

## Teaching Environmental Ethics to MBA Students

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*This essay explains the author's approach to teaching environmental ethics in the graduate school of business. The approach is based on a religious rather than a philosophical perspective, taking its light not from theology or religious studies but from anthropology. The author discusses the origins of the course, then explains the anthropological model of religion as a cultural system and briefly applies that model to economics, focusing on the worldview that undergirds it. The course then shifts to how others understand the world in which they live, introduces Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, and ends by speculating on what might come next if the course were a third longer than it is.*

Loyola University Chicago has had an environmentally oriented class in the MBA program since 1988. That course, Business and the Environment, was my course; I always squeezed environmental ethics into the last three weeks of the ten-week quarter, using films (*God's Earth*), books (Daniel Quinn's *Ismael*), and chapters of books ("The Land Ethic" from Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac*). In late spring 2004 I was asked to offer an environmental ethics course. It would be part of our business ethics certificate program but open to all graduate students in business. Thus was born Global Environmental Ethics. It has been offered every spring quarter since and has drawn an average of 30 students each quarter (a high of 35 and a low of 27).

The two most important issues I faced in planning this course were how to make it global and how to make it something I was comfortable teaching. Making it global was easy; making it something I was comfortable teaching was more challenging.

Because I am not a philosopher, nor philosophically trained, I was not comfortable teaching the course as applied philosophical ethics. Besides, my sense is, along with Harold W. Wood, that as far as ordinary people are concerned, "it is religion which is the greatest factor in determining morality" (1985, p. 151). Anna Peterson agrees: "Religion remains the primary way that most people conceptualize the 'big questions' of ethics and metaphysics" (Peterson, 2001, p. 5). But neither am I a religious studies scholar. To solve my problem I turned to anthropology, and in particular the anthropology of Clifford Geertz.<sup>2,3</sup>

### A THEORY DRIVEN COURSE

Like all professors, I want my class to be theory driven. Instructors in marketing, finance, and accounting can assume a shared theoretical context that arises from the students' previous knowledge of and familiarity with economics. They all take a class in economics, and the first chapter of every business text repackages those lessons. My class does not have that luxury.

Since I cannot rely on familiarity with a pre-existing theoretical framework, I have to develop it myself. While I am merely laying the theoretical groundwork, students see it as *very* philosophical. One student recently wrote on a course evaluation,

For a business discipline to take what appeared to me to be such a purely philosophical approach to environmental ethics was in my mind unpragmatic and therefore of no use to me, and more of the meaningless drivel that I had come to expect from my limited exposure to philosophy in college. After all, we attend business school to learn applicable skills that will ultimately – to continue with bluntness – enable us to increase our earning potential, not pontificate on erudite topics.

Patience prevails, however. The student ended this comment by saying, “Of course, my first impressions were wrong.”

### **The Concept of Culture**

Every student is familiar with the term *culture*, but generally hold a sense similar to the following, taken from my *American Heritage Dictionary* (1996, p. 454): “The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought characteristic of a community or population.”

As a definition of culture, this comes to us from the first page E. B. Tyler’s 1871 book, *Primitive Culture*. It has become known as “the complex whole” definition of culture. The concept of culture I employ is borrowed from Clifford Geertz. “Culture” he wrote,

denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life (1973, p. 89).

As such culture is not a force or causal agent in the world, and it is not a collection of things made. It is a *context* in which people live out and give meaning to their lives (Geertz, 1973, p. 14). In an alternative and more often quoted formulation Geertz writes,

Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning (Geertz, 1973, p. 5).

Culture constitutes “that intersubjective world of common understandings into which all human individuals are born, in which they pursue their separate careers, and which they leave persisting behind them after they die” (Geertz, 1973, p. 92).

I make sure students do not underestimate the importance of this passage because the implication is subtle but critical for this class. To help students fully grasp its significance, we discuss what it is they do when they *think*. Generally they are unable to describe what it is they do in this most fundamental aspect of our mentality. In part this is because they hold to a vague idea that thinking is some sort of thing going on *in their head*.<sup>4</sup> So that is where I begin, and I do so by unpacking this passage from Geertz (1973, p. 214):

Thinking, conceptualization, formulation, comprehension, understanding, or what have you, consists not of ghostly happenings in the head but of a matching of the states and processes of symbolic models against the states and processes of the wider world.

I point out that when we teach our courses we present symbolic models—Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, the product life cycle, the BCG Matrix (with its rising stars, dogs, cash cows, and question marks), the balanced scorecard, the intersecting Laws of Supply and Demand, regression equations—with the hope that students learn them (the models) and use them in their analysis of a case so that the unknown (the case) becomes known (in terms of the model). We generally realize, for example, that the rising stars and dogs are metaphors, but what we do not often recognize that the BCG matrix, itself, is a metaphor.

There is an important caution in this. There are living metaphors and there are dead metaphors. Living metaphors are “offered and accepted with a consciousness of their nature as substitutes for their literal equivalents” while dead metaphors “have been so often used that speaker and hearer have ceased to be aware that the words used are not literal” (Nicholson, 1957, p. 340). McCloskey captured this distinction in *The Rhetoric of Economics* as follows: “Much of the vocabulary of economics consists of dead metaphors taken from non-economic spheres” (1985, p. 76): production *functions*, business *cycles*, *elasticity*, *depression*, *equilibrium*. “The metaphorical content of these ideas was alive to its nineteenth-century inventors. It is largely dead to its twentieth-century users, but deadness does not eliminate the metaphorical element” (p. 79).

This gives rise to the caution. We cannot think independently of the buried metaphor in the words we use. We can only be unselfconscious of the metaphorical nature of the thoughts pursued. We take them to be literal, not metaphorical. Metaphor, however, buried or not, conditions our perceptions. Continuing with McCloskey now,

Self-consciousness about metaphor ... would be an improvement on many counts. Most obviously, *unexamined metaphor is a substitute for thinking*—which is a recommendation to examine the metaphors, not to attempt the impossible by banishing them (p. 81, emphasis added).

It is important that students understand that they, too, think with and through metaphors, with and through systems of symbols and meanings, and that, as individuals, they were born into them, they pursue their separate lives in the context of them, and they leave them persisting behind them, however much they may have changed, after they die. And, most importantly, students need to realize that more often than not they are unaware of the metaphors they use and how they condition their perceptions and determine their decisions.

This understanding must be more than simple book learning; the students must *really* understand it. To do so they must *experience* it. I perform a thought experiment in class that provides that experiential learning. Since I have described it elsewhere (Benton and Benton, 2004, pp. 230-232) I will here be very brief.

I ask students to imagine that they have been on a trip during which they bought something. During their return travels, they strike up a conversation that eventually turns to that which they have bought and, ultimately, to the price they paid. Upon learning the price paid, the person with whom they have been conversing indicates that they got a real bargain. At this point I ask students to describe how they *feel* about their purchase and what they might do. The most difficult question is when I ask how they know that is how they *should* feel and how they know that their course of action is reasonable and realistic.

Almost universally they say they would feel happy, elated, or proud and say they would tell others, sell what they bought to realize a profit, or return and buy more. They can seldom articulate why they should feel that way or why their proposed actions are reasonable and realistic. It is just natural, obvious or self-evident to them.

I then change the intellectual context of the thought experiment. I ask them to transport themselves to a time and place in which the human body is the analogy by which social and economic affairs are described and understood.<sup>5</sup> We exercise this analogy by reading original passages from John Wycliffe, John of Salisbury, and a passage from John Locke and interpretive passages from Tawney (1926) and Mumford (1970). When we revisit the three questions their responses are very different. This time they feel *guilty* and would do something to get the excess captured back into the hands of the vendor from

whom they took it or back into general circulation by giving the excess to charity. They no longer feel good and they no longer say they will keep the windfall. Unlike the first pass of this thought experiment, this time they can explain why they feel guilty and why their course of action is reasonable and realistic by referencing the analogy of the human body.

I finish this thought experiment by putting it in the rhetoric of today by asking if feeling guilt and striving to give the excess back is what a *rationally self-interested* individual would feel and do, given the reality imagined. They appreciate that what is rational and what is in one's self-interest is dependent on cultural context.

The thought experiment illustrates the difference between a living metaphor and a dead metaphor. In this latter pass of the thought experiment the metaphor, the analogy is living; that in the first pass is dead—stone dead, as dead as a doornail!

### **Religion as a Cultural System**

Cultural systems can be thought of as *models*, as sets of symbols whose relations to one another *model* relations among entities, processes or what-have-you in physical, organic, social, or psychological systems by "paralleling," "imitating," or "simulating" them. There are two senses to the term *model*, however—an "of" sense and a "for" sense.

What is stressed in the *model of* sense is the manipulation of symbol structures so as to bring them, more or less closely, into parallel with the pre-established non-symbolic system. This is what we do when we grasp how dams work by developing a theory of hydraulics or by constructing a flow chart. The theory or chart models or describes physical relationships in such a way that those physical relationships are understood. The theory is a *model of* reality.

The *model for* sense stresses the manipulation of the non-symbolic systems in terms of the relationships expressed in the symbolic. This is what we do when we construct a dam according to the specifications implied in a hydraulic theory or the conclusions drawn from a flow chart. Here, the theory is a prescription, a *model for* reality.

It is this double aspect, *models of* and *models for*, that is captured by Geertz when he states, "Religion is never merely metaphysics" and it is "never merely ethics either" (1973, p. 126). Not merely metaphysics and not merely ethics, religion brings together, into a coherent whole, both a metaphysic and an ethic in such a way that one subsists on, is inherent in, the other. Religions demonstrate "a meaningful relation between the values a people holds and the general order of existence within which it finds itself" (Geertz, 1973, p. 126).

In anthropological discussions, *models for* are designated the *ethos* and *models of* are designated the *world view*.<sup>6</sup>

A people's *ethos* is the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects. ... [A people's] *world view* is their picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society. (Geertz, 1973, pp. 126-127)

Religious belief brings together a metaphysic and an ethic, a *world view* and an *ethos*, a *model of* and a *model for*, in such a way that

the *ethos* is made intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life implied by the actual state of affairs which the *world view* describes, and the *world view* is made emotionally acceptable by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs of which such a way of life is an authentic expression. This demonstration of a meaningful relation between the values a people hold and the general order of existence within which it finds itself is an essential element in all religions however those values or that order be conceived. (Geertz, 1973, pp. 126-127)

In this way morality becomes simple realism, practical wisdom. “Religion supports proper conduct by picturing a world in which such conduct is only common sense” (Geertz, 1973, p. 129).

Taken separately, the normative and the metaphysical are quite arbitrary. When taken together they form a gestalt with a particularly strong sense of inevitability. A French ethic in a Navaho world would lack any sense of naturalness and simple factuality that it has in its own context, as would a Hindu ethic in a French world. This is why the students’ first responses to the thought experiment are universally disallowed in the second pass: they are in the wrong context and, because of that, lack any sense of naturalness, simple factuality, rightness.

It is this air of factuality, of describing, after all, the genuinely reasonable way to life which, given the facts of life, is the primary source of such an ethic’s authoritativeness. What all sacred symbols assert is that the good for man is to live realistically; *where they differ is in the vision of reality they construct* (Geertz, 1973, p. 130, emphasis added).

The last sentence in the passage just quoted is particularly illuminating. I make sure students fully appreciate it.

The task in this course, as a course in global environmental ethics, is to understand the values that other peoples hold regarding the other-than-human—their environmental ethic—by understanding the world view which supports and undergirds it, and, thereby, gives it an air of factuality and sense of naturalness that it must have if it is to have authoritative appeal and, thereby, be accepted and followed. It is also important that understand the values and attitudes *we* hold regarding the other-than-human—our environmental ethic—and which we regularly teach as part of our other courses (Benton and Benton, 2004; Wenz, 1997). By understanding the understandings of others, and by understanding our own understandings, we develop a sense of the possible in the area of global environmental ethics.

## **TO KNOW ONESELF: ECONOMICS AS RELIGIOUS BELIEF**

At this point I apply Geertz’s model of religion as a cultural system to economics.<sup>7</sup> To consider economics as a religious belief system shocks most MBA students because we teach economics, but we do not teach *about* economics. As Geertz wrote, “Meanings can only be ‘stored’ in symbols, in a cross, a crescent, or a feathered serpent” (1973, p. 127). To get directly to my point now, the cross can be a Latin Cross, a Maltese Cross, or a Marshallian Cross.<sup>8</sup>

We present economics as a model *of* our price-directed market economy. What we generally think of as a model of a price directed market economy is, in the present interpretation, better understood as a model *for* the price-directed market economy as a recommended style of life: an *ethos*. The model *of* aspect refers, instead, to the unthinkingly accepted metaphysical aspects that inform it; it refers to the image of nature, of self, and of society that underlie it; it refers to the underlying *world view*.

### **The Ethos**

I begin by asking students to reconsider the Laws of Supply and Demand. We generally present these as laws akin to laws in the physical sciences, like the law of gravity. To grasp the meaning and significance of these laws we must consider them not as symbolic expressions of natural processes, nor even as the representation of statistical regularities, but as a specific set of rules found in a particular society that, if followed, assures the material provisioning of that society.

The Laws of Supply and Demand provide us with a distinctive directive for our decisions and actions. They formulate a social code that, when followed, brings the actions and reactions of discrete individuals into agreement. They thus contain an imperative rather than a description of empirical facts. The meaning of the Laws should be formulated in terms something like the following: “If commercial exchange is to be an effective instrument for want satisfaction, sellers should raise prices when buyers increase their demand,” and so on for its various propositions (Lowe 1942, pp. 439-440). Only in this way does the price system act as the signal system that conveys the information that economists say it conveys.

The laws of physics can never be more than principles of *explanation*; we cannot escape them. Economic laws are better conceived as principles of *action*; though we can evade them, we should not because if we do society will not turn out as imagined. The Laws of Supply and Demand do not “describe what an individual member of the market actually *does*, nor does it *predict* what he will do. It *prescribes* what he should do” (Lowe, 1965, p. 45).

The mere existence of a set or sets of rules does not guarantee they will be followed. People must believe that the tensions, conflicts and injustice that they see around them and may personally experience, are the result of people *not* following them. They must also believe that by adhering to the rules both the conflicts and injustice will be ameliorated, if not eliminated. In the case of economics, and in particular with the Laws of Supply and Demand, it is only if people go along with the rules that the social world will turn out as economists imagine it will. And lest we forget, the social world, as imagined by economists, is perfect and pure.

Social friction has any number of sources: the difference between the young and the old, males and females, rich and the poor, and in our society between urban and rural and as well as between people of different ethnic origins and identities. But there is a single root cause to all of these points of conflict. Nelson discussed the degree and the extent to which the concern with conflict and tension is embedded in economics. He writes (Nelson, 1993, p. 777),

Economic theology starts with the recognition that through most of history humans have been afflicted by poverty, hunger and disease. These problems are considered the fundamental reasons that human beings have so often killed, stolen, lied, cheated and committed so many other evils. They have simply been driven to these acts by economic circumstances. Original sin, according to economic theology, is material privation, the condition in which most people have lived. . . . If this diagnosis is correct, then the means of abolishing evil is clear: salvation lies in eliminating all shortages of goods and services.

Conflict passes easily and directly to the problem of justice because, if severe enough, it often seems undeserved, especially to the sufferer but to onlookers as well. The problem has to do with the gap between what various individuals deserve, or feel they deserve, and what they in fact get. “[T]o be just,” MacIntyre points out, “is to give each person what each deserves” (1984, p. 152).

The trick is to come up with a definition of justice, and an institutionalization of that definition, that is acceptable to all. One concept of justice is that people should receive in accordance with what they produce: payment in accordance with product; reward in relation to effort. The contemporary institutionalization of this definition is “the market,” and it becomes manifest if the Laws of Supply and Demand are religiously followed.

We believe that actual prices and incomes (incomes being simply a factor price) are ethically just because they are either based on labor effort expended (the labor theory of value) or based on one’s contribution as valued by the consumer (the marginal productivity approach). Topel (quoted in Bennett, 1988, p. 1) expressed it this way: “I am of the opinion, until proven otherwise, that the market is competitive. Competition is going to dictate what people make. The best measure we have of the value of what someone produces is what he was paid.”

That this familiar refrain is a tautology bothers no one. If I am well off, I can explain it to myself and to others with the knowledge that I am productive and valued. If I am poor, I explain it to myself and to others with a similar affirmation; I am either not sufficiently productive or that which I do produce is not valued by others. No other conclusion is possible and it all emanates from the inexplicable working of the Laws of Supply and Demand, if they are being followed.

While there is pain and suffering, and the distribution of spoils is unequal, it is not inequitable. If the mind is not set to rest, it is spurred to action, especially among the poor as they see that they must work more, harder, or differently.

If the gap between what various individuals deserve, or feel they deserve, and what they in fact get is

experienced as just, people accept their suffering in silence; if it is not experienced as just, they do not suffer in silence. Among the faithful, belief is strong that “Adam Smith’s invisible hand, guided by supply and demand in the labor market, equitably signs everybody’s paycheck” (Bennett, 1988, p. 1).

The story that economics tells is that the price-setting market is comprehensible, that the problems and difficulties people experience are sufferable, and that justice prevails. This will all turn out, however, only if we abide by the Laws of Supply and Demand. If we do not, it will not.

### **The World View**

The idea that the ultimate source of and solution to conflict is tied to production levels is part and parcel of the Enlightenment mentality from which economics emerged. Prior to the point that Adam Smith wrote the *Wealth of Nations*, a nation’s wealth was considered to be the stock of precious metal maintained by the sovereign. Sovereigns often pillaged and plundered in order to increase their own wealth. In the *Wealth of Nations* Adam Smith redefined the wealth of a nation to be “the necessities and conveniences of life which [a nation] annually consumes” (1937, p. lvii). The entire point of *The Wealth of Nations* was to analyze the nature and the causes of growth and expansion of “the necessities and conveniences of life.”

This is noteworthy because Smith actually considered the pursuit of riches to be meretricious and corrupting (Rotwein, 1973). He was concerned with increasing them because, he wrote, “No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable” (Smith, 1937). Smith was also aware that wealth was generally acquired by means *other* than production; most men of luxury gained their fortunes by trading, transporting, or by lending. Smith, therefore, shared with the whole of the Enlightenment, as William Leiss expressed it (1972, p. 30), the notion that “the...inadequate provision for human wants was the source of the instability of society and the internecine battle over the share of spoils that threatened the fabric of civility.”

While general to the Enlightenment, this notion arose most forcefully with Francis Bacon, whom we remember today for having closed the gap between science and technology. Whatever working partnership may have previously existed, “[Bacon] made [it] an even more binding one by linking it to the immediate human desire for health, wealth, and power” (Mumford, 1970, p. 106).

In his *Novum Organum Scientiarum*, published in 1620, Bacon boldly asserted, “the legitimate goal of science is the endowment of human life with new inventions and riches” (quoted in Mumford, 1970, p. 111). He spoke of himself as “a bell-ringer which is the first up to call others to church.” But more, as a trumpeter who

summons and excites men not to cut each other to pieces with mutual contradictions, or to quarrel and fight with one another; but rather to make peace between themselves, and turning with unified forces against the Nature of Things, to storm and occupy her castles and strongholds, and extend the bounds of human empire, as far as God Almighty in his goodness may permit.

Bacon urged the princes, lords, soldiers, and merchants to give up their personal ambitions to extend their own personal power and riches, or that of their country. As Bacon understood it, the pursuit of personal and national ambition was a zero-sum game because, as John Locke expressed it in an unpublished essay with characteristic medieval understanding,

When any man snatches for himself as much as he can, he takes away from another man’s heap the amount he adds to his own, and it is impossible for anyone to grow rich except at the expense of someone else (quoted in Spiegel, 1971, p. 165).

Bacon urged, instead, the joining of hands to engage in a species ambition *to enlarge the power and the domination of the human race over the universe of things*. As a species ambition it was pure because it was not achieved at the expense of others. The assumption, of course, was that nature has no interests.<sup>8</sup>

This attitude embodies a notion of a desacralized nature, most often associated with Bacon, Descartes, Newton, and other Enlightenment thinkers. This attitude, Kinsley accurately writes, “still dominates modern perceptions of the world” (1995, p. 127). Whatever the precursors, and there were precursors (Dijksterhuis, 1961), it was not until the Enlightenment that we find a thoroughly desacralized and mechanistic view of nature, a view of nature as undeserving of moral consideration in the affairs of human beings. This is the reason so much literature in the area of environmental ethics calls, either directly or indirectly, for a “Post-Mechanistic Philosophy of Nature” (Keller, 2009), or for moving “Beyond the Enlightenment Mentality” (Wei-ming, 1994; see also Hinchman and Hinchman, 2001).

It is the desacralized and mechanistic view of nature that largely determines that we see it as having instrumental value only and as not having intrinsic value, value in and of itself. As Kant (1963) said about animals, “we have no direct duties” because animals “are not self-conscious and are there merely as a means to an end. That end is man... animals must be regarded as man’s instruments.” In short, the other-than-human deserves no moral consideration; we can do with it, and to it, as we please.

The key text here is Carolyn Merchant’s *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1980; see also 1998, 2006, 2008a, 2008b). Relevant excerpts from Merchant’s book can be found in many environmental philosophy texts (Armstrong and Botzler, 2004; Foltz, 2003). I have students read excerpts from Merchant’s book as well as excerpts from Descartes (“Animals Are Machines”), Kant (“Duties to Animals”), and a bit of utilitarian philosophy. They see, often for the first time, to what they are heirs. As I repeat several times in the course, what we are trying to do is find a way or ways of extending moral consideration to the other-than-human, and moral consideration is seldom, if ever, given to enemies that must be conquered or vanquished.

## TO KNOW OTHERS

The task of the course up to this point is to bring to conscious awareness what it is students now think about the other-than-human by virtue of the fact that they are part of the tradition to which they are a part. It is with this tradition that other business classes are engaged, including classes in business ethics. But in an increasingly globalized world it is not enough to know oneself; it is important also to know others, to know something about how others understand *their* world and what it is to live realistically in it.

There are a number of books that can be used at this point (Tuan, 1974; Tucker and Grim, 1994; Callicott, 1997; Foltz, 2003; Gottlieb, 2006). I use Kinsley’s *Ecology and Religion: Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (1995). As a text it treats ecological spirituality from the perspective of indigenous cultures (the Mistassini Cree of Quebec, Australian Aborigines, the Ainu of Japan, the Koyukon of Alaska and the Yukon), Asian traditions (Hinduism, Chinese religions, and Buddhism), as well as from the perspective of both Christianity and several of the contemporary eco-spirituality movements and figures.

Each of these indigenous and Asian traditions view the whole of reality, or at least aspects of the non-human world, as organic, as in some way and in some sense alive. As Hans Jonas (1984, p. 7) notes,

When man first began to interpret the nature of things—and this he did when he began to be man—life was to him everywhere, and being the same as being alive. ... Sole flooded the whole of existence and encountered itself in all things. ... That the world is alive is really the most natural view, and largely supported by prima-facie evidence.

Each of the traditional and Asian religions emphasizes the importance of an intense knowledge of the land in which one lives. Kinsley explains: “An underlying assumption... is that human beings can come to know and understand themselves only when they know and understand the land from which they have arisen and in which they live” (1995, p. 227).<sup>11</sup> Often the nonhuman realm is directly related to the human realm. In some cases human beings and other animals are understood as kin; in other cases human beings and animals are seen as descended from the same ancestors, however those ancestors are conceived. This sense of relatedness drives a sense of reciprocity as the framework for relating to the other-than-human

world. Particularly among the hunters and gathers there is a sense of mutual obligation between game animals and humans.

The embeddedness of human beings in each of these traditions presents a dichotomy that is sometimes quite sharp with contemporary North American perspectives. People are *of their land* and without their land they could not exist. By contrast, we set human beings apart not only from each other but also from the rest of nature. The following remark, made by Fisher and Peterson (1976, p. 1), could not have been even conceived by these other traditions: "Man," they wrote, "has probably always worried about his environment because he was *once totally dependent on it*" (emphasis added).

I supplement Kinsley's short chapters with cases, often drawn from current newspapers and magazines. The point of the case discussions is to give students an opportunity to role play by asking them how, say, a Cree, a Kwakiutl, a Hindu, a Buddhist or a utilitarian would approach each case. I do this in groups where the students confer with each other as they map each tradition's approach.

My purpose and intent is for them to see that different people, in different places and different times have very different approaches to what appears to be the same situation. I want them to express how, in their understanding, a Cree, Kwakiutl or Buddhist businessperson might approach a situation differently than would a utilitarian businessperson. If a decision is called for in one of these short cases I ask them how they would make that decision, representing whoever it is they are representing, and, most importantly, *how they would convince others that might have another perspective that their decision is the "right" decision or course of action.*

This portion of the class is typically followed by a series of longer cases.<sup>10</sup> I have used classic cases (Pacific Lumber), contemporary cases (water), and older cases that are in the news again (nuclear energy). I insist they use all the resources at their command and not only the most familiar and comfortable (which still remains the mental baggage they brought with them to class when it began) because the tendency is always to revert back to that with which they are familiar and comfortable.

## ALDO LEOPOLD AND THE LAND ETHIC

I end the class with Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (1949).<sup>12</sup> I do so for several reasons. First, I don't want to leave the impression that simply re-enchanting the other-than-human will solve our environmental problems (Hinchman and Hinchman, 2001). Neither do I want to leave the impression that we can go on with "business as usual" without making radical changes.<sup>13</sup> Leopold's environmental ethic is clearly indebted to Enlightenment ideas and hence represents continuation and growth from within our own scientific tradition. Second, Leopold is a standard feature in any book of readings dealing with environmental ethics, even if it is only the final chapter, "The Land Ethic," that is included and read. Third, Leopold's overall orientation is, as I will suggest, consistent with the overall approach to the course as I conduct it. He fits my lesson plan!

To give context to Leopold I draw on a 1920s essay that remained unpublished until 1979. In this essay Leopold explains our ethical issue in characteristic brevity and clarity (Leopold, 1979, all quotations are from pages 138-139). He begins, "A false front of exclusively economic determinism is so habitual to Americans in discussing public questions that one must speak in the language of compound interest to get a hearing." He goes on to say, "In past and more outspoken days conservation was put in terms of decency rather than dollars," and then quotes Ezekiel:

Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have fed upon good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pasture? And to have drunk of the clear waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet?

Leopold suggests that in these two sentences "may be found an epitome of the moral question involved," further commenting, "It is possible that Ezekiel respected the soil, not only as a craftsman respects his material, but as a moral being respects a living thing."

Aware of the pitfalls of language, Leopold continued: "The very words *living thing* have an inherited

and arbitrary meaning derived not from reality, but from human perceptions of human affairs.” He then tackles our inherited and arbitrary perception of an inanimate, mechanistic nature by quoting the Russian philosopher Ouspensky (1922):

Were we to observe, from the inside, one cubic centimeter of the human body, knowing nothing of the existence of the entire body and of man himself, then the phenomena going on in this little cube of flesh would seem like elemental phenomena in inanimate nature.

Leopold then indicates that Ouspensky suggested, quoting Leopold now,

[I]t is at least not impossible to regard the earth’s parts – soil, mountains, rivers, atmosphere, etc. – as organs, of parts of organs, or a coordinated whole, each part of a definite function. And, if we could see this whole, as a whole, through a great period of time, we might perceive not only organs with coordinated functions, but possibly also that process of consumption and replacement which in biology we call the metabolism, or growth. In such a case we would have all the visible attributes of a living thing, which we do not now realize to be such because it is too big, and its life processes too slow. And there would also follow that invisible attribute – a soul, or consciousness – which not only Ouspensky [sic], but many philosophers of all ages, ascribe to all living things and aggregations thereof, including the “dead” earth.

In short, the moral issue to Leopold is that we approach conservation from a strictly economic point of view and that our economic point of view rests, in turn, on a perception of the other-than-human as mechanistic, inanimate, and dead. Leopold was of the same voice as Hans Jonas when he wrote, “We should keep ourselves open to the thought that natural science may not tell the whole story about Nature” (1984, p. 8).

*A Sand County Almanac* is a *tour de force* in environmental education, but as such it is “more than just transmitting information about natural history and environmental issues” and it is “more than transmitting environmental values” (Callicott, 2005, p. 366). Environmental education should be about redirecting how we experience nature and this can occur only through “a shift from one cognitive nexus for organizing experience to another” (Callicott, 2005, p. 366). In this sense Leopold, and *A Sand County Almanac*, is consistent with the overall theme and approach of the course as I conduct it.

Leopold was convinced that the cognitive shift he saw as necessary requires a direct and sustained physical experience in and with the other-than-human, one that leads to a genuine and deep “love and respect” of it. His pronouncement, in Part III, “We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in,” has become a maxim of the modern environmental movement. Direct, physical experience of nature is vital. But experiences are always interpreted experienced, so direct, physical experience must be filtered by an “appropriate” cognitive orientation. To Leopold, a natural scientist, that orientation is an evolutionary-ecological world view.

Part I of Leopold’s book, entitled “A Sand County Almanac,” attempts to rectify the fact that most of us spend most of our lives in technological cocoons, insulated from direct contact with nature. It takes the reader on a vicarious field trip to the Sand Counties of central Wisconsin.<sup>14</sup> The “shack sketches,” as they are sometimes called, are set in a single place and unfold in the course of a single year. As Callicott describes it (Callicott, 2005, p. 370), Leopold “simply shares his personal experiences, observations, and reflections with the reader. The voice is the first person singular (“I,” “my,” “me”) and the tense is present. The fabric of the narration is perceptual, descriptive, experiential, and sensuous.” He conveys his conviction that land is a community and as such has a subjective as well as an objective aspect. At Leopold’s hand, our determination to believe that animals are unconscious automata, or that river valleys, forests and fields, are perhaps “beautiful but lifeless” (Kant, 1886, p. 259), is exposed as a legacy of pre-Darwinian—and therefore unscientific—prejudice.

In Part II, “Sketches Here and There,” the language is more elevated and less personal; the voice is

first person plural (we, rather than I); the tense is mostly past; and the tone is mournful, “less celebratory of what remains and more eulogistic of what is lost, or being lost” (Finch, 1949, p. xx). The location also shifts from the local (the Sand Counties) to the distant (the continent), thus universalizing the lessons learned in Part I (Callicott, 2005, p. 373).

The tone, tense and intent of Part III, “The Upshot,” changes once again. Written in the third person it is more public, less personal; the mood is imperative, nomothetic, and normative. The reader is prodded to reconsider his or her moral relationship with the world as it has been reconceived in Parts I and II. Consisting of four essays, the final essay being “The Land Ethic.”

As a natural scientist concerned with moral issues, Leopold is interested in and concerned with the origins of morality and ethics. He dismisses any notion that God or the gods impose morality on people and does not accept the almost unanimous opinion among philosophers that the origin of ethics has somehow to do with human reason: that big brained *homo sapiens* sat down together around the campfire and thought their way into a social contract. As a natural scientist he subscribes to an evolutionary perspective: people accept the constraints placed on individual action by ethical and moral codes because doing so *has survival value!*

Leopold implicitly draws on Charles Darwin’s account of the origin and spread of morality in the third chapter of *The Descent of Man*, published in 1871.<sup>15</sup> Darwin had, himself, turned to the Scottish Enlightenment for a moral psychology consistent with and useful to a general evolutionary account of ethical phenomena. He cites both Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and David Hume’s *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751). This is important for an environmental ethics class in a school of business because a direct line of descent can be shown from Adam Smith to Aldo Leopold.

The evolutionary and developmental thrust is set out by Darwin in the following passage (pp. 100-101), quoted at length:

As man advances in civilisation, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races. If, indeed, such men are separated from him by great differences in appearance or habits, experience unfortunately shews us how long it is before we look at them as our fellow-creatures. Sympathy beyond the confines of man, that is humanity to the lower animals, seems to be one of the latest moral acquisitions. ... This virtue, one of the noblest with which man is endowed, seems to arise incidentally from our sympathies becoming more tender and more widely diffused, until they are extended to all sentient beings.

Leopold picks up with this sequence and adds the following: “the land ethic simply enlarges the boundary of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land” (1949, p. 204). The implications are two. First, “the role of *Homo sapiens* [changes] from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it.” Second, it implies “respect for his fellow-members, and also *respect for the community as such*” (p. 204, emphasis added). That is, the community *as such* deserves moral consideration.

Why should we extend moral consideration to the other-than-human? We ought to because it has survival value. Is it inevitable? No! Is it possible? Yes! How do we do it? Again, it requires direct, physical experience with nature, a physical experience interpreted through an evolutionary-ecological worldview, and it requires the acceptance that, quite possibly, the other-than-human world which we inhabit is not mechanistic, inanimate, and dead but, having all the attributes of a living thing may, itself, be alive. While Leopold does not, to my recollection, say it, the acceptance of the earth as a living entity may be necessary for a genuine and deep “love and respect” to emerge.

Just as utilitarianism has its maxim (the greatest good for the greatest number), and Kantian ethics has

its maxim (act in such a way that you can will that your actions should become a universal law), The Land Ethic has one, too (1949, p. 224-225): “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends to do otherwise.”<sup>16</sup> To be able to apply this maxim, to know what preserves and what disrupts the integrity, stability, and beauty of a biotic community, requires some degree of ecological literacy, something we do not now have.<sup>17</sup> One doesn’t need a shack and acreage in central Wisconsin, a place in the Colorado or Canadian Rockies, or a house overlooking the Pacific Ocean in order to develop the kind of ecological literacy that may be necessary. All one needs is, perhaps, a backyard (Bass, 2010).

## WHAT WOULD COME NEXT

The class is a ten-week quarter course with thirty contact hours. If I had an additional five weeks, equivalent to a 45-hour semester course, I would introduce material I do not now introduce for lack of time: Jewish thought, Islamic thought, and a more thorough treatment of Christian thought (separating Protestant, Catholic and Eastern Orthodox). I would have representatives of as many of the traditions come to class as I could to discuss the issues from the perspective of each tradition. I would explore the parallels between Leopold and James Lovelock’s Gaia Hypothesis (Lovelock, 1987, 1988, 2006, 2010; Margulis, 1998; Primavesi, 2000; Turney, 2003; Harding, 2006). Exploring Lovelock, in particular, serves to illustrate that all the issues and questions that students think are scientifically settled are not, necessarily, settled. And Lovelock, having focused not on biology or ecology but on the physics of climate (and not initially on climate change), will provide a stepping off point to explore modern physics and cosmology. This is important in light of Sideris’ comment, “the science of particular interest to many ecotheologians seems to be physics rather than biology” (2006, p. 452).

I would more fully explore the lineage between Leopold’s Land Ethic and Adam Smith. Callicott has proposed this connection several times (1987, 1999, 2005), and it is worth exploring in more detail (Frierson, 2006a, 2006b; Bradley, 2011). If the lineage stands, it will give credibility to The Land Ethic for business students by establishing a direct link between it and the tradition of which economics is a part and to which they adhere.

Finally, since MBA students think of themselves as pragmatic decision makers, I would introduce a discussion of moral pluralism (Norton, 1991; Wenz, 1993) and environmental pragmatism (Light and Katz, 1996; Norton, 1991), ending with a renewed focus on a real-world practical issue using a case of sufficient complexity that requires students to once again role play a specific tradition explored in class. The task would be to have students, grounded in their own or an assigned tradition, grapple with a problem and come up with a solution. This would necessarily involve the sort of practical compromising that is part of the real business world. What will be learned, hopefully, is that a diverse group, each coming at the problem with their own or assigned world view and ethos intact, can actually find common ground. They will learn, hopefully, that there may be many different paths to the top of the mountain, each path laden with its own obstacles, but that there will be but one top of the mountain, one environmental endpoint, at which they can all meet. How each student, in his or her own or assigned tradition, reaches that endpoint is where the struggle will be.

As Leopold might put it, such a coming together may be nothing more than an evolutionary *possibility*; doing so, however, may be, for us, an evolutionary *necessity*.

## POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

Those of us in the academy are not only teachers. We also conduct research. There are at least two research orientations that emerge from this way of teaching environmental ethics to MBA students. First is research that looks into how decision makers *actually* decide. The overwhelming bias is to assume that they do so on the basis of rational, logical decision making grounded in the values of economics. But do they? Might they make decisions on the basis of some other mental matrix, and strive after the fact to justify those decisions to themselves and to others by reference to the traditions of economics, our

dominant cultural system? As Leopold noted in *The Sand County Almanac* (1949, p. 210), repeating a point he made in the 1920s article quoted above,

Of the 22,000 higher plants and animals native to Wisconsin, it is doubtful whether more than 5 per cent can be sold, fed, eaten, or otherwise put to economic use. . . . When one of these non-economic categories is threatened, and if we happen to love it, we invent subterfuges to give it economic importance. At the beginning of the century songbirds were supposed to be disappearing. Ornithologists jumped to the rescue with some distinctly shaky evidence to the effect that insects would eat us up if birds failed to control them. The evidence had to be economic in order to be valid.

The long, in-depth interview would most likely be the methodological approach here as it offers distinct advantages when approaching a problem like this. The long-interview can take us “into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world.” It allows us “to step into the mind of another person to see and experience the world as they do themselves” (McCracken, 1988, p. 9).

It would also be worth investigating how managers in Asian or other cultures navigate these issues. Do they make decisions based on the mental matrix of economics and try to justify it to themselves and their colleagues through their traditional patterns of meaning? After all, one of the significant exports of the West to the rest of the world over the last fifty years has been the economic way of thinking.

There is also a possibility for research into how this approach to teaching environmental ethics, to MBA students or others, translates into technological innovation, a topic that will be of importance to the readers of this journal. It is a mistake to think that technological development will come to an end with a perspective and orientation other than that of modernism. Embracing a world view other than mechanism would not be the end of technological development; it would be the beginning of a different technology, a restorative technology rather than a destructive technology. And this, a restorative economy,<sup>18</sup> will move us beyond preservation vs. conservation, and it will leapfrog sustainability, a concept whose time, I believe, has already past (Benton 2009).

## ENDNOTES

- Title: A shorter version of this paper was first presented at the Third Annual International Conference on Business & Sustainability, November 5-6, 2009, Portland State University, Portland, Oregon.
2. I draw particularly on “The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man,” “The Growth of Culture and the Evolution of Mind,” “Religion As a Cultural System,” and part of “Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols,” all in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). These are each assigned reading in this class.
  3. Although anthropological in orientation, my approach is, I feel, akin to that of Iris Murdoch (*The Sovereignty of Good*), Stanley Hauerwas (*Vision and Virtue*), Peter Levine (*Living Without Philosophy*) and Anna Peterson (*Being Human*).
  4. They subscribe to a notion similar to how, again, my *American Heritage Dictionary* defines the term. Thinking, it says, is “To have or formulate in the mind” (p. 1864).
  5. Sometimes I tell student this is based on Medieval Europe, sometimes I cast it as a people recently discovered by anthropologists, and sometimes as a future or as an alien society. It makes no difference in the outcome of the thought experiment.
  6. The convention today is to spell this as a single word, *worldview*. Geertz consistently spelled it as two words, *world view*. I adopt his convention throughout this paper.
  7. There is no room for a complete account of economics as a religion. I simply mention the main points of such an analysis and direct the reader to sources where the argument is more fully developed (Benton, 1982, 1986, 1987, and 1990; Cox, 1999; Foltz, 2007; Loy, 1997; Nelson, 1993, 2001).
  8. Alfred Marshall was the 19<sup>th</sup> century British economist that brought the separate ideas of a Law of Supply and a Law of Demand together, illustrating it with the now familiar graph depicting a downward sloping demand curve and an upward sloping supply curve. Being the first to so illustrate these two laws

economics, this standard illustration of the intersection of supply and demand is known today as the Marshallian Cross.

9. This attitude, this aesthetic, is commonly expressed and re-expressed today, but perhaps seldom as plainly as in William James' 1906 speech, "The Moral Equivalent of War" (James, 1910). James, a pacifist, was looking for an alternative to war. His moral equivalent of war was to enlist *all* youth in "warfare against nature."
10. This is an attitude held, as well, by Aldo Leopold (1949), as I will point out below.
11. I have to give credit and thanks to Ron Dulin, a former graduate student, for insisting that I more fully integrate decision oriented cases into this class. He kept reminding me, both when he took the class and subsequently when we would meet, that business students want to make decisions.
12. Students read the entire book and not only the final essay, "The Land Ethic." If, for some reason, time is short I omit only Part II.
13. We cannot reincarnate the worlds of the past, however enchanted and enchanting they may be. But, as Jonas (1984, p. 23) puts it, "It is moot whether, without restoring the category of the sacred, the category most thoroughly destroyed by the scientific enlightenment, we can have an ethics able to cope with the extreme powers which we possess today and constantly increase and are almost compelled to wield. ... Only awe of the sacred with its unqualified veto is independent of the computations of mundane fear and the solace of uncertainty about distant consequences."
14. This is the time to weave a field trip into the course. In the past I have included a voluntary Saturday day trip to Volo Bog, an Illinois State Natural Area (<http://dnr.state.il.us/lands/landmgt/parks/r2/volobog.htm>). In spring 2011 I took the class for a weekend retreat to Loyola University Retreat and Ecology Campus (<http://www.luc.edu/retreatcampus/>).
15. I am using a reprint of the first edition. In the second edition of *The Descent of Man* this is chapter four.
16. Another of Kant's maxims is that one ought not treat people only as a means to an end but rather as having an end in themselves. This, too, will require reformulation. Jonas wrote (1984, p. 8, emphasis added), "It is at least not senseless anymore to ask whether the conditions of extrahuman nature, the biosphere as a whole and in its parts ... has become a human trust and has something of a moral claim on us not only for our ulterior sake but *for its own and in its own right*. If this were the case ... [it] would mean to ... extend the recognition of 'ends in themselves' beyond the sphere of man [to] include [things extrahuman]." We would no longer be able, ethically, to treat extrahuman nature only as a means to our ends, but would have to treat it as having an end in itself.
17. "A land ethic," Leopold wrote, "reflects the existence of an ecological conscience" (p. 221). He adds, "One of the requisites for an ecological comprehension of land is an understanding of ecology," but "ecological training" under whatever label we choose to present it, "is scarce" (1949, p. 224). This is as true today as it was in the 1940s.
18. Robert Rodale (Rodale Press) first introduced me to the notion of a "restorative economy" at a conference in 1983. Rodale's notion of a restorative economy may be related to that of Cunningham's *The Restoration Economy* (2002), but I have not read the book. Other books that are relevant to this orientation include McDonough and Braungart's *Cradle to Cradle* (2002), Benyus' *Biomimicry* (1997), and Chiras' *Lessons from Nature* (1992).

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