

WHAT

I

One





*Morning mist on the lake
County Monaghan, Ireland*



It is November and this part of County Monaghan is far enough North in Ireland to be in Ulster, but geography pales on the way to the grocery store where machine guns and camouflage are sadly still part of the journey. The light comes late and fades early in these Northern latitudes and the people here think of light as something bringing color and a vague indication of form. Clarity and brilliance are thought here, but not often seen. Annaghmakerrig is the name of the place I have come to. The name kind of rolls off the tongue doesn't it? At least it did the way the taxi driver said it. And, he said, "Boards," and was surprised when I didn't know he was talking about 'Pheasants.' He also said, *"If you going to be here for a whole month, you ought to get at least one, or even two, sunny days."*

A few days have passed, and as yet, it has not rained. No, the skies have not been black with storm, but the worrisome part is that I have not seen a shadow. I have just returned from a walk alongside a lake in this most rounded of drumlin landscapes. At the halfway point I neared the end of the lake and went up to its boggy edge and stood among the sedges and listened to the nothing. There was a light breeze on the water, but not enough to make any noise. The clouds over the lake were no longer their earlier uniform smooth gray but had broken into rounded clumps rubbing into one another, like businessmen on a winter subway. As the noiseless clouds roiled above the lake, the colors of the land slid away. The spruces on the opposite shore went from fuzzy green lumps to the silhouette of a black saw blade against a darkening sky. Light was being sucked out and I could see night coming toward me. There were two small breaks in those clouds and when the breaks passed overhead I looked up through the hole, only to see a second layer of clouds.

Just as the cloud hole passed the zenith, the second layer unzipped itself and flashed a light and pale northern blue. And as quickly as it came, it zipped back up and left. I was delighted by this titillation, this aerial strip tease. As I walked back in the darkness, I realized that if I was able to be jerked around by a little color change in the sky, a little cumulous cleavage, it was about time I figured out what was my relationship with nature and how it became that way?

By the accident of osmosis I have absorbed fragmentary ideas from other people but I have never really internalized any singular vision that would make me as an acolyte in any one particular camp. One of the reasons is memory, or in my case, forgetfulness. If we humans are

supposed to be so far up the food chain, why are most of our memory banks so fickle, undependable and quirky? Is it a question for another time? Perhaps, but memory is a component of my comprehension. It allows me to conveniently forget something I was supposed to hold on to and simply slide into something more currently acceptable. It allows me to do so with hardly a recrimination over not only having changed horses, but allows me to think it completely acceptable to have jumped off in mid-stream. My understanding of nature changes horses all the time. We know we are concerned, even outraged about various aspects of environmental quality, but when pressed, aside from self-preservation, we have surprising difficulty explaining why we are concerned at all.

Any cognizant person will attest to the fact that our relationship with nature has changed dramatically in the recent past and that general environmental quality has rapidly gone downhill. The process of addressing a series of questions about nature may allow me to discover some greater clarity about my relationship with it. Love of nature is like fear of farting, we know it is part of us, but we don't know what to do about it.



*Lake Annaghmakerrig
County Monaghan, Ireland*

What are the metaphysics of nature? What is real?

Ta Meta ta phusika “the things after the physics” Aristotle called them; because they came after his treatise on Physics, but we have come to know metaphysics as the study of being (ontology) and often, the structure of the universe (cosmology). Metaphysics spends most of its effort on the study of first principles and the problems of ultimate reality. In the metaphysics of nature, the first question seems to be: What is nature and how do we know what it is?

In order to address this question, we can be intuitive, empirical, or analytical and I would present that any understanding is inevitably a function of all three. If we are intuitive, not being children in the wilderness, we are also being empirical. That is to say, we have some experience of nature and draw on that experience to explain what nature has come to mean to us. Consequently, on the basis of our involvement with it, nature is how it seems to us. If we have little experience with nature we have a small pool of information to work with and what nature is will be colored by that perception. Many people in industrialized societies have relatively little contact with nature and as a result have very little experiential understanding of what constitutes nature, while rural people have the immediacy of nature assisting with their comprehension. You might say the reason we are having a difficult time in our relationship with nature is because we live in cities. We have very limited personal and perceptual experience with nature itself and therefore it doesn't seem much of anything to us in our daily urban lives.

We do live in this moment. And this particular moment holds some very contemporary conditions which effect all the questions we raise about nature:

- The presence of media constitutes a difference from earlier times and that presence causes us to bear the collective weight of the volume of people in the world and the number of decisions those people make. Cable television connects us to the rest of the world and increases our sense of powerlessness. All we do is watch.
- We have become more self-contradictory as a specie and have come to feel pride and status in indignation and have uncovered a perverse satisfaction in collective guilt without collective action.
- We have a newly defined distrust of authority because we recognize they may exercise or express a

form of order based on a specific favoritism rather than universally held principles.

- We love the idea of equality but refuse to understand it to be an unachievable myth. (n.b. I will never be a concert pianist or a mathematician, no matter how much I think things should be equal. See Kurt Vonnegut's “The Handicapper General.”)
- We distrust the concept of truth because we don't seem to be able to determine what it is.
- We want to start fresh, with a clean slate, but Paul Varilio reminds us in his “Aesthetics of Disappearance.” that, “The idea of the ‘Tabula Rasa’ is only a trick to deny particular absences any active role.” And he goes on to remark that in a society where things are moving at an ever increasing speed, at some point, it is not necessary to know anything more about something than it is going fast.
- Nature is violent, chaotic, unpredictable, and uncontrollable, and so, as Camille Paglia reminds us, is television.
- We realize there are only a few people who fall into categories like gracious, smart, kind and honest. Simultaneously we realize there are whole lot of people out there who fall into the category of ‘fool or idiot.’ They are mean spirited and self centered, driven by greed, arrogance, stupidity and sloth and they are not going to change just because we would like them to.
- What we think we use to make decisions is not what we use. There is less connection between believing in something and doing something about that belief than in any time in history. We hold onto fragments, little chips of ideas and prejudices, because we are too lazy to study address and consider the whole.
- It has become perfectly acceptable to hold multiple and conflicting philosophical postures. We have come to terms with our inconsistency. This happened because we no longer believe in universal truth. We see there are too many things happening at the same time for us to be able to do anything meaningful. We have come to devalue our own individual contribution because there are so many contributions happening at the same time. We find it nearly impossible to even look at all of the ideas presented, much less distill and evaluate them. Criticality has flown the coop.

If you want to just look at the pictures and read the captions, like you do at the Dentist's Office, OK, but sometime come back and read the hard stuff beginning on the left.



Trees, clouds, inside, outside, endless red brown dirt and the bluest skies ever seen. Everything all at once. And we love it that way.

A high speed bus ride.

Australian Outback

Given this list of visions unique to our time and place, we may be able to get a better grasp on understanding nature by attempting to define what it is not.

Speaking again from the standpoint of a person in an industrialized society, the common perception of nature is something which exists without human intervention. It does not mean that we do not participate with it, rather that it has no inherent need for us. It can function quite well on its own. Nature is everything which has not been constructed by humans and it means we of industrial societies are not part of nature. We might participate with it in various fashions, but we are not part of it. So I am left with the conclusion that nature is whatever is not human or constructed by humans. It is other.

What is the epistemology of nature - how do I understand? It is from the Greek word '*epistandi*' meaning, to stand upon. Epistemology investigates the nature of knowledge to help us know, where we stand.

Even having listed some of the intuitive and empirical visions of this particular moment, perhaps even because of them, I have the responsibility to address nature more analytically. Analysis leads directly to those places whose authority we respect and we find ourselves immediately at the doors of law, religion and science.

Law has surprisingly little to say about nature. Christopher Stone and other attorneys are making significant contributions ('Should Trees Have Standing?' 1974) to the relationship between law and nature and I expect much more to come of this activity in the near future as we are a society who increasingly makes up its mind in legal terms. Law does have a great deal to say about how we behave in relation to property and if we continue to view much of nature as property it may have an increasing amount to say about what constitutes nature. But for the moment, law has the most to say about rights. And it is interesting to note those rights are interpreted differently in different places. In the former Soviet Union they had substantive rights, meaning humans had the right to food, clothing and shelter and it was the obligation of the society to provide those things to all people. There was no discussion about the quality of the food, clothing and shelter provided, simply that every citizen had the right to them and the state had to provide them. By contrast, the United States has procedural rights, where every citizen is given the right to equal opportunity, which means we can chase after pretty much what we want, but there is no guarantee we will ever get it. The common perception about Ameri-

can law indicates it is primarily concerned with control and theoretically establishes the procedures which attempt to guarantee the rights and responsibilities of individuals are unimpeded.

The central problem of law in relation to nature is that while the rights of nature are beginning to be explored by some legal activists, it remains unclear what our legal responsibilities about nature really are.

Religion, on the other hand, is literally a Pandora's box of claims about what constitutes nature and how we are expected to interact with it.

Our collective religious traditions have been more informative influences than providers of solutions to the human/nature dilemma. The Judeo/Christian creation myths present the dynamic conflict between the farmer and the nomad, (Cain and Able). The nomadic life says be fruitful, multiply and subdue the Earth, it also says: shit anywhere you want because you are going to leave. The Farmer's life says care for and tend to nature and it says: don't shit where you eat because you are going to stay there. Clearly, the farmers lost and the nomads won. The dominance of this vision is pointed out in the Jewish 'Feast of Booths' which comes from the grape harvest. It is the farmer's harvest, but it provides food and trade for the nomad and it guarantees the maintenance of the nomadic tradition. Both The Jewish and Christian tradition are anchored in the belief that nature has been given by God to humans for their exclusive use and it presupposes nature has utility in the nurturing and continuance of human life. The tradition has it that there is a 'Great Chain of Being' with humans occupying the highest position on that chain as they were made in God's image and are consequently superior to anything else and have dominion over nature. It believes humans have a special status in the order of 'creation' Some Contemporary Christian theology suggests that God wants us to care for nature by subduing it. This tradition of subjugation still places people above nature.

The Hindu/Buddhist tradition has a farmer based ethic and a cyclic view of the universe. It believes nature is superior to humans and that humans are reasoned while nature is unreasoned. The holy man lifts the scorpion out of the water and it stings him. The scorpion falls in the water and the holy man again, lifts the scorpion out of the water and the scorpion stings him again. It is in the nature of the scorpion to sting and it is in the nature of humans to assist in the preservation of all life. The environmental problems associated with this belief structure are not seen in the Vedas or the Upanishads, but in the streets of Calcutta, in the sheer weight of human and animal population.

Many American Indian religious traditions are a blending of nomadic and farming traditions and often do not accept that humans are separate from nature. While there are many differing positions taken by the various tribal groupings, a relatively accurate generalization is that American Indian communities believe nature is used and serves for human benefit, but one must not kill anything (including plants) gratuitously. What western civilization calls The Enlightenment has led to Romanticism and the attendant glorification of nature and within these movements, whether pantheistic or transcendentalist, God and Nature are seen as the same. While many contemporary conservationists believe this to be in close agreement with American Indian beliefs, many American Indians are tired of being the mascot for middle class white values and see the white interest as simple self-serving nostalgia. One of the questions often asked about the American Indians relation with nature revolves around the fact that they lived on the land for a very long time without making major environmental impact. 'Why was there not more impact? Was it because they lacked the technology? Research into the use and practices of fire indicate they certainly had one very powerful form of technology and used it with care and discretion. The reason for this behavior is apparently based in the idea that they could see no need for doing anything destructive to the environment, not that they lacked the technology to do so.

While these three visions are not inclusive of all world religions, they do exemplify the three major modes of thought, namely: 1. Humans are superior to and above nature. 2. Nature superior to humans. 3. Neither humans nor nature are superior as humans are a part of nature.

Science is third on my authority list and yet I do not find the clear and singular vision I have been taught to expect from science. Instead I find multiple and even conflicting evidence and understandings. What is the logic of nature - what are the patterns we can rely upon?

Paul Shepard says, "The natural world, as actually constituted, is one in which one being lives at the expense of others." He goes on to state "...the fundamental ecological reality: The structure of nature is a sequence of killings."

Ecology, arguably the most mis-used term in contemporary society, has been inserted into the vernacular as though synonymous with nature. The term 'environment' has suffered a similar fate and has come to mean 'everything.' We seem to have forgotten 'ecology' is not a thing or a place, but rather the study of relationships between things. Ecology presents its primary precept

by arguing that diversity contributes to stability. If this statement is intended to be a beacon of natural understanding, a goal as it were, one might logically ask what is the desirability of stability, or put another way what is the value of stability?

The Nobel laureate in biology, Konrad Lorenz, had some very informative ideas on this topic. He quotes his teacher, Professor Burian, "Man's original sin is monoculture." Lorenz, speaking specifically about water pollution, goes on to say, "The stability of an ecosystem is proportional to the number of species that inhabit it. We must make the public aware of the irreversible and irrevocable nature of the pollution of the waters. If we kill a body of water, a body of water as a living system that consists of many species, then we can never make up for this fully."

"Thus the biocenosis becomes poorer and poorer, and it is erroneous to think that man alone will be impervious to this impoverishment and that he alone will survive when all other creatures perish. For this reason, the destruction of a body of water, the murder of a river or a lake is always a step toward the suicide of humanity."

"Research in evolution teaches us that a species can most easily adapt when its degree of specialization is low. A chameleon is dependent on eating moving insects since its specialization is connected with motion. A mouse on the other hand is neither choosy about what it eats or where it lives. Nevertheless, there is a great imbalance between those species that can adapt to changes in their surroundings and those that cannot. One can only name a few animals that can survive when their habitat grows smaller; that is to say, ones that can move into town with us. Most species are certainly unable to adapt as rapidly as the changes in civilization require. However, to look into the future and determine what will exist and what will not is impossible. One cannot foresee a prevailing ecological social structure."

One of the most respected and well reasoned views of the topic of 'structure' comes from Aldo Leopold in his famous "*Sand County Almanac*," where he addresses land as an energy circuit [and] conveys three basic ideas:

1. Land is not merely soil.
2. The native plants and animals keep the energy circuit open; others may or may not.
3. Man-made changes are of a different order than evolutionary changes, and have effects more comprehensive than is intended or foreseen.

The summation of his thoughts are in the final para-

graphs of the book: "The "key log" which must be moved to release the evolutionary process for an ethic is simply this: quit thinking about decent land use as solely and economic problem. Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

Lorenz, Leopold and the concept of ecology have run into difficulty in being accepted and internalized by the common person, not because they are wrong, but because their ideas are based on the idea of community and the waning years of this century are still championing the individual as the most credible ideal.

We don't believe society cares about the individual person at all. As a matter of fact, we all have memorized examples of how society has demonstrated it doesn't care about anyone. It is not brittle recalcitrance that has sent us into this place, we are just hedging our bets. If society does care for the individual, well, hooray, but just in case it doesn't, it might be valuable to have a little insurance policy. At the present moment, we tend to look out for ourselves. Certainly we have community activities and instincts, even hopes, which drive us to participate in developing an increase in this desire for collective value and value, but most of us, after the town meeting is over, get in our individual cars and drive home, quite alone. At the stoplight, late at night, there are damn few illusions.

The clarity and truth of Lorenz and Leopold has problems penetrating the shield of our consciousness because they spend their time in aquariums and forests and we spend our time in a 'Bladerunner' world. The Land Ethic can make all the sense it wants to but it doesn't make any linkage to urbanity, where we all are.

Leopold, speaking on the idea of 'The Ecological Conscience', says, "No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections and convictions. The proof that conservation has not yet touched these foundations of conduct lies in the fact that philosophy and religion have not yet heard of it. [1949] In our attempt to make conservation easy, we have made it trivial."

It may have taken nearly fifty years for philosophy and religion to "hear of it" but it has now been heard. We never really doubted Lorenz's biologic accuracy or Leopold's 'Land Ethic, or even the harsh realities of an Ecologist like Shepard. The problem is we don't know what to do with this information and we have internal-

ized the concept that ecological responsibility is a little like a religion. We may believe in that religion, but we are not always good at practicing it. Up to this point, we have been able to get away with being disinterested and disrespectful in the church of nature. We know the priests of science are right. We even trust their supposed disinterest and neutrality more than we do many religious teachers. The center of the problem is we have been lulled into the idea that the future will be a seamless extension of the past.

In looking at the Logic of Nature, the search for patterns we can rely upon, we have been looking the wrong way. We have been looking in the forest and the rivers, we have watched the birds and hoped they held the secrets. The unkept and obvious secret of the birds, is that the problem is with the humans. I am writing this sentence on a computer made primarily of plastics and the process of its construction caused complex polymer chemistry to pollute one of the river valleys of northern California. I don't recall asking for either the computer or the pollution; both were presented to me by a society I cannot change. The more we learn about meteorology and riparian systems, the more we build houses in flood plains. The more we understand about ground water depletion, the more irrigated orchards get planted. The more we learn about aquifer recharge, the more of the land we pave. This is the pattern of nature we can rely upon: We humans will not change unless and until there is a catastrophe.

What are the ethics of nature - how should I behave?

Ethics - the study of the specific moral choices to be made by the individual in their relationship with others. Ethics are inextricably connected to values.

The further we get into this process of trying to understand nature the more we begin to see our concern is essentially philosophical. Aristotle gave us '*Telos*', Thomas Aquinas his '*Summa Contra Gentiles*' and Immanuel Kant presented his '*Lectures on Ethics*', but at some point, we ordinary contemporaries must confront the fact that the problem of value is difficult even for exceedingly thorough modern philosophers like, J. Baird Callicot who states, "The question of ultimate value is a very sticky one." And he believes, "There can be no value apart from an evaluator."

Why does anyone value nature? Values are tools that help us know how to behave. They explain our decisions. So by trying to discover what constitutes nature we have unavoidably had to establish how we believe



One of the most commonly held views of nature is a place that appears to be unsullied by the hand of man. A place where we are (can be) awed by the beauty and majesty of forces larger and more powerful than us.

Loud and powerful puts you in your place. [Maybe.]

Yosemite National Park





The Latin word *primævus* means 'early in life' and gives us *Primeval* and it is how we feel about all forests. Dank, dark, dangerous and forboding are terms we associate with forests, but forests are also where we get the belief that nature consists almost entirely of plants, and green plants at that.

We like our nature to be green, very green, and in a forest is where the green is the best
Kepler track, South Island, New Zealand





The Western vision of nature is based in the forest and that vision leaves little room for the idea of the steppe, savannah or desert as constituting anything other than deadly threat. The canopy of the forest or the jungle is where we get our protection. The hot and the flat are where the danger looms.

Often, nature just scares the hell out of us, and it should.

This highway is as straight as possible because we want to get out of here as soon as possible. (Unless you are Navajo and are already home.)

Shiprock, New Mexico
(Navajo - Tsé Bit' A'i - Rock With Wings)

we should behave in relationship to it. If, as a case in point, I use my own perceptions to stand inside Calli-cot's realm of "evaluator" I must state that my values come from being alive in a particular society at a particular moment in time and that my views are specifically contemporary; and the reason for my concerns about nature are based in self interest and consequently as a contemporary person see little justification for valuing nature for other than anthropocentric reasons. It is, however, important and necessary to look at various and contrasting view points:

The superficial ecologist (Who never wants to be called that and would much prefer the inaccurate title of 'conservationist'.) see themselves as a person who is doing the correct things for the correct reasons. They recycle their newspapers and glass bottles, they buy cars which use unleaded gas, they agonize about 'plastic or paper?' at the grocery stores. In short, they are consumers in a consumer society. They are trying to pay the mortgage and get their kids to piano lessons. They don't have the energy or the interest to do anything different than what they are doing, because it is hard enough just doing that.

The conservationist is convinced we can use something without screwing it up. The idea is to save. It doesn't exclude many activities of humans nor does it pretend to. The forest service is an example of an organization which attempts to use and protect at the same time. The other end of the conservative spectrum is represented by 'The Nature Conservancy' who has the wisdom to understand the only way you control and protect anything in a capitalistic society is to own it. And land ownership is their tool for conservation.

The preservationist is a label often confused with conservationist and yet is dynamically different as was demonstrated by the enormity of the rift between John Muir (preservationist) and Gifford Pinchot (conservationist) in their battle over the Hetch-Hetchy valley. The preservationist believes in wilderness for its own sake and will do anything to assure the continuation of that wildness. The preserve part of preservation to them means 'intact.'

The deep ecologists see it as inappropriate for humans to discuss the value of nature. They say humans are separate from nature and that nature doesn't care. I find this approach both truthful and impossibly impractical. Yes, western science has corrupted us all and economics is a form of brain damage. The Earth may have moral status on its own. But I live here too, and my values are part of this place. The Earth First! people

and Edward Abbey would say that is exactly the problem, too many people. Deep ecologists are here championing the rights of nature as separate and autonomous and believe if we humans are going to be allowed to continue to be here then everything we do must be considered in relation to nature. If it is not a religion, it is at least an entire philosophy whose epistles and treatises are still being written and argued about.

The bio-centrists view humans as part of the Earth's biosphere that they see as a complex web of interconnected organisms objects and events. Some bio-centrists subscribe to 'The Gaia hypothesis' (A theory presented by the atmospheric scientist James Lovelock, who believes the Earth behaves like a single organism.)

Eco-centrism is related to bio-centrism but appears to be in favor of swing the pendulum to plants and animals and away from humans. They assert the 'purpose' of nature is for it to flourish.

The eco-feminist presents the thesis that our problems with the natural world are a result of insensitive ineptitude on the part of male decision makers. They contend the (attributed) male characteristics of linear logic and rational procedural sequence and aggression toward nature is a result of male domination of western culture. If humans are going to improve their relationship with the natural world women will have to become in charge of policies that cause changes in processes and decisions about what constitutes environmental quality.

The animal liberationist and *ecocentrist* positions are presented simultaneously by the views of Tom Regan who believes in: 1. the total abolition of the use of animals in science. 2. the total dissolution of commercial animal agriculture. 3. the total elimination of commercial and sport hunting and trapping. He also believes what would be good for the Earth is a decrease in human population and that nature has no interests. What he does admit is we have, indeed, multiplied and subdued the Earth and although that statement is from the Christian tradition, it is obvious the religious traditions of many cultures were founded when the world was a very different place and their population policies continue as though nothing had changed. When one begins to understand the complexity of establishing the moral rights of anything in addition to humans, it becomes relatively obvious that our population must now be managed in a way it never has been managed in the past. The ecocentrists understand that ethical values have always been anthropocentric not ecocentric and the reasons for ecocentrism are ultimately anthropocentric.

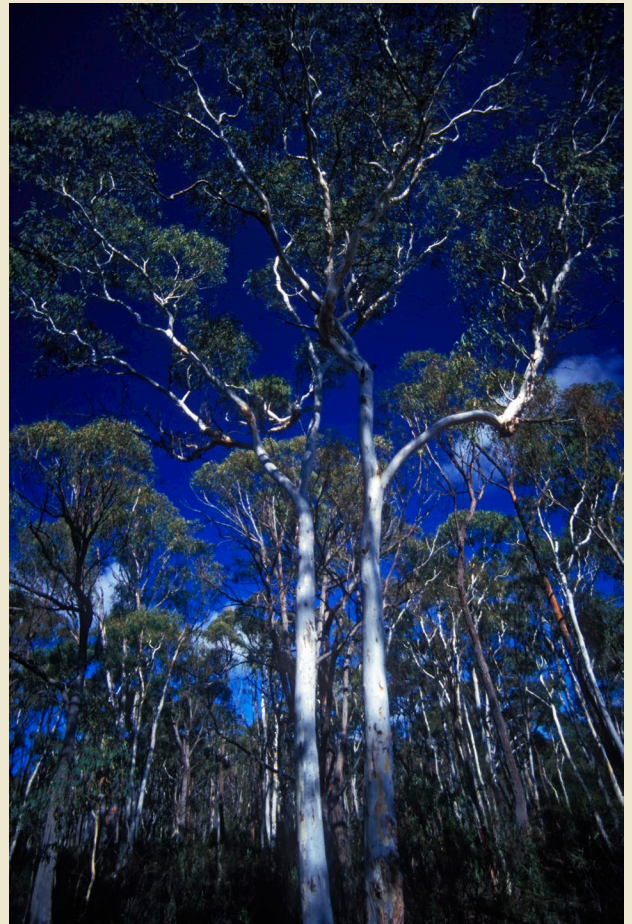
Once we get beyond the point of introductory statements of beliefs of the various groups, conflicting statements and interests begin to occur. 'The area of 'Rights' and 'Moral Standing' have shown themselves to be particularly contentious issues once we begin to recognize the philosophical existence of other beings as other than objects for human use.

Let us suppose, just for a moment the animal rights activists were able to convince the cattle industry of the folly of their ways. What then? These animals have been domesticated to the point they must be fed. Do we let them starve in their newly found freedom? I know we have plenty of efficient plant protein to go around, but what, exactly, is it that happens to the chicken farms? They exist, now what is it we are physically going to do with or about them? We could feed them until they die in captivity, but it would be a violation of their newly declared rights. Or we could let them out of their cages. And then what happens?

There appears to be a conflict between animal liberation and environmental ethics. It is most clearly pointed out by Mark Sagoff who states: "An environmentalist cannot be an animal liberationist; nor may animal liberationists be environmentalists. The environmentalist would sacrifice the welfare of individual creatures to preserve the authenticity, integrity, and complexity of ecological systems. The liberationist must be willing to sacrifice the authenticity, integrity and complexity of ecosystems for the welfare of animals."

To make things even more complex, J. Baird Callicot presents the idea of humans universally becoming vegetarians being, "tantamount to a shift of trophic shift niche from omnivore with carnivorous preferences to herbivore. This shift would, "...increase available food resources for human beings. The human population, as past trends overwhelmingly suggest, expand in accordance with the potential thus afforded. The net result would be fewer non-human beings and more human beings, who, of course, have requirements for life far more elaborate than even those of domestic animals, requirements which would tax other "natural resources" (trees for shelter, minerals mined at the expense of topsoil and its vegetation, etc.) more than under present circumstances. A vegetarian human population is therefore probably ecologically catastrophic."

This type of ideological conflict is predictable in the light of conflicting information and lack of certainty. Mr. Callicot does not figure into his equation the problem associated with cattle producing digestive gas that has significant implications on air pollution and ozone layer destruction. Nor does he factor in the realization that land formerly used for cattle production could be



Ghost Gums (Eucalyptus)
Australian Outback

Eco-centrist want nature to flourish, but the position doesn't come to grips with the question:

What about me?

What about me?

What about me?

I truly like and respect plants and animals and rocks and weather and all the rest, but **am I not part of nature flourishing?**

What about *me?*

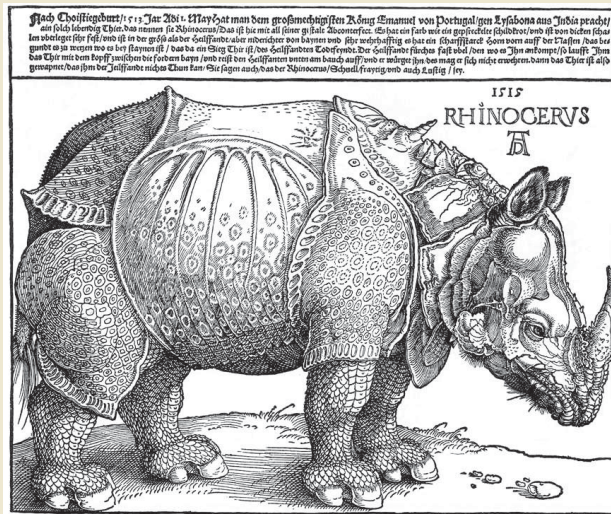
used for the production of forests in addition to becoming fields of human food. The person making the case for saving forests by mentioning that trees produce Oxygen for us to breath hardly ever mentions that most of the oxygen produced in our atmosphere does not come from the forests, but from the ocean, from sea algae. Comparing and contrasting ideologies is the arena which is the most confusing because the ground shifts according to which camp one resides in at a given moment.

The screw-up is a stance often left off of the lists enumerating philosophical positions. It is actually composed of two positions that are often unfairly lumped together with *'The bastards'*. It is a position taken by a great many people and I am surprised it has been ignored for so long. *The screw-up* does not have a true position as oblivion is their natural state. They are not even aware enough to be presumptuous and no mater what ethical posture is the excepted norm of the time, it will be overlooked by these people. They are care-less. In previous, less politically correct times, they were appropriately called morons and they still are, and they are out in force. They believe what they do has no impact on anything. They think that whatever they do doesn't make any difference, but there are so many of them that what they do makes an enormous difference. They perceive themselves disenfranchised, often are, and they are convinced they will stay in that position forever. They are unaware of the consequences of their actions and whatever harmful actions they produce is out of ignorance and stupidity. They have considerable ability to cover ignorance with arrogance and their position is a particularly viscous form of sloth.

The bastards are an entirely different matter. They are not indifferent and incompetent, they are spiteful. They will assert their presence at every possible opportunity and have axes to grind that they know are irrelevant and stupid. They are [by an odd turn of phrase,] by nature, contrary to any sense of common purpose. They are unable to discern the difference between habit and tradition and use tradition as a method of covering up the fact that they have no logical reason for being assertive. Most commonly found in bureaucracies, they see their purpose in obstruction and obfuscation. Seemingly incapable of honestly listening or evaluating an alternative position, they are convinced their method is the only correct one and as though they were genetically incapable of change, they refuse to admit they were or are ever wrong about anything. Avaricious self-interest are their watchwords. They have the tenacity of Moray eels and present dogma in place of thought. If the data banks of census bureau had this category we would be overwhelmed by the statistics.

Natural law theory, natural rights theory and utilitarianism are the three major realms of western ethical theory. (Most clearly presented by Donald Van DeVeer and

Christine Pierce in their philosophical anthology "People Penguins, and Plastic Trees. Wadsworth publishing, 1986.) While we have looked at some variations of the first two, utilitarianism is usually the place where the bulk of the battles are fought in western societies. Cost-benefit



analysis is a primary technique for establishing utility and it is an uncomfortable topic to many who are concerned with environmental quality because it uses tools which are in the realm of the economist, but more importantly it presumes identifiable utility to everything and that utility can be identified and measured in relationship to dollar standards. The codification and 'measurement' of the benefits eventually slides into subjective and indefensible areas. (Steven Kelman has made notable contributions to this dialogue.)

When considering cost-benefit analysis it is difficult to agree with the politicians, scientists and economists who view nature as a commodity or even a service. In Paris, standing in front of the Musée d' Orsay, is an anatomically accurate bronze statue of a *rhinoceros*.

What its purpose for being there is probably relevant in the curatorial minds of art historians but is unknown to everyone else. Long before a real rhinoceros was ever imported to Europe, *Albrecht Dürer* was asked to make a drawing of this newly discovered beast. The only source of information he had to work from was the written notes of African explorers who had actually seen a Rhinoceros. His genius allowed him to draw what he thought was the idea of what a rhinoceros might be. His final engraving was widely published and much of Europe was astonished at the visual qualities of this amazing creature. Durer certainly did his best, but the Rhino ended up with a full suit of riveted, bolted metal armor and all manor of imagined bumps, gew-gaws and an extra horn. It is a beautiful re-presentation of the idea of a rhino, but his rhino ultimately fails us is because Dürer was trying to use his drawing to demonstrate the benefit derived from the cost

of the expeditions, to use reason to give value to something as unreasonable as the existence of a rhinoceros.

Nature is unreasonable and we humans are one of the most powerful and unreasonable part of it. We poke around in nature, we make changes to things and we assert our needs. We do unreasonable things individually and collectively. No matter how much I despise the Forest Service for treating our forest heritage as an artificially subsidized crop, they will continue to reside inside the department of Agriculture. And unless the whole nation gets upset about how the Forest Service has been pissing away our collective heritage with a policy of 'the greatest use for the greatest number', there is little potential for change. Anyone who believes otherwise has never been to a meeting of a local 'county board of supervisors' to witness our governmental cost-benefit policies in action.

The illusions of cost benefit analysis were most poetically presented as long ago as 1964 by Thomas Merton: "Let me say this before rain becomes a utility that they can plan and distribute for money. By 'they' I mean the people who cannot understand that rain is a festival, who do not appreciate its gratuity, who think that what has no price has no value, that what cannot be sold is not real, so that the only way to make something actual is to place it on the market. The time will come when they will sell you even your rain.

At the moment rain is still free, and I am in it. I celebrate its gratuity and its meaninglessness."

It is historically naive to view the world other than a garden because we have treated it as such since the beginning of agriculture. The problem is not with the garden rather it is with the gardeners. We work in our gardens and we value their productivity. The value civilization places on nature is proportional to how bad non-nature is. At the moment, our cities and all our non-nature is pretty horrid. Consequently, the value of nature is increasing and I would think nature will soon become the most valuable thing of all.

At the risk of stating the obvious, I believe the natural world is in trouble. It is seriously out of balance. And by now it is obvious to everyone in developed countries. Even though it would probably be good and feel good to dedicate more time and energy to conservation, preservation and restoration. However, the problem is now rather far removed from simple good deeds. The developing countries will continue on their present paths as long as their economies can afford to pay for unemployment. After that point is passed, the rules of the game will change. When the cost of food increases to the point where agricultural workers receive the same rates or higher than factory workers, we could easily see a depopulation of our cities. But between now and then, the population bomb is hurtling toward us at a rate

which makes Robert Malthus look fairly intelligent after all. (The net human population increase is one-quarter million per day.)

The concept of developing countries could turn out to be an illusion. I could be building walls in the river of my ethics, but If I look at the present global condition from the stance of a natural scientist I might easily come to the conclusion that humans are the will of nature. In Aristotelian terms, we could be the Telos, the end product, the purpose of nature. We have proven ourselves to be the end of the food chain. Since that is the case, is there anything to discount the idea that we are also the end of the line? We have not behaved biologically. We have a population size billions beyond the size of our niche in the realm of mammals. We, unlike most species, have had nearly endless wars, vile plagues have often had their way with us, and yet nothing has killed us off, or even modified our behavior patterns. What, for example, prevents us from collectively demanding our religious leaders to change their population policies? Is it not obvious by this time that more is not better for anyone? We have continually increased. If indeed, humans are the will of nature, then either we clean up our collective act or we go down the drain of specie extinction. At the moment, there is no clear evidence we have either the interest or capacity to clean up anything.

As much as I despise the despoilers of the natural environment I cannot pledge allegiance to the ecocentric cause because they assume an arrogance of theological omniscience. (They think they know how nature is supposed to work.) Consequently, I am left with an exceedingly traditional approach to the controversy and suggest that prudence and long term thinking are our most viable option.

We should fear nature because the consequences are huge. We should assume ignorance and be very conservative in our actions because we know so little about what the natural order is supposed to be. In the course of being concerned with the welfare of life on the planet, I discover the reason I have the concern is because I am able to perceive the world and consequently the source of my feelings is myself. I would like life to be better for all things in the world because it would, in addition to making it a better place, it would also make me feel better. Some place down near the core I must admit I find no other reason for having these feelings about environmental quality than pure, unbridled self-interest. I am anthropocentric. I am responsible for my actions and yes, want a future for my children and everyone else's children too. I want the natural world to be important to everyone and for everyone to realize there are, indeed, limits, but I can't pretend I think a tree cares if it is rotting into compost or is used to make a coffee table. I am the one who cares about the tree, not the other way around.