One way of explaining such philosophical recalcitrance is in terms of *historical materialism*. You don't have to be a Marxist to find historical materialism a compelling explanation for why societies adopt the particular value-sets they do.

For those not *au fait* with historical materialism (and in these post-Marxist days, fewer of us are), the general idea is that the values that characterize a society – which is to say, the consciousness, culture and identities which prevail in it – are largely an upshot of the underlying "modes of production" in that society: its basic economic modalities – and in particular, the *praxes* whereby its members act upon nature in their efforts to wrest a livelihood from it. So, for example, hunter gatherers in a rainforest might be expected to hold very different views of self, society and world from, say, industrial workers in a nineteenth century factory town.

All that counts as culture and consciousness in a particular society, and the identities that the members of that society construct for themselves, are basically, from an historical materialist perspective, *ideological*, in the sense that they reflect and legitimize more basic economic conditions. These ideological structures cannot be changed by argument (philosophy, science,

discourse) or exhortation (moral persuasion). They can only change when the underlying *praxes* of the society in question change.

So, one would not expect to persuade a hunter gatherer to become anthropocentric in outlook just by engaging them in philosophical argument any more than one would expect by the same method to persuade workers in, say, a factory farm or on an assembly line to embrace an ecocentric perspective.

While historical materialism is not a cast-iron or comprehensive explanation of values in society, I do personally find it plausible, as far as it goes. It definitely helps to explain why no amount of wilderness workshops or classroom discussion or even public debate will genuinely induce ecological consciousness or identity in us if we have to return to the shopping malls and mills of industry, commerce and corporatism after leaving our conferences and eco-retreats. And return to these most of us do, since alternative opportunities for making a living are exceedingly thin on the ground in modern societies.

To allow that historical materialism largely explains why particular value-sets prevail in particular societies need not imply that all such value-sets are *merely* ideological. I think certain value sets can be demonstrated by reason to be sound and others not so, relative to agreed further ends. But what historical materialism does teach us is not to expect societies at large to adopt new value sets, no matter how rationally preferable to the old ones, if the new values are inconsistent with the basic *praxis* of the societies in question.

However, while historical materialism might go a long way towards explaining why particular value-sets prevail in particular societies, it does not in itself solve the problem of how actually to bring about a new value regime. For to replace the underlying *praxes* of our present society with *praxes* that would, according to historical materialism, induce ecological consciousness would require massive economic and political investment in new eco-compatible modes of production. Such investment could presumably not occur unless those very ecological values were already in place. It is this vexing circularity that makes the problem of moral reform in relation to the environment so intransigent. This is why I call it the "Hard Problem" of environmental reform.

Affiliation, religion and identity

In light of such circularity, and the moral inertia it entails, what can be done? Are there other motivating forces as powerful as materialist or economic ones that might be harnessed to foster value change? Marx would presumably have said no. Materialist or economic forces are determinative, for him, precisely because they ultimately govern our survival, and nothing is more fundamental, in terms of impact on consciousness, than the survival imperative.

But perhaps this presumed priority of material forces is debatable. Perhaps in the human context there are other forces, further to materialist ones, that also determine our survival. The imperative

to *affiliate*, for instance. The need to belong to a community or group or troupe is perhaps as core to our survival, in evolutionary terms, as our need for food and shelter.

This seems to be borne out not only in our own present-day experience of life in society, with its many imperatives to conform, and the frightening mental health and criminality costs of failing to conform, but also when we look to our evolutionary reflection in primate societies. In chimp troupes, affiliation is important both for the purpose of sharing resources and for social legitimacy - misfits and stragglers are policed and killed. In evolutionary terms, affiliation may be as powerful a determinant of identity and consciousness as *praxis* is.

Perhaps, then, identity - in the sense conferred by affiliation - is a potential site of value change, one that could serve as prelude and impetus to the longer term, ecological "transvaluation of values" that will indeed, I think, as historical materialists insist, require major changes in economic *praxis*. How might this strategy work? What loci of affiliation might serve to embed Earth-friendly values in society? One major possibility is religion. For Marx, of course, religion was a prime instance of ideology, different religions serving merely to prop up and legitimate different economic regimes. In an industrial society like ours, characterized by intensely instrumentalist relations with the entire biosphere, only religions that reinforce an anthropocentric orientation might be expected to achieve social traction.

But in a twenty-first century Western context, in which the star of secularism is rising and that of traditional religions appears to be waning, the bedrock formations of belonging and therefore of identity that religions afforded are eroding. Perhaps in this new context, our basic need for affiliation is ceasing to be satisfactorily met. The forms of identity and consciousness that emanate from capitalist-industrial modes of *praxis* are possessive, individualist and self-centric as well as instrumentalist: they untether the self from any larger - social or environmental - meanings or responsibilities.

Possibilities of affiliation do of course exist, but, arising as they do from contingent interests or causes rather than from the moral or metaphysical core of people's existence, they arguably leave members of modern societies morally and metaphysically marooned and accordingly at existential risk. A new formation, introduced to take the place of traditional religions but serving Earth-friendly values rather than the anthropocentric ones served, to varying degrees, by present-day major religions, might in this context prove as powerful a determinant of consciousness as are materialist or economic forces.

Of course, a preliminary step in this connection would surely be to attempt to green *existing* religions. Such efforts may not suffice to turn the moral tide in the modern West, however, for two reasons:

— Religion in its currently prevailing forms might already be too discredited - as inimical to science, as authoritarian rather than democratic, and latterly as riven with sexual and other scandals.

— Those world religions with the greatest currency and influence in the West - namely, the Abrahamic faiths - may resist being greened to any significant extent in any case, having arisen as expressions of an agrarianism that set humanity outside and above nature, as domesticator, ruler and engineer of hitherto sovereign (that is, self-ruling) landscapes. So lip service may be paid within those faiths to new ecological values, but whether such values can truly be inhabited consistently with the anthropomorphism that typically underpins theisms, regardless of stripe, may be questioned.

In any case, whatever progress may be made in this matter of greening existing religions - and, admittedly, Pope Francis is currently putting the entire weight of the papacy[4] behind this effort - it may nevertheless be ultimately necessary to introduce an entirely new formation: a formation which creates a new narrative of identity and belonging; a narrative devoid from the start of anthropomorphic undertones.

We might perhaps choose not to call this Earth-friendly formation a "religion" at all, even though it might be socially organized into communities of interest as religions are. For it would differ from theistic traditions inasmuch as it would not feature notions of godhead, popularly construed in highly anthropomorphic forms, but would instead feature science as integral to its notion of the universe. *Mind*, however, in some larger sense, might be re-construed as immanent in matter, and the universe itself might thus be perceived as intrinsically alive, inherently communicative, and hence as the ultimate wellspring of meaning.

There would be no need, from the point of view of this new formation, for texts or scriptures, or for spiritual interpreters or authorities. Earth, as microcosm of the living universe, would provide the "scripture"; transactions with Earth-mind or mind-in-nature would be a personal affair - a personal locus of revelation. The orientation of this Earth-friendly formation might be described as eco-spiritual - but unlike spirituality more generally, which is often taken to connote value-sets held outside of formal institutions, the Earth-friendly values of the new formation could be held collectively, since the purpose of this formation would be to constitute powerful new loci of affiliation. Members would be allied not only to Earth itself and the larger community of all life, as implied by eco-spirituality, but also to organised local "congregations" comprised of people whose allegiance was likewise to Earth.

Actually, I think it would be important *not* to call this value-set, and the new narrative of identity attending it, a religion (or faith or credo) because the term, *religion*, has long been used to disparage environmentalists - to imply they act from irrational motives. But nor would it count merely as philosophy, since it would betoken much more than philosophy does - a whole-hearted commitment to care for Earth-life and identification with the human community sharing that commitment.

4 Stephens, S., '"Care for Our Common Home": Taking Up the Moral Challenge of Pope Francis', *ABC Religion & Ethics*, [online], 19 June 2015, https://www.abc.net.au/religion/care-for-our-common-home-taking-up-the-moral-challenge-of-pope-f/10098176, (accessed 1 June 2019).

Perhaps the term *cosmology* might serve: cosmologies can be exclusively scientific or exclusively mythopoetic or a combination of both. The very term, *cosmos*, is after all directly derived from the Greek, *kosmos* - meaning "order" - and is in this sense inherently normative, implying that the physical universe as we encounter it does not merely hang together contingently but is self-conforming to some kind of inner principle of integrity or goodness. Such a cosmos is immanently lawful in its configuration not merely in a causal but in a normative sense.

An ecological cosmology would thus have much more in common with the Earth-based cosmologies of Aboriginal Australia than with major religions such as the Abrahamic faiths, since it, like Aboriginal cosmologies, would be organized around an immanent, normative axis of ecological Law rather than around the worship of gods.

Communities of conservation

In the absence as yet of widespread economic *praxes* conducive to an ecological orientation, day-to-day practices that could anchor the Earth-friendly values of the new cosmology in actual experiences of reality could include the practice of conservation. Through *in situ* activities such as revegetation, restoration and re-wilding, people could gradually begin to decode, and become implicated in, actual ecologies, gaining in ecological literacy and becoming initiated into the intricacies - the myriad minds and mysteries - of actual life communities.

Indeed, I would suggest that hands-on practices of conservation, undertaken not in a purely utilitarian spirit but as devotional service - as the defining *telos* of one's community and as the perceived end-point of human agency - afford new ways for us to re-enter reality and find our normative direction therein. To practice conservation truly effectively requires the closest attention to the particularities of a given place, to the lie of its land and the patterns of its weather, to the minutiae of the manifold identities and relationships that are forever forming and reforming there.

The practice of conservation also involves push and pull: we make interventions, such as plantings, thinnings, weedings and, perhaps, in some circumstances, baitings and sprayings. We must pay attention to the consequences of those interventions for ecosystems, including all the vertebrate and invertebrate actors therein, rapidly adjusting our actions in light of often unintended outcomes. Our activities may expose us to risk, as we immerse ourselves in life-worlds outside the blind bubble of modern civilization. In these normally overlooked life-worlds, venoms and wild antagonists, hidden perils of many kinds, lie in wait for us.

Such threats, as much as our ministrations, force us to cultivate attentiveness and responsiveness, and little by little this attentiveness, together with the respect that grows from our engagement with a multitude of inscrutable agencies, opens our eyes. It opens our eyes to worlds within worlds within worlds of astonishing embodiments of life, all cohering and conforming to one another - insofar as they are not derailed by the industrial juggernaut of modernity - in accordance with

the manifest principles of creation and regeneration that Indigenous peoples signal when they say, "the Law is in the land."

In this way, right under our very noses, the land may begin to *open* to us, to *come alive*, and a whole new horizon of relationship, presence, communicativity, enthralment, mystery and indeed revelation may come into view.

Such place-specific conservation activities are in principle available to everyone. Those with disposable capital (attention retiring baby boomers!) might join with friends to purchase an ecologically strategic property, then safeguard it with a conservation covenant, and prepare to embark on what might become, in its quiet way, a depth-initiation that few anticipate. Those without such financial means can still commit to an ecologically strategic place, by volunteering for caring-for-country type programs on public or private estates or creating such programs themselves.

Site specific conservation practices, sustained over the long term, can genuinely induct us into and re-implicate us empirically in the real, rescuing us from the ideality of traditional religion and from the blind bubble of anthropocentrism. By coming to know a particular community of life in this intimate way, and by becoming implicated, through our own sweat and care, in its return-to-life, we become bonded to it, and to our colleagues-in-care who likewise find themselves drawn into its larger significance. Before too long we may start to feel like custodians of the place in question - the particular woodland or mountain, rocky outcrop or arid shrubland - its interests gradually overtaking our own; our allegiance to it, and to our fellow custodians, may gradually outgrow our narrower, more personal perspectives.

While such conservation activity may not in itself be strictly *praxical*, in the historical materialist sense, in that it does not constitute a mode of production, it is in-service to the *praxical*, inasmuch as it helps to repair the biospheric fabric that is a condition for any and all ongoing economic activity. At the very least, it represents a purposeful immersion in the real and in this sense may genuinely have the power to actualize new forms of identity and consciousness.

To sum it all up: I think one way for environmentalists to tackle what I've called the "Hard Problem" - the circularity that besets our attempts to shift society towards Earth-centredness and that is so well explained by historical materialism - is to create new formations that answer to the human need for in-depth affiliation, a need arguably as core to our survival as are material needs. An ecological cosmology, socially organized into place-based congregations of commitment, richly informed with natural history and the relevant sciences and anchored in hands-on practices of conservation but also open to larger possibilities of communion, may serve this purpose.

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IV

Foregrounding Ecojustice

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Introduction

We have entered the 6th mass extinction event in the history of Planet Earth[1]. During the past five decades, scholars and policy-makers have been aware of this first pending, and now unfolding crisis. Despite the development of a large body of literature, we are today further than ever from addressing and stopping this mass extinction[2]. Academics seem to be increasingly pitted against one another on the key issue of whether conserving nature is worthy for its own sake, or only indirectly - to the extent it benefits people. In other words, debates continue about whether social (i.e. inter-human) justice trumps ecological justice (justice for the nonhuman). The recent realization that we may in fact need to more than double protected areas to achieve biodiversity protection has led to increasing tension between respective advocates of social and ecological justice. Ecological justice is based on ecological ethics derived from ecocentrism, a position that has been developed over the past 75 years[3].

Anthropocentrism Blocking Ecojustice

"Justice for nature" has been ignored or denied, being something of a taboo that academia avoids[4]. Further denial will only exacerbate the ongoing biodiversity crisis. The key problem in this discussion is anthropocentrism. By explicitly privileging human welfare over that of all other living beings, anthropocentrism denies ecological justice and the "Rights of Nature", the case for legal recognition of which is argued by Earth jurisprudence. If nature is ruled out as deserving

1 Washington, H. (2015) *Demystifying Sustainability: Towards Real Solutions*. London: Routledge

2 Ceballos, G., Ehrlich, A. & Ehrlich. P. 2015. *The Annihilation of Nature: Human Extinction of Birds and Mammals*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

3 Curry, P. (2011) *Ecological Ethics: An Introduction*. Second Edition. Cambridge: Polity Press.

4 Washington, H., Chapron, G., Kopnina, H., Curry, P., Gray, J. and Piccolo, H. (2018) 'Foregrounding ecojustice in conservation', *Biological Conservation*, in press. See: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0006320718305020?via%3Dihub

any moral consideration, then justice for nature is similarly abandoned, as nature doesn't count, has no "rights" and is not deemed to be a locus of intrinsic value.

Social Justice

The dominant meaning of social justice is justice for humans. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines social justice as: "Justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society". This is a human society. However, recently some scholars writing about "just conservation" have sought to redefine social justice as the "fair treatment of others", where the "others" are left open, and may include nonhuman nature[5]. By widening the scope of social justice to include nonhumans, they seem to operate on the assumption they are doing something "good". However, in their discussion of "conservation conflict resolution" they do not include ecological justice as part of the mix. Offering expansion of social justice to include nonhuman nature is similar to arguing that nature is part of culture, rather than the other way around. Nonhuman nature thereby becomes an after-thought pushed into social justice around the edges of social justice's primary meaning: justice for humans. To see nature as part of culture is both anthropocentric and denies the evolutionary reality that humans and their culture are part of nature[6].

Environmental Justice

Social justice has also been applied to issues of environmental distribution of environmental "goods" such as resources, and "bads" such as pollution. This has mostly been defined by the confusing term "environmental justice" (an offshoot of social justice). Environmental justice is not ecological justice, since it expresses no concern for the nonhuman, nor does it explicitly address the importance of protecting species or ecosystems. It is thus anthropocentric. It is also self-defeating if long-term human flourishing is what we aim for, as society depends fully on nature to survive[7].

Ecological Justice (ecojustice)

The simplest definition of ecojustice is justice for nonhuman nature. Ecological justice is distinct from (and arguably more inclusive) than environmental justice, and is concerned with other species independent of their instrumental value for humans[8]. It extends concern beyond human beings. It acknowledges the great moral crime that society has carried out for the last few centuries – ignoring that the nonhuman also deserves justice. Dobson[9] notes that leaving nature out of traditional theories of justice comes from a desire to exclude nature, and not from

5 Vucetich, J., Burnham, D., Macdonald, E., Bruskotter, J., Marchini, S., Zimmerman, A. and Macdonald, D. (2018) 'Just conservation: What is it and should we pursue it?', *Biological Conservation* 221: 23–33

6 Curry, P. (2011) *Ecological Ethics: An Introduction*. Second Edition. Cambridge: Polity Press.

7 Washington, H. (2015) *Demystifying Sustainability: Towards Real Solutions*. London: Routledge.

8 Baxter, B. (2005) *A Theory of Ecological Justice*, New York: Routledge.

9 Dobson, A. (1998) *Justice and the Environment: Conceptions of Environmental Sustainability and Dimensions of Social Justice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

any sound theoretical reasoning. This involves a fear of putting nature on an equal moral footing. This demonstrates that for decades, an academia dominated by anthropocentrism has refused to consider that nonhuman nature also has a right to justice. This denial is a major obstacle to reaching a viable concept of justice that encompasses both humans and nature, and hence achieving a holistic conservation strategy[10]. Ecojustice has been a taboo for society and academia for far too long.

Distributive Justice for Nature?

Social and environmental justice are commonly based on the idea of "distributive" justice looking at how resources or pollution are distributed amongst society. However, distributive justice can also be applied to nature. Baxter[11] argues that nonhuman species have a moral right to distributive justice, which entails recognizing their claim to a fair share of the environmental resources which all life-forms need to flourish. For example, how much of the Earth's biological productivity should be controlled by just one species? Net Primary Productivity (NPP) represents the energy from photosynthesis (stored in organic matter) left over after the plant's energy needs are provided for. Estimates of the NPP being co-opted by humans each year vary from 30% to 55%[12]. This is a huge percentage of the planet's productivity. How much is enough, and how much is too much? If it were to approach 100% of NPP, then ecosystems would collapse, as would civilization[13]. Clearly, we are already way beyond what could be considered "just" in terms of our fair share, in terms of any conception of holistic distributive justice.

The application of distributive justice to conservation need not just be about energy. As an alternative basis for conservation policy, an ethic of "bio-proportionality" has been proposed by Mathews[14]. The goal of such an ethic would be not mere viability but "optimization", meaning it would seek not merely viable but optimal populations of all species. As Mathews (p. 140) notes: "This has specific policy implications for human population and strengthens the case for increasing the extent of protected areas".

How Can Social Justice and Ecojustice be Reconciled?

How then can one reconcile social justice (for humans alone) with ecojustice for the whole of nature? For centuries, "justice" in Western society has side-lined nonhuman nature. Activist pressure has managed to create some laws that gave some protection to nature. Overall however, nature has had no voice, and has been denied intrinsic value or rights. As Curry[15] notes, the "Sole Value" assumption has been in force, where humanity has the only value. More recently, some

10 Washington, H. (2015) *Demystifying Sustainability: Towards Real Solutions*. London: Routledge.

11 Baxter, B. (2005) *A Theory of Ecological Justice*, New York: Routledge.

12 Washington, H. (2015) *Demystifying Sustainability: Towards Real Solutions*. London: Routledge

13 Washington, H. (2015) *Demystifying Sustainability: Towards Real Solutions*. London: Routledge

14 Mathews, F. (2016) 'From Biodiversity-based Conservation to an Ethic of Bio-proportionality', *Biological Conservation* 200: 140-148

15 Curry, P. (2011) *Ecological Ethics: An Introduction*. Second Edition. Cambridge: Polity Press.

have argued that nature does have a degree of intrinsic value, but we have then been confronted with the "Greater Value" assumption, where in any conflict between humans and nature, humans always win (ibid). Effective conservation of nature thus cannot take place under the "Greater Value" assumption.

Society has a major problem when "justice" refers only to social justice (and its offshoot environmental justice). If we continue to ignore ecojustice, society is doomed to condone ongoing ecocide[16]. A meaningful overall theory of justice must rank ecojustice as at least equally important as social justice. At certain times and certain places, ecojustice must supersede social justice in order to protect the remaining natural world, on which we all depend, humans and other species alike (ibid). In fact, in the long-term, ecojustice superseding social justice may be a service to future social justice, as it protects the free ecosystem services that are essential for society (especially the poor).

What are some of the best ways to reconcile social justice and ecojustice? We need to promote the "Rights of Nature", and "Wild Law" and "ecocide law"[17] where laws specifically argue that nature has an existential right to exist. Part of this is Earth jurisprudence. Eco-democracy may also help to advance ecojustice through ideas such as voting proxies for non-humans, human "Guardians", etc.

Conclusion

Humanity is faced with a serious predicament it does not wish to acknowledge – the accelerating ecocide and the mass extinction of life on Earth. Such denial has been aided by a dominant anthropocentric worldview that denies nature any value or justice. Much of academia has been slow even to mention the idea of ecojustice, focusing purely on social justice, and environmental justice (just for humans). Even those who acknowledge the intrinsic value of nature often fail to acknowledge the need to speak out for ecojustice (or to mention the concept). Instead, they seem to be attempting to push justice for nature into the periphery of social justice. This is unethical, and doomed to failure as a strategy to protect life on Earth. Any meaningful long-term conservation strategy must overturn the "code of silence" about ecojustice. It is time for society and academia to foreground ecojustice.

16 Washington, H., Chapron, G., Kopnina, H., Curry, P., Gray, J. and Piccolo, H. (2018) 'Foregrounding ecojustice in conservation', *Biological Conservation*, in press. See: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0006320718305020?via%3Dihub

17 Washington, H. (2015) *Demystifying Sustainability: Towards Real Solutions*. London: Routledge.

V

Ethical Decision-Making and Environmental Action

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Introduction

This paper aims to empower readers to understand the pitfalls that can happen in ethical decision-making, and the way these problems can manifest when they – or their organizations – are making environmentally-infused ethical decisions. The ease with which most people make and act upon everyday moral decisions can distract us from the many stages that must be successfully navigated to deliver justifiable and effective outcomes. Awareness of these stages allows us to attend constructively to all the areas where ethical decision-making may falter.

Sometimes, ethical decision-making can seem the easiest thing in the world. Imagine a scenario where you have promised a beloved niece to play with her after dinner. When dinner is complete, she reminds you of your promise, and off you go. What could be simpler? In fact, however, you actually worked your way through a number of distinct stages on your way to this successful ethical result. Recent literature on ethical decision-making, deriving from foundational work in moral psychology, puts forward a variety of stages that an ethical decision-maker must work through to achieve a good result.[1] Existing models of the process distinguish and delineate the stages somewhat differently.[2] Here I employ a seven-stage model of ethical decision-making:

1. *Awareness*: the agent needs to realize they are confronted with a morally loaded issue;
2. *Information gathering*: the agent needs to acquire the relevant facts to inform their judgment, including physical (scientific) facts, and social facts (e.g., of conventions or laws);

1 Rest, James. 'Morality' in *Handbook of Child Psychology*, edited by Paul Mussen, 556-629. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1992.

2 See Mark S Schwartz, 'Ethical Decision-Making Theory: An Integrated Approach' (2016) 139 *Journal of Business Ethics* 755; Linda Klebe Trevino, 'Ethical Decision Making in Organisations: A Person-Situation Interactionist Model' (1986) 11 *The Academy of Management Review* 601; Breakey, Hugh. 'Building Ethics Regimes: Capabilities, Obstacles and Supports for Professional Ethical Decision-Making.' *University of New South Wales Law Journal* 40, no. 1 (2017): 322-52 http://www.unswlawjournal.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/401-13.pdf

3. *Judgment*: the agent needs to reason or intuit their way to a defensible moral judgement about the correct course of action;
4. *Decision-making*: the agent needs to apply appropriate priority to their judgment – desiring to do the right thing;
5. *Action*: the agent needs to act on their decision – which may require virtues like courage, diligence, tenacity or equanimity.
6. *Performance*: sometimes, the agent must display not only the will to act, but proficiency or expertise in successfully performing the action;
7. *Reflection*: even after the action is completed, an agent might need to return to the decision, modifying its outcomes, or putting in place measures for better results in future.

In the case of playing with your niece, these stages can be whizzed through so effortlessly you may hardly realize the multiple capabilities at work. You know that promises are morally important, that the appointed time has arrived, and thus that you should play with your niece. Because she is a delight to play with, there are no motivational or other obstacles impeding your decision and ability to successfully act on your judgment.

However, more complex cases are possible, where an agent possesses resources and capabilities to navigate almost all the stages, but a critical failure in just one capability leads to a poor outcome. This can be especially so when the decisions in question revolve around *environmental* ethical decision-making – that is, cases where we are morally required to factor in the (perhaps long-term) impact upon non-human life-forms, ecosystems and the land itself.

Awareness can be challenging in such cases because harms can be initially invisible, and nature itself cannot respond with immediate righteous demands the way aggrieved humans can. *Information-gathering* can be particularly difficult. Even experts might disagree on the impact of an intervention in a delicate ecosystem, or on the cost-benefit outcomes of different types of recycling. So too, the moral reasoning required for *decision-making* about non-anthropocentric ethical values can pose serious challenges, forcing agents to weigh up, for example, concerns for animal welfare, species extinction, untouched wilderness and biodiversity. Complicating matters at both the information-gathering and decision-making stages is the fact that it may still be necessary to take decisive action even in the case of ambiguous and conflicting evidence (the 'precautionary principle' can be a helpful rule of thumb for just this reason). Taking *action* can also be hard, and may require tenacity and courage, especially if one is placed in a community or organization that does not esteem environmental values, and where conformity to normal and expected ways of behaving press against – rather than for – conscientious moral actions. Finally, even *reflection* can pose a challenge, as getting feedback on our decisions (which may only have long-term consequences on local flora, say) can be harder in the ecological space than it is when our impacts are on our fellow citizens.

As such, environmentally-aware agents need to be attentive to all the different stages of ethical decision-making, to ensure that one 'weakest link' does not lead them into a poor outcome. Fortunately, even though the stages are distinct, the same activities and practices that improve

one area might well improve others. For example, increased knowledge and knowledge-gathering capabilities about the environment may create a shift in values – impacting not only on the information gathering and judgment stages, but also on the decision-making stage. As Aldo Leopold put it, "Once you learn to read the land, I have no fear of what you will do to it, or with it. And I know many pleasant things it will do to you".[3] Equally, practices of eco-spirituality or mindfulness can impact holistically on judgment, decision-making, action-taking and reflection.[4]

One further complexity worth highlighting is that posed by organisations and groups. Professions provide a well-known example of ethical decision-making in groups, with professional organizations making collective decisions (such as to alter the requirements for entry to the profession) and laying down frameworks and supports (such as in their code of ethics) for individual decision-makers within the profession.[5] Such collective decision-making is very common in environmental contexts; while individual moral agents can act in isolation to protect and promote environmental values, often critical activities are performed by *institutions* – whether corporations, governments, universities or NGOs. This can pose a serious problem – such as when the requisite resources and capabilities are disaggregated across the institution, such that there is no one agent that has the awareness, information, desire and capability to act to mitigate environmental impact. Equally though, institutions can create powerful opportunities for effective decision-making. While moral psychologists tend to focus on individual capacities that help resolve each stage (e.g., Rest 1992), the stages can also be successfully navigated through the use of interpersonal and institutional facilities.[6] For example, approachability, social deliberativeness and a supportive social context can assist an agent through the stages of awareness, judgment and action respectively.

In conclusion, when thinking about how people and organizations can make better environmental decisions, it is important to focus not only on very visible questions of motive and judgment, but on all the social, personal and interpersonal capabilities that are required for achieving genuinely constructive results. Pursuing environmental values poses serious challenges to moral agents on multiple fronts, and awareness of all the opportunities and resources at our disposal remains critical.

3 Leopold, A. (Ed.). (1992). The river of the mother of god and other essays. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. For an in-depth discussion of Leopold's thinking on moral psychology and development, and of the inter-relation of learning and valuing, see Breakey, N., & Breakey, H. (2015). 'Tourism and Aldo Leopold's "Cultural Harvest": Creating virtuous tourists as agents of sustainability' Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 23(1), 85-103.

4 Preston N. (2014) Ethics: With or without God, Morning Star Publishing; Northcote; Pless, N., Sabatella, F., & Maak, T. (2017). Mindfulness, Reperceiving, and Ethical Decision Making: A Neurological Perspective. Research in Ethical Issues in Organisations, 17, 1-20.

5 Breakey. 'Building Ethics Regimes'.

6 Compare Rest 'Morality' and Breakey 'Building Ethics Regimes'.

VI

Intersections of Science, Economics, Law and Ethics in the Anthropocene

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Introduction

Emergent thinking in science, economics and law seems consistent with an Earth Ethic.[1] And while institutions that have developed different knowledge cultures continue to contribute their particular form of knowledge, there is a growing convergence in their adoption of a universal ecological theory of value.

In his extensive work on the risk society, Beck[2] argues that industrial societies under the threat of self-destruction think and act in institutional categories–scientifically, legally, economically and politically–normalising environmental risk and paving the way for a technocratic road to power. For Beck the moral imperative is to recognise ecological hazards, and attribute responsibility and liability through institutional change.

In this paper, a review of institutional responses to environmental degradation provides insights into the role of science, economics and law in perpetuating a cultural norm of risk acceptance, what Beck describes as the fatalism of progress. However the history of each of these disciplines reveals a retrievable core of knowledge and practice that is consistent with transformative change. Emergent ideas across these disciplines can build on earlier knowledge to create strong institutional support for an Earth Ethic for our time.

The Fatalism of Progress

By the 1950s the long-term effects of success for applied science and technology were clear: while first order (direct) effects have enabled us to live healthier, longer lives, increased food

1 An Earth Ethic is Humanity's ethical and pragmatic commitment to express in all our thoughts and deeds, our indivisibility with Nature: D. Dibley, *Sophia in the Anthropocene: An Earth Ethic for our time* (PhD thesis, Fenner School of Environment & Society), Australian National University, 2018.

2 U. Beck, *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk*, Polity Press, 1995

production, and led to large scale manufacturing, "second-order (consequential) effects" include environmental destruction and climate change.[3]

It is not science alone that has seduced us to accept increasing environmental risk associated with second-order effects, but a system of *organised non-liability*, which Beck[4] argues permeates the institutional thinking that controls the production of hazards—law, science, economics, administration and policy.

A review of environmental law reveals a system that suppresses the environmental protections it was supposed to provide. It includes legal and procedural technicalities, such as the placement of *burdens of proof* so that one side has to prove *the impossible*—while the other side can continue to do what it likes[5].

Modern Economics also operates in a self-validating environment of non-responsibility. Adam Smith's metaphorical *invisible hand* turns out to be the *invisible saboteur*[6]. A review of cost benefit analyses shows how this theoretical process (*de rigueur* in current policy development), reduces environmental questions to the common metric of homogenised utility for which accountability and liability do not apply. Its application to policy and regulatory instruments is seen to favour economic utility over environmental protection.

Is there anything in historic and emerging views in science, economics and law that is at variance with their contribution to Beck's fatalism of progress; something that could support an Earth Ethic?

Ancient Threads and Emerging Views Intersect to Provide a Transdisciplinary Basis for Change.

Institutional knowledge embedded in society.

From classical antiquity to the mid-16th century, philosophers (including natural philosophers or natural scientists) respected multiple ways of thinking and acting[7]. This is consistent with contemporary thinking of science as a socially embedded practice. It is reflected in *post normal science* which recognises that the quality assurance of scientific inputs into policy processes requires an *extended peer community*, including all the stakeholders[8]. Inclusive thinking also infuses various aspects of law that rely on the *commonsense* of the citizenry—the jury system and the concept of the *reasonable person* applied in Tort and Criminal law. Recognising the danger of regarding the world through a narrow institutional lens, ecological macroeconomics promises to

3 G. Weinberg, *An Introduction to General Systems Thinking*, Weinberg and Weinberg, USA, 2011

4 U. Beck, *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk*, Polity Press, 1995

5 J. Krier, *Environmental Litigation and the Burden of Proof*, Institute Government & Public Affairs, University California, 1971

6 U. Beck, *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk*, Polity Press, 1995

7 S. Toulmin, *Return to Reason*, Harvard University Press, 2003

8 S. Funtowicz & J Ravetz, *Post Normal Science*, International Society for Ecological Economics, 2003

ground the study and application of economics within the biophysical realities of a finite world and the moral obligations of a just society[9].

Institutional acknowledgement of inherent uncertainty.

Acknowledgement of uncertainty in science is important, not just in the procedural sense that it quantifies margins of error, but in the ethical sense that *good* science is essential to *good* public policy and legislative enactments. Post normal science argues that where there is an obvious lack of data and insufficient information, the *precautionary principle*[10] should be applied in the decision-making process. The need for caution is also understood in the standards of proof adopted by the civil and criminal courts—*on the balance of probabilities* and *beyond reasonable doubt (Dibley 2018)*. Economists too are increasingly acknowledging the vulnerability of the market to uncertainty associated with environmental shocks. The 2016 *World Economic Forum Global Risk Survey*[11] rated biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse, water and food crises, extreme weather events and a failure of climate change adaptation and mitigation as major risks facing the world. While the Forum didn't go so far as to link standard economic policy with ecosystem decline, there was recognition that healthy ecosystems underpin prosperous economies and resilient communities.

Australia's National Australia Bank has launched a natural capital initiative aimed at recognising environmental risk associated with investments in agriculture[12].

Institutional recognition of an increased role for the State in environmental protection.

Early commentators including Aristotle and Aquinas[13] writing about the ancient mercantile practices of their time believed it was the responsibility of the State to protect the poor and apply *fairness*, for example to the notion of *a fair price*. They regarded mercantile activity as serving the common good. Since the *Great Depression*, there has been a challenge to neoclassical economics from those who want the State to keep a watchful eye on markets, to maintain readiness to intervene to manage the inevitable market imperfections and failures that generate cycles, and to address natural resource degradation and growing inequality[14]. The revival of ancient legal instruments for the protection of the commons by the State includes the regulated use of common law *covenants* and *easements* and the invocation of *public trust law* which entrusts common resources such as the air, waterways and forests to the State for the benefit and use of the general public.

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9 J. Erikson, *Foreword*, Ecological Economics for the Anthropocene, Columbia University Press, 2015

10 One of the primary foundations of the precautionary principle, and globally accepted definitions, results from the work of the Rio Conference or Earth Summit in 1992. Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration notes: "In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation." See *UNEP. "Rio Declaration on Environment and Development".*

11 http://reports.weforum.org/global-risks-2016

12 K. Henry, *Advancing Australia's Natural Capital*, The Fiona Wain Oration, Sydney, 2016

13 K. Malik, *The Quest for Moral Compass: A Global History of Ethics*, Atlantic Books, UK, 2015

14 J. Sachs, *The Price of Civilization*, Economics and Ethics after the Fall, Random House, 2011

Rodgers[15] regards public trust law as the strongest contemporary expression of the idea that the legal rights of nature and of future generations are enforceable against contemporary users. Other expressions of an elevated role for governments in protecting the commons include *constitutional protections* for nature and natural processes, the enactment of laws granting nature equal rights to humans and the expansion of State governance through the use of the *land registration system*.

New indicators to measure wellbeing.

Calls across institutions for new indicators of *wellbeing* reflect a growing convergence of economic, social and environmental interests. GDP is criticised as a poor measure of both economic and general wellbeing as it only reflects economic activity, regardless of the effect and cost of that activity on social and environmental health. In contrast the *Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare*[16] provides a more complete picture of economic progress. Ecological macroeconomist Erikson[17] recognises that a *good society* in the 21st Century would be measured not only by its economic prosperity but by its social justice and environmental sustainability. He proposes new ecological indicators derived from planetary boundaries. The new UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Global Indicator Framework[18] with its broad set of individual indicators is consistent with growing recognition across the institutions of knowledge of a convergence of interests. These new ecological indicators could discourage *trade-offs* between various indicators, targets and goals that have compromised policy-making on sustainable development in the past.

Conclusion

Despite their seemingly separate spheres of interest and preeminent claims, it has been argued here that science, economics and law exhibit common logic and ethics both historically and, more recently, in the current thinking of practitioners in the Anthropocene.

A common logical, imaginative and open-minded practice is emerging across science, economics and law, grounded in an understanding of Earth's interdependent ecosystem that could support an Earth Ethic. How could such a convergence work in practice?

The persistence and re-emergence of common positions across science, economics and law raises the possibility of complementary tests and standards for acceptable/sustainable levels of environmental impact associated with human activity. For example, the idea of *taking care*, a *precautionary approach*, appears in all of the knowledge cultures. Under a shared *Earth Ethic*, invocation of the precautionary principle could respond to inherent uncertainty in science, the dependence of economic returns on managing environmental risk and the application at law of

15 W. Rodgers W, *Bringing People Back: Toward a Comprehensive Theory of Taking in Natural Resource Law*, 10 Ecology Law Quarterly 205, 1982

16 The Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW) proposed by Daly and Cobb in 1989 provides a more down-to-earth representation of the well-being of a society than GDP does, since its definition involves also variables that are not included in the conventional national accounts (such as social and environmental issues).

17 J. Erikson, *Foreword*, Ecological Economics for the Anthropocene, Columbia University Press, 2015

18 https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/

a *duty of care*. Agreement on thresholds, standards and tests to determine levels of acceptable environmental risk and to predict effects over time could address current confusion about acceptable impacts. It could also discourage trade-offs between competing interests—trade-offs that currently favour economic over environmental benefits.

There is growing awareness across science, economics and law that exclusive institutional knowledge has limited application to solving the problems of our time. New respect for other ways of thinking harks back to earlier times when the application of science, mercantile activity and legal protections was deemed to be for the common good. Thinking across science, economics and law is reconnecting the human concerns of its practitioners with civil society.

VII

Educating for Reconnection: Fostering reverence for Earth

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Grass Tree as Teacher

> Explanation is rational; understanding is intuitive. Reconnecting these two severed branches of our psyche is a vitally important task if we are to respond appropriately to the vast ecological crisis that our culture has unleashed upon the world.[1]

When I contemplate my own experience of the education system in Australia, and to what degree it is equipped to build Earth Ethics in our society, my relationship with grass trees speaks to the "severed branches of our psyche" that Harding refers to above. This relationship began while doing an ecology project for a subject in my environmental science degree. The project involved measuring out quadrants in the nearby forest and counting the number of grass trees (*Xanthorrhoeajohnsonii*) in each quadrant. While I enjoyed the experience of being in the forest and away from the lecture theatre, I did not feel connection to the grass trees, the forest, or to the earth by doing this project, nor did I develop an appreciation for the interconnectedness of the forest and its beings.

Some years later, on the other side of the continent, in South West Western Australia, I attended a series of fireside story-telling sessions with a Noongar man, Noel Nannup, sitting in the presence of many grass trees – known as "balga" to Noongar people. Some of these balga were truly majestic beings, with some of the larger ones having trunks over 3m tall and being fatter than me, with branches reaching out in different directions. There was something very beautiful about having these elders, the balga, sit all around us as we listened to ancient stories of the land we were on.

1 Harding, S. (2006) *Animate Earth: Science, Intuition and Gaia*. Foxhole: Green Books Ltd. 14

Not long after returning to the East Coast to live a year or so later, I volunteered on an environmental education program for primary school students. One of the practices there was to spend some time sitting in a "Magic Spot", observing the life around us, returning each day to the same spot. As a volunteer, I was placed in the middle of the year five children attending the program. After one of the leaders had indicated my spot, I sat down, and immediately realised I was surrounded by three grass trees – a tiny one to my right, a middle-sized one in front of me, and a larger one to my left – all with their long needle-like leaves gently waving in the wind. Immediately I was overcome with a feeling of awe and gratitude for these ancient beings and their presence in the forest, with tears springing to my eyes, and a deep sense of connection to them washing over me.

Encounter

Later I realised I had experienced what Dr Stephan Harding refers to as '*encounter*'[2]. Harding tells of his own experience while doing his PhD fieldwork on the muntjac deer in England, contrasting the hours of data collection with moments of deep connection and reverence for the forest, describing how the latter – *encounter* – gave him "the most valuable lessons about nature".[3] On occasion, a muntjac would appear, when he and the deer would meet eyes:

> there was a sense of the being of the muntjac as a revelation… so I could immediately understand the wholeness of the muntjac and how they relate to the entire wood …. and… I could also get a sense of the whole ecology of the forest…[4]

I reflect that my own university time counting grass trees had not enabled me to experience *encounter*, while the magic spot, supported by intervening experiences with grass trees had done so.

As Harding discusses, intuitive and holistic ways of knowing are needed to complement the rational in order to "develop a deep reverence for our planet home".[5] The focus on the mechanistic world-view promoted by conventional science has brought us to the ecological crisis in which we now find ourselves, so a shift is required to bring us back into balance – in science, education, and society as a whole.

Sit Spot

There are many practices that educators can use to open the possibilities for intuitive ways of knowing, to pave the way for *encounter* to occur, and to foster a sense of excitement about, and love for nature. The "Sit Spot" - also known as a "Magic Spot", or "Sit Area" – is one simple and effective practice that can be used to great effect. It involves participants being given, or

2 The term 'encounter', italicised throughout this article, is used with the meaning as described by Stephan Harding in Armstrong (2017) as when "you actually meet the being, as the being coming forth from itself, as itself, revealing itself to you in a way that is beyond your intellect, in a way that is much more deeply intuitive and much harder to express".

3 Harding, S. (2006) Animate Earth: Science, Intuition and Gaia. Foxhole: Green Books Ltd. 18

4 Armstrong, P. (2017) Encountering another Being, [online video] Available from: http://www.flemingpolicycentre.org.uk/seed-beneath-snow/ (Accessed 2 July 2018).

5 Harding, S. (2006) Animate Earth: Science, Intuition and Gaia. Foxhole: Green Books Ltd. 19

better yet, finding for themselves, a special place in nature where they sit and observe, and return to this spot over time. Young, Haas, and McGown state that the Sit Spot is a place where "the lessons of nature will seep in", where children "feel wonder", "face their fears" and "meet nature as their home".[6] In my own experience of asking both adults and children about their favorite activities on nature connection programs I have run, participants will invariably name the sit spot as one of their highlights, and during the programs, children will often eagerly ask, "When are we doing sit spots today?"

In school programs the sit spot can be linked to curriculum outcomes. Broda describes a "sit area" project at a school in Ohio, U.S.A., whereby 8th grade students returned to the same spot at least twice a month to complete different activities including drawing or sketching plants, or recording bird calls.[7] He relays how one student, Ellen, said she "was not at all impressed" towards the beginning of visiting her sit area. Weeks later she had changed her mind considerably, stating that "I realised there were tiny things everywhere that proved this patch of land was full of life… this area was more alive than anything I had ever seen".[8]

Young, Haas and McGown discuss the Sit Spot as the keystone practice of one of fourteen "Core Routines of Nature Connection."[9] They describe how some of the other core routines they detail can be practiced there – including learning bird language, journaling, mapping and expanding the senses.[10] The practice of sitting alone in nature for short periods of time can also be the beginning of a journey evolving into other solo nature practices like wandering in nature, overnight camping or questing in nature, all of which provide opportunities for deep encounter.

My *encounter* with the three grass trees was symbolic of the power of this practice, and the Sit Spot is now a regular routine for me. Through it I have opened to intuitive ways of knowing, felt connection with numerous plants and animals, and developed a deeper love for and awareness of the bioregion that I live in. For Jon Young, his Sit Spot "had more to do with his development as a human being, not to mention a naturalist, than anything else".[11]

Nature Names

Allocating "Nature names" to participants in education programs is a potent way for them to learn about local plant and animal species and start to build reverence for them. The Nature

6 Young, J., Haas, E., & McGown, E. (2010). Coyote's guide to connecting with nature, 2nd edition. Shelton, Wash: OWLLink Media. 37

7 Broda, H. (2007) Schoolyard-Enhanced Learning: Using the Outdoors as an Instructional Tool, K-8. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers. 107

8 Broda, H. (2007) Schoolyard-Enhanced Learning: Using the Outdoors as an Instructional Tool, K-8. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers. 107

9 Young, J., Haas, E., & McGown, E. (2010). Coyote's guide to connecting with nature, 2nd edition. Shelton, Wash: OWLLink Media.

10 Young, J., Haas, E., & McGown, E. (2010). Coyote's guide to connecting with nature, 2nd edition. Shelton, Wash: OWLLink Media.

11 Young, J., Haas, E., &McGown, E. (2010). Coyote's guide to connecting with nature, 2nd edition. Shelton, Wash: OWLLink Media. 37

Name supports a deep personal relationship developing with that being and the other life it is connected to, with the plants and animals becoming teachers for the participants.[12]

Before the start of the program, educators make a list of nature names to include, and on the first day participants are invited to choose one of these names out of a hat[13] or, as I do, from a group of name badges that are turned upside down to hide what the names are. The list of Nature Names used are based on those animals and plants that can be found in the local bioregion. I choose animals and plants that I know are present on the land that the program is being held on, as those participants who choose plants will certainly be able to "meet" their beings, while those who choose animals have a high chance of being able to. The excitement when a bird or other animal is spotted for the first time is often palpable.

Activities later in a program can cement the participants' learnings about their Nature Names, both individually and collectively. In the children's holiday programs that I run, participants are often invited to create a mask, sculpture or painting of their nature name, and I am constantly impressed with the wonderful creations that are made, and how excited the children are to do this. Other activities include writing about what is special about their Nature Name, or doing a 'web of life' activity using string to demonstrate how each being is connected to others in that ecological community. Giving Nature Names is a seemingly simple process, one which builds reverence and respect for these beings, bringing together hearts and minds in understanding and appreciation.

Conclusion

The emphasis on rational ways of knowing and a disregard of intuitive and holistic ways has resulted in an imbalance with detrimental effects - in our education systems, in the scientific world, and in our society as a whole. However, there is a shift starting to happen in some places, one that "takes young people out of the classroom to encounter the mystery" and to discover a "sense of wonder".[14] Wonder, reverence for, and engagement with nature is needed in all levels of education, as well as informal education, to bring about a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of all life, and hence an Earth-centred Society.

12 Young, J., Haas, E., &McGown, E. (2010). Coyote's guide to connecting with nature, 2nd edition. Shelton, Wash: OWLLink Media. 349

13 Young, J., Haas, E., &McGown, E. (2010). Coyote's guide to connecting with nature, 2nd edition. Shelton, Wash: OWLLink Media. 348-350

14 Orr, D. (2012) A Sense of Wonder [online] Available from: https://www.ecoliteracy.org/article/sense-wonder-young-minds (accessed 2 July 2018).

VIII

Eco – Spirituality: A Companion to Earth Ethics

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Spirituality is a bridge between ethics and beliefs, that is, beliefs which are informed by the life sciences and sometimes by religion when it is authentic to our times. Spirituality implies nurturing practices, with or without (a theistic) God, to sustain an ethical life. Spirituality refers to the human quest to live life with a meaning and purpose that is linked to a sense of transcendence; that is, spirituality bespeaks a consciousness that we are part of a reality beyond ourselves. Therefore, one's spirituality helps shape answers to questions which are fundamental for our species, questions of values, identity (who am I and what am I to be?) and community (to whom do I belong and with whom do I have shared responsibilities?).

We cultivate our spirituality in our "inner life" as we cultivate, maybe unconsciously, community and personal development built on authenticity, integrity, hope and love. And the cultivation of spirituality is inextricably linked with our connection to the wonders of the natural world. To paraphrase (the self-styled "geo-logian") Thomas Berry: the more we destroy the world the less a sense of the sacred is possible.

Environmentalist Fritjof Capra[1] identifies the basis of eco-spirituality: "Ultimately, "he says, "deep ecological awareness is spiritual or religious awareness. When the concept of the human spirit is understood as the mode of consciousness in which the individual feels a sense of belonging, of connectedness, to the cosmos as a whole, it becomes clear that ecological awareness is spiritual in its deepest sense." Capra is obviously envisioning, as I do, a spirituality that all human beings potentially share.

This spirituality must be "practised", as Buddhists would say. Sometimes formal religion helps this practice. The Australian Lutheran biblical scholar, Norm Habel, has provided what Val Webb describes as "a lyrical memoir-reflection" titled *Rainbow of Mysteries: Meeting the Sacred in Nature*. I read it as a resource for and of eco-spirituality, grounded in what Habel calls "the mystery of

1 The Hidden Connections,(2002) p. 129.

Presence": "when I am home with earth, I am acutely aware Earth is there, mystery is moving me and Presence is present."[2]

For many, eco-spirituality must be ritualised (in ways I have called "celebrations of being"), and Habel's volume provides examples. Grace at the family meal table is a simple practice of thankfulness and focus on the interdependence of all life forms. Different pathways will suit different people at different stages of their lives. Inspirational music and engaging with wilderness can be a major focus in cultivating eco-spirituality. Some might find practices built around communal activity more suitable while others are nurtured by solitude; some might be awakened to a sense of connectedness to nature by getting down and dirty in the garden, while others are awakened by illness, which helps them discover how they are embodied and connected to all bodies.

Finally, the following statement describes what I mean by eco-spirituality. It is not wedded to any particular faith or religion, though it may reflect my Christian training. The statement rejects the anthropocentrism which, in the last 500 years or so, infected mono-theistic religions including Christianity and western philosophy as well as the ideologies of capitalism and communism. The statement affirms that homo sapiens is part of, not separate from, nature.

Eco-spirituality supports the eco-centric emphasis[3] which contemporary ecology and cosmology suggests. It is a practice which arises from our connection to all beings and Earth herself, and from experiences of transcendence and mystery which this connection may evoke.

Eco-spirituality focuses our commitments and relationships, fostering a sense of intimacy with the ever present spirit of life, "the Ground of our Being". Arising from a fundamental reverence and awe for life's unity, balance, difference and connectedness, eco-spirituality cultivates compassion which is all inclusive and empowering, drawing on restorative wellsprings that are both contemplative and prophetic.

Eco-spirituality encourages us to pay attention to where we are, to tend our garden and care for our neighbourhood. Eco-spirituality rejects easy optimism and recognizes the limitations which confront us. Transporting us to a deep sense of gratitude for the gift of life, eco-spirituality frees us to be self-giving. It is a spirituality which challenges the illusions which easily capture us – that consumerism makes us happy or even that there is a God out there who will save us.

Eco-spirituality is a necessary companion in working, hopefully, for eco-justice[4], a work that is costly. In the quest for a balance that is in harmony with the Earth, eco-spirituality calls us to live graciously, act justly, love all beings tenderly and walk humbly with the spirit of life, while we think globally, act locally and live simply so others may simply live.

(**Extracted from N Preston *"Ethics, with or without God"***, Morning Star Publishing, 2014, pps. 52 -54).

2 Habel, N (2012), 29

3 The term eco-centrism needs some qualification along the lines developed by Birch and Cobb in The Liberation of Life. They provide a viewpoint which is more complex than the fundamentalism of some environmentalists.

4 The term, eco-justice, refers to the convergence between social justice and environmental sustainability.

IX

Can Religion Make a Viable Contribution to the Realization of an Ethic for Earth?

Anne Boyd
Earthsong

"Earth is crammed with heaven,
and every common bush is on fire with God;
but only he who sees takes off his shoes;
the rest sit around it and pluck blackberries."

These insightful words written by Elizabeth Barret Browning in the early 19th Century may well have been written in the early 21st Century to describe the dilemma in which we find ourselves today. Whilst our planet is riddled with destruction and multinational corporations flaunt the rules governing healthy ecosystems and social bonds, there are multiple domains of emergence that are networking across the planet and following the principles of creativity. Paul Hawken likens this movement to the Earth's auto immune system.[1] Can we find any of these within the Christian faith?

Abundant and often well-deserved criticism has been levelled at Christianity in the Western world for its promotion of a dualistic attitude to matter and spirit, advancing a theology of "dislocation" from the life-giving systems of our planet, and the promotion of anthropocentrism. However, as we become more deeply attuned to the inherent kinship of all beings on this planet, the cries of species other than human reach our ears with greater clarity. In the listening, the boundaries of our cultural institutions fall away. Through the cracks a new inclusivity is seeping.

Brian Swimme[2] speaks of the Universe as always seeking new "domains of emergence" and, in the chaos of emergence, transcending the existing order, embracing opposites, and taking

1 cf Paul Hawken *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Social Movement in History is Restoring Grace, Justice, and Beauty to the World*, Viking (New York) 2007

2 Brian Swimme *Powers of the Universe* dvd, Centre for the Story of the Universe, San Francisco CA, 2004

new forms. Others, building on the work of many earlier thinkers, identify an experience of an evolution of consciousness.[3] A way to contextualize these new insights is to place them in the dynamics of the three principles determining the narrative of evolutionary creativity. These principles inform us that the Universe in its creative unfolding delights in difference and diversity, infuses each being with inner self-organising abilities and spirit driven capacities and holds all in one interconnected communion. I recently heard these principles described as the "footprints of God" and indeed for people of faith this process answers the question of how the Mystery brought all things into being.

In asking if religion can play a role in awakening contemporary societies to the new moral and spiritual dimensions of the current ecological crisis, Freya Matthews[4] claims that "since morality and spirituality are core to the business of religion it would seem that religion is indeed an appropriate vehicle for a moral and spiritual call to arms on behalf of Earth". In recognising the acute anthropocentrism that has been characteristic of many of the world's religions she believes that there is the possibility for a new domain of emergence because religion permeates consciousness and culture:

> In order for a particular ethic to gain acceptance, it must figure as part of an entire context of belief, a specific way of perceiving the universe and creating meaning through distinctive narrative and normative lenses – where the provision of such lenses has traditionally been the task of religion.[5]

Matthews continues to propose that religions have the capacity to be organic and can embrace an evolving consciousness that offers a "moral and spiritual compass" allowing for a re-interpretation of their tradition. The reality that new emergences embrace earlier ones, distilling what is obsolete and then transcending them into the next phase of being is very relevant for the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Whilst there has always been a constant thread of ecological insight weaving through Christian tradition it is now coming into prominence with the teachings of Pope Francis. His encyclical *Laudato Si: Care of our Common Home*[6], offers much potential as a domain of emergence and the evolution of religious consciousness. This document, addressed to all people, not only critiques the anthropology that gave rise to human domination of the planet: "a misguided anthropocentrism leads to a misguided lifestyle"[7] but calls for an integral ecology, one in which the whole community of life is viewed as an interconnected web. Each creature has its own intrinsic value regardless of its usefulness to humans. He rejects an instrumental approach to the more than human world and promotes a sacral view:

3 cf Barbara Marx Hubbard https://centerforintegralwisdom.org/foundation-conscious-evolution/

4 Freya Matthews 'Satao's Cry', EarthSong Journal, Spring 2014, 11-13

5 ibid

6 Francis, Encyclical Letter Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home, St Paul's Publications, NSW 2015

7 ibid 100, par 122

> The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face.[8]

Whilst he draws on wisdom from earlier church teaching he is also inclusive of other traditions and honours the discoveries of the modern sciences. There is a strong resonance here with the teaching of Thomas Berry and colleagues that the universe is communion of subjects and not a collection of objects. In recognition that we all come from the very same source and are essentially connected, Francis "would reiterate that God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement".[9] Similarly, perceiving the communion of diverse, self-organising beings Francis believes:

> God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other in the service of each other.[10]

This document recognises the consequences of treating Earth's "resources" to meet the excessive wants of humans:

> This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she "groans in travail" (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters. *nothing in this world is indifferent to us*.[11]

The Pope quotes Bartholomew, the Greek Patriarch: "For human beings… to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life – these are sins".[12] Thus, ushering a new moral consciousness.

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8 ibid 179, par 233

9 ibid 59 par 67

10 ibid 73 par 86

11 ibid 10, par 2

12 ibid 14, par 8

Writing on ethics and ecology, Thomas Berry[13] points out that the process of embracing and transcending the old consciousness is no easy task because of deeply embedded cultural coding and that as a major functionary of culture. Religion has a journey ahead of it:

> Our cultural traditions are constantly groping toward their appropriate realization within the context of an emerging universe. As things change, the traditions are forced into new expressions or into an impasse that demands a new beginning.
>
> Perhaps a new revelatory experience is taking place, an experience where human consciousness awakens to the grandeur and sacred quality of the Earth process.[14]

Whilst *Laudato Si* is a long way from the vision and articulation of Earth Jurisprudence, the Australian Earth Laws Alliance and movements such as the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature, it is a step along the way and perhaps may be envisaged as a caterpillar inside the chrysalis, which actually dissolves into a protein-rich soupy substance. Cells, which had been dormant in the caterpillar and which biologists have the poetic genius to call "imaginal cells," begin a process of creating a new form and structure. At first these imaginal cells – the seeds of future containing the blueprint of a flying creature—operate independently as single-celled organisms. They are regarded as threats and are attacked by the caterpillar's immune system embedded in the soupy substance. But they persist, multiply, and connect with each other. The imaginal cells form clusters and clumps, begin resonating at the same frequency and passing information back and forth until they hit a tipping point. They begin acting not as discrete individual cells but as a multi-celled organism – and a butterfly is born.

So it remains to be seen who will take off their shoes with Elizabeth Barret Browning and see "every common bush on fire with God."

13 Thomas Berry *The Great Work: our way into the future,* Bell Tower NY, 1999, 101

14 ibid 106

X

Cultivating Dialogues and Transforming Worldviews – A Depth Psychological Perspective

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Transforming Worldviews

Mainstream Australia largely lives in a state of dissociation from Earth and its ecosystems, driving much harm to our ecologies, societies and psyches. To acknowledge and address these harms, communities need to engage in questioning and challenging the dominant worldviews and cultural myths that support this dissociative state of separation. This paper explores how productive and transformative community dialogues that give shape and meaning to Earth-centred realities and ethics can be supported by depth psychological practices and perspectives.

In order to change worldviews, and the consciousness that supports them, there is a need for individuals and societies to engage with what is commonly ignored, dismissed or denied within their habitual worldviews. An ecological worldview values life on the margins as sites of evolution. Similarly, psychological perspectives value the transformative possibilities of paying attention to what is routinely sidelined in individuals' thinking, and in social processes. Depth psychology is particularly well-equipped to facilitate the shift away from habitual ways of understanding towards dismissed and/or emergent worldviews because it works by focusing on the realms of the unconscious where awareness is routinely suppressed, repressed, neglected or simply undiscovered.[1] Central to depth psychology is an acknowledgement of the creative and healing possibilities of making what has been unconscious, conscious. In order to both identify what we don't know and to find another way, depth psychology pays close attention to self, others and the world by "being with", through reflection and dialogue, while "seeing through" the apparent to the less apparent and the hidden possibilities of a situation.[2] Its experiential approach,

1 Paris, Ginette (2007). *Wisdom of the Psyche: Depth Psychology After Neuroscience*. Hove: Routledge.

2 Hillman, James (1992) *Revisioning Psychology*, New York: HarperPerennial. 140-5

focused awareness and facilitation of transformative insights make it well suited to supporting exploratory dialogues in search of emergent worldviews.[3]

The transitional zone between old and new worldviews is a confusing and chaotic, yet potentially creative, space in which new ways of perceiving and understanding can be formed and tested Myths are narrative templates which unconsciously shape our perceptions of, and ethical relationship to, our world.[4] As much as we may like to, we cannot simply adopt new and better worldviews, nor construct cultural myths. Such deep change has to work its way into consciousness, through attending to the unconscious or hidden dimensions of societies and individuals, and to their disruptive consequences. Karen Armstrong observes that the most powerful new myths arise in extreme times when we "have to go to a place we have never seen, and do what we have never done before"[5]; a time like now, when we must collectively dig deep to discover and nurture entirely new ways of being and acting, in response to widespread ecological destructions.

It takes time to transition into a new worldview and to evolve the cultural myths that sustain them. The great mythologist Joseph Campbell wrote about how we are born into myths and are formed by them. Some forty years ago, Campbell wrote that "the only mythology that is valid today is the mythology of the planet – and we don't have such a mythology".[6] He did believe, however, that when future myths arose they would speak about the importance of developing individual maturity within a global society through holding a conscious positive relationship to nature and cosmos.[7] Ask almost any child today how they see our planet, and they will talk about the need for all of us to care for the Earth and its creatures, finding ways to live that do not pollute its atmosphere and oceans. This is an encouraging sign that an Earth-centred global myth is in gestation. As is the growing visibility of and respect for the Earth-centred cultures of First Nations people

Cultivating Dialogues

One way of countering the highly polarised nature of many environmental debates in the public realm, is to initiate and support exploratory and inclusive dialogues which enable participants to articulate and listen to a diversity of experiences and beliefs. Through open dialogues, people can begin to identify, share and explore what lies beneath the apparent apathy and paralysis in response to ecological destruction, and a disconnection from Earth-centred ways of knowing.[8] Respectful, open-ended conversations at a personal level invite reflection, connection and inclusiveness. They can ask fundamental ethical questions about what matters most in life. When this takes place, the commonality of who we are and what we love can be recognised, helping

3 Coppin, J., & Nelson, E. (2005). *The Art of Inquiry: A Depth Psychological Perspective* (2nd ed.). Putnam, CT: Spring Publications

4 Paris, Ginette (2007). *Wisdom of the Psyche: Depth Psychology After Neuroscience*. Hove: Routledge.

5 Armstrong, Karen. (2004). *A Short History of Myth*. Melbourne: Canongate. 3

6 Campbell, Joseph (1988). *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday. 22

7 Campbell, Joseph (1988). *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday. 32

8 Lertzman, Renee (2015). *Environmental Melancholia: Psychoanalytic Dimensions of Engagement* Hove: Routledge.

painful emotions to be shared, deep-seated assumptions examined and conflicts negotiated. The writer and Zen teacher, Natalie Goldberg observes that:

> To allow someone else's mind is to be newly open to our own mind. To abide in a whole room of individual thoughts is to feel large, containing worlds, abundant and whole. No enemies. No one to fight. This ability to listen seems a strong foundation for democracy.[9]

It is also a potent tool in birthing cultural change.

Grassroots organisations and community initiatives are mushrooming in response to the ongoing failure of the Australian Government to address ecological harms and losses. Each provides opportunities for formal and informal dialogues which foster cultural transformation and empathy. Dialogues that transform people's hearts and minds need to have a personal element, inviting authenticity and freshness into the room. They allow time for the sharing of feelings and anecdotes which lay foundations for new connections to be made, and for beliefs and ethics to be re-examined in non-threatening ways.

Acknowledging conflicts within ourselves and between ourselves is a necessary part of this process, which can be highly productive if safely contained and explored. No one changes by being harangued and berated. Depth psychology values the process of bringing conflicts into the open and examining all the perspectives and responses present. Open and respectful listening to others, or to our own conflicted responses, helps to create a crucible for personal and social change through cultivating patience, tolerance and compassion.

Many people avoid engaging with ecological crises because they fear falling into overwhelming feelings of sadness, fear, guilt, anger, hopelessness and grief.[10] These are potent emotions which are readily stirred by facing climate disruption, biodiversity loss and a myriad of other ecological impacts. However, as long as we relegate these feelings to the margins of our attention or repress them into the unconscious, we cannot deal with them or be motivated by them. Nor can we address them on a purely individual basis given that these feelings are stirred by collective issues. What is needed are collective forms of response, generated by dialogue. Just as ecosystems foster strength and diversity through a network of communicative and supportive relationships working through ongoing listening and feedback, so must we.

In my own experience of facilitating groups in their engagement with climate issues, I have frequently witnessed how, when one person is in despair, another is hopeful, and then vice versa. The multiplicity of feelings and experiences that individuals bring to a group strengthens it. When people witness the fluidity of their own and others' emotions, they can become more trusting of working with emotional responses and processes generally. Realising that we all, at times, will feel a wide range of feelings in response to ecological destruction can be bonding and

9 Goldberg, Natalie (2013). *The True Secret of Writing: Connecting Life With Language*. New York: Atria Books. 54

10 Weintrobe, Sally (Ed.). *Engaging with climate change: Psychoanalytic and interdisciplinary perspectives*. Hove: Routledge.

energising, as the commonality of who we are and what we are experiencing emerges, supporting collaborative learning and action. In particular, there is a need for a collective acknowledgement and expression of grief over ecological losses, such as the fast-approaching death of the Great Barrier Reef. Facing into such significant and threatening losses and marking them, through performances, laments and memorials for example, stimulates heartfelt conversations about what we cherish most, laying the foundations for Earth-centred worldviews, ethics and actions.

There are many possible avenues for creating dialogues about transitioning from Earth-separated worldviews to Earth-centred ones. These range from making a good amount of time for personal 'check ins' at community meetings, setting up film or book club discussions or initiating dialogue circles through to inviting friends or work colleagues to café discussions. While the form and format can be varied, what is crucial is creating space for people to be listened to respectfully, without interruption or criticism, as they share their experiences and feelings in response to the ecological crises we live within.

The momentum for evolving an Earth-centred ethical orientation is already synergistically building, through a network of community groups founded upon passion, commitment and care. The more that community groups can make themselves sites for open discussions about the experiences, meanings values and emotions that accompany this work, the more they can contribute to growing consciousness and energy for birthing a culture of shared responsibility and care for the Earth.

XI

Ethics, Ecology and Subjective Experience

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Introduction

Ethics involves awareness and empathy, or sympathy, with others. The more aware we are, the more ethical and responsive we can be. Human ethical responses are also heavily affected by what people habitually think, feel and do to survive in society, and this includes responses to "nature" or "ecological processes". However, human awareness of complex living systems is inevitably limited, creating unconsciousness which intensifies the likelihood of harm or unexpected consequences. By becoming more aware of unconscious processes and their causes, we can increase our ethical sensitivity, and by recognising that we live in complex systems we can begin forming an ethics that accepts unpredictability, apparent disorder and flux.

Thought and perception

The philosophical theory of the "theory dependence of observation", implies that what we think and feel influences what we perceive, and how we will act.[1] Thinking, feeling and habit ("TFH") intertwine producing a person's ego, or consciousness, and sense of place in the world. As the word "habit" implies, TFH tend to be repetitive and automatic even when it feels we have chosen freely.

Realising the power of TFH does not call for "positive thinking" as a problem solving technique. Life can be tragic and wonderful simultaneously, as paradox is normal. Suppressing an awareness of complexities through habitual and unreflective behaviour gives a distorted and inadequate view of life, and reduces ethical sensitivities. For example, a positive refusal to acknowledge socially generated ecological disruption, and the laws enabling it, prevents neither the disruption nor its consequences; lessening disruption comes through increasing awareness and learning to think, feel and act more appropriately given the complex circumstances.

1 Chalmers, A. 1976. *What is this thing called Science?* St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press. 20–34

Ethics and Relationship

Philosopher David Hume suggested that practical morals grow out of empathy, sympathy, and identification with others. People do "reason" about ethics, but they usually proceed through feeling and habit.[2] Given theory dependence, then society's ethical guidelines generate an awareness which influences understanding, and misunderstanding, of the way the world works or should work. The same can be true of law.

Unconscious process

Humans become unconscious in at least three ways:

Perceptually: We process massive amounts of sensory input. Most of this we filter out of consciousness, even if other parts of us may be aware.[3] Our attention is driven by theories and "TFH" (e.g. we may only see a town in terms of pubs or bookshops, or we may try to kill all bacteria without recognising that some are vital), while some awareness is filtered by biology (we cannot consciously detect some electro-magnetic waves, even as they harm us). Our total bodily and mental systems are more aware than our consciousness.

Functionally: We are unconscious of some processes because they lie behind or beyond our consciousness. We don't always know how or why thoughts appear (although we can rationalise them), or why we act (as is implied by post-hypnotic suggestion). We may not perceive most of our bodily workings, and the world that produces us because we identity with those people using TFH.

Socially: We use TFH in particular ways because those we identify with those using TFH in these ways, we have been taught to use TFH in these ways, or because challenging existing orders risks violence. People can suppress their empathy/sympathy with others to fit in with social expectations, or suppress what they think is evil. They can project self-failings onto others; as when authoritarian activists strongly denounce authoritarianism in others while not perceiving their own. Maintaining our social power and group alliances often requires us to suppress empathy with others in outgroups. Living in modern societies tends to separate people from awareness of their surrounding ecologies. Laws, likewise, can be part of an ethical system of ordering and suppression of consciousness, although (like ethics) they do not have to be.

Ecology and Complexity

All living systems (including humans) are complex systems in which interactors and interactions are modified in response to events in the system. These "systems" are not absolutely harmonious for life requires conflict, pain and death; neither are they always in balanced equilibrium. Complex systems have certain important properties:[4]

2 Hume, D. 1888. *A Treatise of human nature*, ed L.A. Selby-Bigge. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

3 Nørretranders, T. 1999. *The User illusion: Cutting consciousness down to size*. Penguin.

4 NSF 2009. *Transitions and Tipping Points in Complex Environmental Systems*. National Science Foundation.

— *We cannot predict in specific what will happen, although we can forecast trends. The consequences of ethical decisions/actions are uncertain, although attention to these consequences can guide our ethics.*

— *We cannot understand such systems exhaustively. We are always partially unaware and unconscious. This unconsciousness may be reinforced by violence and demands for inaccurate, socially-approved orders.*

— *Small unnoticed changes may accumulate, producing rapid system change, at certain points. These places of rapid change are known as tipping points. We cannot assume because things are going well, or seem stuck, that they will continue in that way.*

— *Systems are in constant flux. If sustainability means holding nature still, then sustainability is impossible as evolution and accident occur continuously. Attempts to hold systems in place may produce further disruptions, while apparent mess can be functional. Ethics must be able to deal with the change, unpredictability, uncertainty and mess inherent to complex systems.*

Humans do not exist apart from these systems, and if these systems are ordered violently or suppressed, then unexpected and probably harmful consequences will arise for individuals and communities.

Complexity challenges conventional Western myths which assert that God is order, good is order and order is fixed and eternal. In these established myths, anything that obstructs our demands for order is evil or unreal, and should be suppressed, while complexity theory implies the world is messy and mutually involved, and that what appears as disorder can inform us about inaccuracies in our thinking and acting, and can be necessary for systemic functioning. Ethical and legal action needs more awareness of these complex and unconscious processes, and the ways we make ourselves unconscious, to avoid making things worse.

Therapy

To summarise, we are fluxing complex systems interacting within fluxing complex systems, with an unconscious awareness of, or feel for, those systems which complements conscious awareness. This awareness and empathy can be suppressed, creating disorders ("symptoms") through the orders we impose. For survival, we need to access unconscious awareness of complex ecological processes. Access can be helped by working with others dealing with similar problems, or with an experienced therapist who can look at unconsciousness, the world and society.

Even by ourselves, we can approach unconsciousness and attempt to perceive world dynamics with more care. We can realise we do not consciously experience the world directly, we experience our TFH and the realities they create. For example, when we feel anxious, it is generally because we are having automatic anxious thoughts (thinking horrible events will occur). This does not mean those thoughts may not be apt, requiring sensible action, but sometimes just realising the

https://www.nsf.gov/ere/ereweb/ac-ere/nsf6895_ere_report_090809.pdf

anxiety comes from our thinking, and then pausing, is helpful. Our TFH are not necessarily true or adaptive, even if they feel that way, and others agree with them.

Some unconsciousness can be relieved by giving relaxed, non-judgemental attention to flux, without holding onto demands for order. Awareness is awareness of change or of difference.[5] As the unconscious can be translated into consciousness through feelings and symbols, this change in focus may produce images, or release emotions, which we can observe and accept, without taking them as literal or accurate. For example, you don't have to kill your boss, because the feeling arises; if this feeling arises it's a symbol and it may change into something else, if accepted. You can listen for inner wisdom and awareness. You can also pay attention to dreams, to daylight fantasies and so on. These often translate unconscious awareness or unconscious processes into conscious awareness, opening solutions and providing creative perspectives on life problems.[6]

The more you pay "acceptive" attention to nature's ecologies and interact with them, noticing what is different, the more you become aware, even if unconsciously. The more you get a "feeling for things", the more you can develop your ethical relations with the world and improve the solutions you propose. However, if a convincing insight arises, test it. Does it work? Does it need modification? Is it yet another defence? Accepting an idea, feeling or image as an insight should not lead to immediate action, especially while you are unpractised. This process is experimental; ideas and insights need testing in the world to see how useful they are. We cannot always work life out by deduction.

Conclusion

Ethics involves attention, empathy and sympathy, which arise within a framework of socially and personally supported thoughts, feelings and habits ("TFH"), complexity and unconsciousness. Lacking awareness and the ability to work with unconscious perceptions, we may rigorously apply laws without sensitivity to context, demanding fixed orders instead of accepting natural flux, while insisting on our rightness and being unable to correct for reality. By increasing our awareness, our ethics, actions and legislation can have sensitivity to the constant flux of systems and the uncertainty of knowledge. We may then change our social conditions of life, our laws and actions doing less damage to the world than we do presently.

5 Langer, E. 2009. *Counter clockwise: Mindful health and the power of possibility*. New York: Ballentine.

6 Gillespie, S. 1996. *Living the Dream: a guide to working with your dreams*. Sydney: Bantam Books.

XII

Signs of Hope for an Emerging Environmental Conscience in Australia

Chris Dalton
Author of "From Terra Nullius to Beloved Companion: Reimagining Land in Australia"

Artists can provide a penetrating commentary on changing attitudes in society. This is certainly true with regard to environmental policy and has been demonstrated throughout Australia's colonial history.

Since the arrival of Europeans in Australia, non-indigenous landscape art has provided a compelling narrative on evolving (western) responses to the environment in Australia. Early paintings depict a barren, harsh, God-forsaken landscape waiting to be exploited by human action to deliver its bounty – gold, iron, coal, water and land for sheep, cattle, forestry, crops and housing. It was a view underpinned by the religious outlook of the time, and contributed to Australia emerging as a wealthy nation, that has so benefited us. As noted by Meredith Lake:

> Protestantism helped to lay the foundations for colonial society by encouraging the transformation of the environment according to colonists' values and needs.[1]

More recently, however, a greater western awareness of spirituality connected to the environment has emerged. The artist Lloyd Rees, for instance, compared his visit to Uluru with that of visiting Chartres Cathedral, when "coming up against the immensity and miraculousness of nature".[2] As one art historian, Roslynn Haynes, has said:

> we are continually creating the landscape that we "see" ... In the two centuries since European settlement of the continent it has been promoted from "best forgotten" oblivion

1 M. Lake, "Protestantism, the Land and the Colonisation of Australia, 1788–1850" (Sydney University, 2008), 1.

2 L. Rees, "The great rock: dusk", NSW Art Gallery notes

> to centre stage prominence … Uluru vies with the Sydney Opera House as the icon of the continent.[3]

These competing elements merge in the new Parliament House in Canberra, at the very heart of our nation, which draws inspiration from the Australian landscape. It's almost a New Age Cathedral for a modern liberal democratic state. Its architecture and paintings place the Australian environment centre stage in the human ordering of public policy decision-making.

The environment, somehow, is working its way deep into the Australian psyche, and we are starting to regard it in terms of a relationship, not an object. As stated by Tim Winton:

> The environment has started to make the kind of claims upon us that perhaps only a family can … (but) … twenty first century governments continue to make decisions based on the assumptions of the nineteenth century.[4]

Yet a human-centred focus is still dominant in Australian politics today. Most parliamentary speeches about natural resource development, public debates surrounding environmental protection, legislative objectives, and answers to parliamentary questions focus primarily on human utility, with little consideration given to the intrinsic interests of the environment. We might resist this mantra, we might judge its advocates, yet in insidious ways many environmentalists also implicitly support an anthropocentric focus:

— *Nation building is good*

— *I want to leave a healthy planet for my grandkids*

— *We should share our natural resources with developing nations*

— *Resource development is OK provided we look after the environment*

How, then, do we inspire an adoption of Earth ethics in the face of political conservatism and the inevitable compromises we ourselves make as citizens of one of the world's wealthiest nations, that leave us open to the accusation of hypocrisy?

There are many ways forward, including: advocating for the Rights of Nature, learning from indigenous spirituality, encouraging environmental education and activism, listening to our artists, and making our own eco-footprint sacrifices. I also think there is a need for change in what a former President of Czechoslovakia, Vaclav Havel, has called *the sphere of the spirit*.

We talk, for instance, of finding the right balance in environmental protection legislation, but that begs the question of what yardstick is used to measure balance. It is a broad term used by both sides in the environmental debate to suit their particular interests. So how do we assess

3 R. D. Haynes, *Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3.

4 T Winton, *Island Home: A Landscape Memoir* (Melbourne: Hamish Hamilton, 2015), 23, 110–12.

what is the right balance in a world of political compromise? The myth of objective neutrality looms large in this public policy debate. Havel's outlook is very relevant:

> What could change the direction of today's civilization? It is my deep conviction that the only option is a change in the sphere of the spirit, in the sphere of human conscience. It is not enough to develop new machines, new regulations, new institutions. We must develop a new understanding of the true purposes of our existence on Earth. Only by making such a fundamental shift will we be able to create new models of behaviour and a new set of values for the planet.[5]

I am optimistic on four counts that this is achievable in Australia. Firstly, attitudes are evolving in Australia, as illustrated by our artists and poets, and seen in, for example, landowner resistance to CSG mining where there are many parallels with the response of Indigenous peoples to European occupation, such as:

— *This is our land, we've lived here for generations*

— *Our way of life and identity are closely connected to this land*

— *These developments are impacting on our health*

— *I feel so powerless when confronted by state and commercial interests*

Both groups resisted what they saw as an invasion resulting from what others might call nation-building. While their circumstances are very different, they share values in how they relate to the environment that transcend the goals of economic growth and development that are so beloved of politicians. Attitudinal change can also be seen in a resolution (19.14.18) passed in 1991 by the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia (*The Rights of Nature and the Rights of Future Generations*):

> We appeal to the United Nations to develop a new Declaration which explicitly protects (these Rights). Simultaneously we appeal to individual nations to incorporate these rights into their constitutions and legislation.[6]

Secondly, the nature of Australian society is changing, such that we now live in a 'post-secular' society where multicultural and multifaith communities flourish and spirituality is an accepted and recognised concept. It is becoming more legitimate to recognise faith perspectives in the public policy debate, provided they are presented in a non-dogmatic way. A former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, put it this way:

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5 V. Havel, "Spirit of the Earth," Resurgence 191, no. 30 (1998): 30.

6 See https://www.unitingjustice.org.au/environment/uca-statements/item/479-the-rights-of-nature-and-the-rights-of-future-generations

> The sphere of public and political negotiation flourishes only in the context of larger commitments and visions, and that if this is forgotten or repressed by a supposedly neutral ideology of the public sphere, immense damage is done to the moral energy of a liberal society.[7]

In this regard, there is much common ground on environmental matters between groups like AELA (Australian Earth Laws Alliance) and ARRCC (Australian Religious Response to Climate Change) that provides a good basis for working together.

This leads to the Pope's environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, as a third cause for optimism. It has been well received and widely discussed in Australia,[8] and invites dialogue with the broader community, recognising we can learn from one-another. For example, Pope Francis appeals for:

> A new dialogue about how we are shaping our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental changes we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.[9]

Then later he states:

> Given the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we need to realise that the solutions will not emerge from just one way of interpreting and transforming reality... This encyclical welcomes dialogue with everyone so that together we can seek paths of liberation.[10]

This is a welcome open-ended call to dialogue that makes no imperialistic claims about exclusive insights into truth and reality. It sounds much like Havel's call for a change in the sphere of human conscience.

And there's a precedent for this, my fourth cause for optimism. Effecting profound change in societal attitudes as suggested by Havel, although not to be underestimated, is achievable. This can be seen in the abolition of the slave trade over 200 years ago. Metaxas describes the impact of William Wilberforce's pioneering work in this way:

> He vanquished the very mind-set that made slavery acceptable … He destroyed an entire way of seeing the world … we would never again question whether it was our responsibility

7 R. Williams, quoted in S. C. H. Kim, *Theology in the Public Sphere: Public Theology as a Catalyst for Open Debate* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 181.

8 See http://catholicearthcare.org.au/ecological-encyclical/

9 Pope Francis, Laudato Si'. (Rome: St Pauls, 2015), ¶ 14

10 Ibid, ¶¶ 63, 64

> as society to help those less fortunate … Today we call this having a "social conscience", and we can't imagine any modern, civilized society without one.[11]

Interestingly, there was much resistance to Wilberforce's crusade to abolish the slave trade, with claims it would be an economic disaster, give other nations a competitive advantage over Britain, cause plantation owners to go bankrupt, and increase living costs for ordinary consumers. Opposing slavery was seen by many as challenging the very foundations of the British Empire, almost treason. Economic and cost of living arguments also fuel resistance to the incorporation of the Rights of Nature into legislation in Australia.

My hope is that in years to come people will liken Earth ethics to *having an environmental conscience*, and will not be able to *imagine any modern civilized society without one*. Maybe, in time, we will come to loathe and condemn our anthropocentric, utilitarian treatment of the environment, just as much as we now loathe and condemn slavery.

We can debate endlessly the economics, science, legality, and politics of environmental protection. But maybe significant change will only come about as a result of ethical arguments that implicitly appeal to worldviews. As Ross Garnaut, chair of the federal government's climate change review has stated, the "wicked problem" of climate change is, at its heart, an ethical issue.[12]

In conclusion, there are positive signs that a strengthening environmental conscience in Australian society will lead to the adoption of the Rights of Nature into legislation. Landscape art points to a constructive re-imagining of Land, secular and faith communities are pressing for environmental policies that go well beyond the current anthropocentric focus on economic growth and development, and precedents like the abolition of the slave trade provide hope that there is the potential for a new set of values for the planet to be embraced that will transform current environmental policies.

11 E. Metaxas, *Amazing Grace; William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery* (Oxford: Monarch Press, 2007), xv, xvi.

12 See http://www.garnautreview.org.au/CA25734E0016A131/WebObj/Transcript_KeynotespeechtoClimateChangeandSocialJusticeConference_RossGarnaut_3April08/$File/Keynote%20speech.pdf, retrieved 13 October 2016

XIII

Women on the Frontline: Morality in the Anthropocene

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Morality: A system of values or principles of conduct concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behaviour.[1]

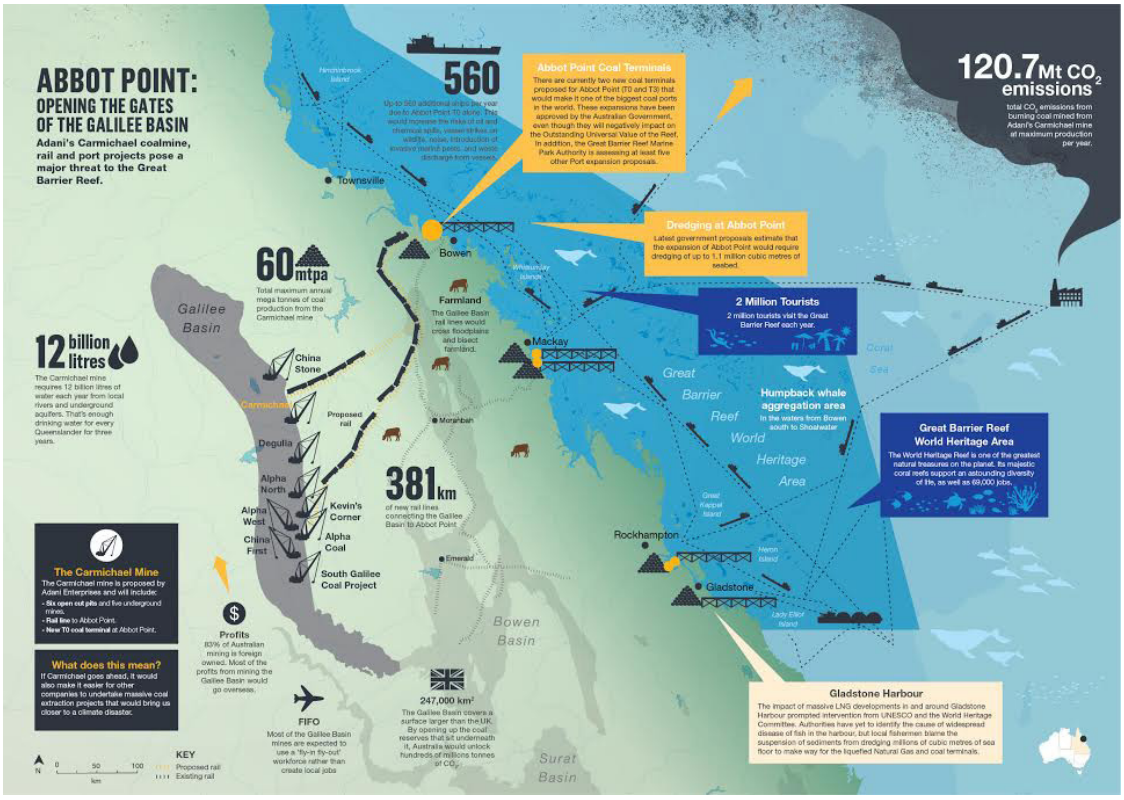
People have challenged moral systems throughout history. In this era of the Anthropocene, demands to end injustices such as slavery, sexism and racism have grown to include those perpetrated against our environment. Yet the cause of these injustices are deeply woven into our society's legal, social and economic systems. Our complicity in these destructive human-centred systems, whether willing or not, incurs harm to our environment that is almost impossible to avoid. And while we work towards an earth-centred governance model to live within our ecological means and respect the rights of nature, emissions continue to rise, our fossil fuel addiction persists and new coal mines continue to be built.

What do we do? Continue to wait while we build this systemic change? Or does our place as humans in the Anthropocene confer some additional responsibility on us to take immediate action in the face of these overwhelming collective environmental problems?

Five women in late 2017 decided that it did. They chose to challenge the prevailing morality of the Anthropocene - to grab, to own, to consume, to profit - by taking non-violent direct action to stop the proposed Adani Carmichael coal mine in northern Queensland. Like most of us, these women had involuntarily benefitted from the wealth generated by millennia of environmental destruction. But for them, coal mining in the 21st century was a line in the sand: *humanity is better than this*. They locked themselves to farm gates, occupied offices and barricaded roads, taking immense personal risk to work towards forcing our society's systems and social norms to change. What drove this choice?

1 https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/morality

"I just look at the Galilee Basin [where the proposed Adani Carmichael Mine would be built] … and I just think that is not happening. You have to stop it. There is too much at stake now." Nora[2] had been on the frontline a number of times after seeing first-hand the devastation caused by regional coal mining. For Rachel, an IT project manager, the sheer audaciousness of the mine played a factor: "If either the Great Artesian Basin or the Great Barrier Reef are gone, then that's just so mind boggling. It just defies logic." The same word drove Susan, a retired Principal from regional Queensland: "For me… it was the most illogical act that anybody on the planet could do. And that illogicality was the thing that spurred me on to do something about it."



Source: Greenpeace (http://www.greenpeace.org)

However, the decision to "do something" wasn't spontaneous. Beth, a 25 year old student, described how her awakening occurred during a visit to another frontline protest: "To see and meet people, to hear their stories about corruption, injustice, what the coal mines had meant to their lives, meeting traditional owners, hearing about the process that they'd been through in trying to protect their sacred sites and how ineffective that had been. You know, seeing the cops behaving so badly. [It] just really opened my eyes in a way that living in the city as a young, privileged white person just never would have."

Many of us are taking action to reduce the harm we inflict on the environment. We use reusable coffee cups. We talk to our politicians and try to get them to listen. We ask nicely. Like many, Beth had tried this, over and over again. But she "became a little bit disenfranchised with how slow it was, how unable it was to deal with [the problem]." For Mary, a retired civil servant, it was clear that other methods of creating change hadn't worked. "Well, we still don't have legalised

2 Names have been changed

abortion, we still have all these issues. None of them have actually been resolved positively. So, there is a point where direct action really needs to complement the rest of it". As Rachel explained, "What [is needed] is actually physically stopping them, because there's nothing else we can now do. I don't think there are any options left."

Photo by Julian Meehan. Copyright: Creative Commons CC-by-SA

But putting your body in the way of trains and machinery doesn't come without cost: there is a price to pay when you challenge entrenched systems normalising profit-making from ecological destruction. A criminal record, the threat of physical abuse and substantial fines compounds the stress intrinsic in being part of frontline action. Beth experienced this when she first took direct action as a teenager. "When I first became more radical, I thought I would be able to change more than I could. Or I thought that everyone should be able to work as hard as I was. But when I was there for longer [I] saw the toll these kind of things have on people. I'm also constantly unsure if what we're doing is the most effective thing, or what we could be doing differently. [Yet] I feel like 25 is too young to be jaded and cynical."

Despite the challenges, these women and hundreds like them are still driven to do something. To Rachel this compulsion is intrinsic to who she is as a person: "Culpability. I think that everyone has to weigh up what sits with them, but with me, it's definitely that I could not possibly live with myself if I didn't do it." And for Beth, moral behaviour in the Anthropocene means taking responsibility: "I feel like that not everyone can do the work that I do now, and so I really should take up that task now. I do deeply feel that sense of responsibility or the need to do the things that I do."

Not everybody can take the risks of frontline activism. But maybe that isn't necessary; a small battalion of women may help stop the development of one of the world's largest coal mines. In doing so they show us we all have the power to demand a better world: one by one we can challenge social norms that suppress protest, encourage silence and ostracise radical activists. In fact, this is the only way that we can transform our moral and governance systems to support, and not destroy, the home we all depend on. Our human-centred governance is destroying the habitability of our planet, right now, in forests and farmlands near you. Given this fact, frontline activism may be the instrument that buys the time to work towards a long term systemic change in our governance systems.

People are not standing by as the great Anthropocene ecological collapse proceeds. For some like Nora, their moral compass is strong and steady: "Well, I think I have an obligation to the planet, to my country. To the soil, the ground. It was the way I was brought up and I just have a great love for it. And I think I just have to put my life on the line for it basically."

XIV

Lines in the Sand

Meredith Elton
Artist

https://vimeo.com/277245857/d0f2ec97a9