

Chapter 14

Ethics and the Human Environment

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The scope of this chapter is potentially very large, for ethics is far from simple and the human environment is made of many, many things. What is more, geographers have seldom studied the environment from the viewpoint of ethics, or ethics from the viewpoint of the environment, so there are few precedents for us to follow. The work that has been done, most notably by Tuan (1993), Sack (1997), and D. Smith (2000), identifies what we might call the spatiality of sympathy as a major problematic for those who would study moral geographies. They are, by my reading, interested in three general questions. First, to ask which sociospatial settings foster feelings of sympathy, affection, and responsibility for other humans, and what if any variety there is in these settings and feelings. Second, to ask why these feelings are very often partial, leading to ostracism and spatial exclusion of pariah groups and deviant behaviors (Sibley 1995). Third, to ask if, and if so how, we might enlarge feelings of sympathy and responsibility beyond the traditional spatial forms of the local community or nation state, and thereby create a flexible but universal ethic appropriate to the spatial form of the global economy.

Geographers interested in the spatiality of sympathy treat the physical environment as mere medium, a substance that social groups shape to inculcate ethical ideas, segregate moral communities, and increase the mutual sympathy or suspicion with which these communities view one another. This is only part of what we can or should ask about ethics and the environment. Before asking whether it is most ethical to shape the environment in this or that way, we surely must ask the more basic questions of whether, and if so to what extent, it is ethical to shape the environment in the first place. In this chapter I review general answers to this question, since every landscape, ethical or unethical, originates in a positive answer to it. Indeed, if geography is the study of earth-shaping processes and humans are moral agents, answers to this question are the foundation of human geography.

What follows will be in four stages. First I will discuss what I understand to be meant by the word ethical. This is not an exhaustive or deeply learned disquisition, but rather an attempt to outline some basic ideas in terms that I find helpful. I am most concerned to connect ethics with the concepts of ethical vision and moral

community. Second, I will discuss premodern environmental ethics, connecting these to belief in a personalized environment of reasonable beings. In this and subsequent sections I will present something like Weberian ideal types to generalize about diverse beliefs. Third I will discuss modern environmental ethics as a consequence of disenchantment (Weber again) and the consequent belief that nature is dead matter not deserving moral consideration. In the fourth section I will discuss some postmodern environmental ethics, which is to say ethics proposed in conscious reaction against perceived environmental degradation caused by the modern environmental ethic of disenchanted nature.

Ethical Matters

The adjective ethical can be applied to a statement or an act. An ethical statement is an imperative that describes a person's duty, what he or she should or should not do. Ethical acts are described or directed by such imperatives. These imperatives and acts are further understood to be of a special sort, so that not all commands or commanded behavior is ethical. They are *categorical* imperatives, which means that they are absolute and unconditional duties incumbent on every person, or every person of a particular class in a particular situation. Children, obey your parents, is a categorical imperative.

Categorical imperatives are distinct from hypothetical imperatives, the former being absolute and the latter conditional (Flew 1995). A hypothetical imperative normally takes the following form: if you desire or value X, then you should do Y. If you desire a slender body, for instance, then you should eat less. In a hypothetical imperative an individual human is the axiological ground or source of value, since, to continue with the example just given, he or she must decide whether a slender body is indeed valuable, as an end in itself or as a means to some further end. In a categorical imperative the axiological ground is something outside of or in addition to the self. This is evident if we state the general form of a categorical imperative is as follows: regardless of what *you* desire or value, do Y. Regardless of what *you* desire, for instance, you should telephone your mother once a week.

For a categorical imperative to have any sway over a person, that person must recognize the behavior denoted as Y as possessing a value other than or in addition to the value it has (or lacks) for himself. In other words, something capable of valuing, some other axiological ground, must value this act. Some examples are easy to grasp. All but the most impulsive among us recognize our future self as an axiological ground whenever we defer gratification and serve the interest of our future self. Unless you are an egoist, you almost certainly recognize and respect other humans as axiological grounds, and therefore recognize that their value as persons is primarily the value they have for themselves. This is why you see it as a moral obligation to treat other humans as ends and not means, to place the value they have for themselves ahead of the value they have for you. Additional axiological grounds can be posited. God, for instance. You may feel enjoined to do certain things, and to refrain from others, because you believe they are valued or discountenanced by God. Society or the cultural tradition may be taken as an axiological ground, so that the values of the group, including perhaps those of its deceased and

future members, govern a person's behavior. As we will see, environmental ethics must always stipulate what sorts of beings are capable of having values that we humans should respect, values that legitimately constrain or compel behavior toward them or the things with which they are interested.

Ethics place more or less systematic limits on a person's behavior because they require him to recognize values other than his own, values that originate in an axiological ground other than his own, present self and its desires. This is no doubt why many think that ethics is a killjoy. But there is more to ethics than this. Any set of ethical rules purports to bring behavior into line with a transcendental reality that the authors and disciples of those rules believe lays beyond appearances (J. Smith 2000). Ethical rules are therefore the practical manifestation of a larger system of beliefs that, taken together, might be called the moral imagination or ethical vision, "a constant and self-renewing motive to action" (Scruton 2000: 12). Only in an ethical vision do humans perceive, or believe themselves to perceive, values that originate outside their present selves and their immediate aversions and desires. The ethical vision takes as its premise the assumption that the world apparent to the unaided eye is false, distorted by selfishness, ignorance, and impulse, but that this false appearance can be corrected by conscience, virtue, charity and piety. It seems to me that, regardless of specific substance, every ethical vision purports to be a sort of corrective lens. Indeed without an ethical vision, the world we experience would not be a human world, for it would be devoid of rights, duties, obligations, voluntary acts, and choices, as well as of virtues such as courage, temperance, justice, and charity (Scruton 1996). Taking ethical vision as a corrective lens that discloses the real nature of the world and our relations to it, we can understand why the limits ethics imposes on behavior are supposed to liberate, not limit. An ethical vision purports to free a person from the illusion of mere appearances, from the tyranny of passions aroused by these appearances, and from the evil consequences that follow upon taking these appearances for reality.

This is why ethical choices are often likened to a fork in the road, for the image of a traveler deliberating at a fork gives intuitive understanding of the concepts of freedom, duty, and moral choice. One *can* go either way, but only one of them is the right way. And it is a commonplace of such metaphors that to those without the proper ethical vision, the wrong path will appear most attractive. The most familiar trope is in Matthew, where Christ states that "wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction," but "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life" (Matthew 7:13–14). Virgil was also of the opinion that "the way down to Hell is easy" (*Aeneid*). Shakespeare suggested that it was also delightful, attractively bordered by the first – alas evanescent – flowers of spring, and therefore called the "primrose path."

An ethical choice at a metaphorical crossroads is therefore an affirmation of some transcendental reality behind the deceptive primroses of immediate appearance and egoistic desire, and as such it is an expression of identity. By choosing one path over another, and especially by abjuring what many see as the more attractive way, a person identifies himself as a member of a moral community. This social aspect of ethical behavior must be added to the prudential aspect, for in addition to the practical benefits that may accompany adoption of the corrective lens of an ethical vision, those who recognize a transcendental reality gain a feeling of membership

and meaningfulness. The connection of morality and membership is evident in the close relation of the words ethics, ethos, and ethnic.

Humans have generally believed that their actions toward the environment are governed by categorical imperatives. Perhaps the most famous, and misunderstood, of these is the command given by God to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. "Be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, and every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28; see Callicott 1994: 14–24). Such an imperative discloses a supernatural reality beyond nature and natural impulse, for what primitive human could have supposed, simply on the evidence of his senses, that it was his place to subdue and have dominion over the natural world. This imperative served as a corrective lens, inspiring audacity in men who were weak, and it also served as a ground for meaning and membership in a moral community that was united in its ethical vision of a reality beyond nature.

Premodern Ethics and the Haunted Environment

It is difficult to discuss premodern environmental ethics in a short space, since they were always local products adapted to the contingencies of particular environments and cultures. The matter is further complicated by the fact that much of what we know about premodern environmental ethics is drawn from written documents, and there is good reason to doubt whether these speculations by the cultural elite closely resemble the beliefs and practices of ordinary folk. Nevertheless, some generalizations are possible.

We should begin by observing that humans with a premodern view of the environment did not attempt to manipulate nature simply by *causing* it to behave in one way or another. They also gave the natural entities that were pertinent to their purposes *reasons* to behave in the desired fashion. To clarify this distinction, imagine that you are a cold camper with a single match endeavoring to light a fire in a damp forest. If you hold the lit match to dry tinder and ignite it, you *cause* it to burn. If you coax the waxing flame with words of encouragement, or threaten it with curses, you are giving the wood a *reason* to burn. To the extent that you think these words addressed to the wood increase the likelihood of it catching fire, your thinking is premodern.

This is because a premodern person assumed that objects had a nature in some respects like his own, that they were much more like people than like what we in the modern world call things (Barfield 1988: 42). Trees, springs, lakes, mountains, and stones were assumed to be quasi-persons, with something like a mind and a will of their own. They appeared as the mountain did to William Wordsworth, as beings animated "with voluntary power instinct" (*The Prelude*). Getting what one wanted from such an environment was, therefore, much like getting what one wanted from other people: it was a matter of giving natural entities good reasons to cooperate (MacCulloch 1961).

Because it took natural entities to be somewhat like humans, this view of the natural world is often described as anthropomorphic. It is also described as animatism or animism. Strictly speaking, animism describes a belief in spirits that are bound to particular bodies, much as an individual human spirit is tied to a par-

ticular human body, but it was often connected to belief in a more populous spirit-world. In addition to the animating spirits of things, this might include ghosts of dead humans, the dream-souls of metempsychosing witches and magicians, and those peripatetic spirits that Teutonic folklore represented as elves, dwarves, and giants. All such beings were presumed capable of affecting the material world to the boon or bane of human designs. Perception of an anthropomorphic, personal environment seems to have been universal among premodern peoples, and there is reason to suppose the human mind is congenitally disposed to perceive a spirit-haunted world.

In the West such thinking began to disappear in the sixteenth century. The personalities of the old folklore survive in children's literature, but with characters now so affable and benign that it is hard to remember that they were not always friendly beings. Most were indifferent to human happiness, bent on their own mysterious projects, unconcerned by human fortune and misfortune. Many were malevolent. Few could be counted as friends. Belief in beings bearing such dispositions toward humans served to make the ways of nature intelligible. It explained events in nature, and why these events were so often contrary to human interests.

The personalized human environment was thought to consist of *reasonable beings*, beings that act as they do because they believe they have reasons to act in these ways. The cause of a reasonable act does not work directly, but only through evaluation, judgment, and interpretation; its effect is not a necessary consequence, but rather a *deliberate* response. If you shoved me and caused me to fall, my body would not reflect on the impact and then determine that falling to the floor was the proper response. It would fall necessarily, like an upset tower of building blocks. Being a reasonable being, and assuming that you are analogous, I would, however, instantly question why you shoved me. What did the shove mean? In asking this question I change the shove, from an event that caused me to fall, to the act of a reasonable being that communicates a meaning and is itself reason for some response from me.

To be a reasonable being is, therefore, to engage in symbolic communication, and to demand that actions be justified. This is why we have, after Ludwig Wittgenstein, come increasingly to equate reason and personhood with language and other forms of symbolic activity (Scruton 1996). This is why a premodern person, living in what he took to be a personalized environment populated by reasonable beings, believed that the actions of these beings had a meaning he could understand, and that his own meaningful actions could be understood by these beings. Hence his efforts to influence the environment through symbolic behavior such as dances, charms, sacrifices, or disciplined conduct.

When entities in the natural environment are personalized, supposed to act for reasons, and supposed capable of symbolic communication, it is possible to describe the human environment in distinctly moral terms. This is, firstly, because natural objects could be held morally accountable. One could feel indignant over an undeserved catastrophe, call it an injustice, perhaps appeal to a higher authority. One might also feel a sense of obligation and pious gratitude toward beings that have been of use, or that have at least refrained from causing mischief. They might, after all, have withheld the favor or wreaked the havoc. Secondly, reasonable beings must be regarded as axiological centers, for reasons presuppose values and reasonable

beings are necessarily intentional beings. In an environment so conceived, humans are not the sole source of value. Anthropomorphism precludes anthropocentrism. No particular environmental ethic follows from these assumptions, but it seems almost certain that *some* environmental ethic must have.

Modern Ethics and the Disenchanted Environment

Belief in a personalized, spirit-haunted world started to fade in the sixteenth century, when some educated Europeans began to view the environment as a collection of inanimate objects mindlessly moved by mechanical processes, rather like the works of a clock. This shift from an anthropomorphic to mechanistic ethical vision has continued down to the present. Indeed, disbelief in supernatural agents and embrace of materialism is a defining characteristic of the modern age. Anthropomorphism is now regarded as a superstitious solecism of the fanciful, delusional, and ignorant.

The sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) described this shift as “the disenchantment of the world” (*Die Entzauberung der Welt*), and regarded the exorcism as an event of great and lasting importance. For Weber, disenchantment was a precondition of modern control of nature because it opened up the possibility that “one can in principle master all things by calculation” (Weber 1946: 139). It was not a way of perceiving nature that arose as a result of technological mastery, as Marxists would claim, but a transcendental reality that had to be fully imagined before technological mastery could begin. As a commentator on Weber puts it, “*de facto* mastery is not a precondition for disenchantment. Rather the world is disenchanted when it is perceived as a potential object of mastery” (Gilbert 1993: 28). This is because disenchantment depersonalized the environment, thereby removing the grounds on which premodern peoples had based their belief that there were limits to human mastery.

Mastery by calculation has four basic aspects. First, before one can master something one must perceive that it has no other master. This was done by denying the existence of nonhuman persons and the values they had been thought to bestow. For instance, if there were such a thing as a wood nymph, it would presumably value the tree it inhabited much as a person values her own body. And it would have something like the same sort of moral claim on that tree. Therefore, to a person who believed in wood nymphs, felling a tree would be an act that, if not forbidden, would require some sort of compensation to the nymph, just as our justice requires compensation to persons whose property or bodies we damage or destroy. Disenchantment removed from the environment all axiological grounds other than human beings, thereby eliminating the possibility that things in the environment might be valued by beings other than humans, might be in a moral sense *their* property. Thus was the way to anthropocentrism cleared.

In denying anthropomorphism, disenchantment also removed the grounds for attempting to give nature a reason to cooperate. Inanimate nature neither understands nor engages in symbolic communication, and so cannot be influenced by reasons. This put an end to the search for symbols with which to flatter, deprecate, or propitiate nature, and directed the whole of modern enquiry into a search for causes. This is the origin of modern technology. Abandonment of attempts to communicate with nature followed the decision to disbelieve in personalized nature, but

in turn changed the way humans understood nature. This is because attempts to influence nature with symbols seldom work, and frequent failure reinforced the idea that nature cannot be mastered, that it has a will of its own. Once causal techniques were discovered, however, attempts to influence nature with causes often did work, and this reinforced the idea that nature can be mastered.

The third way in which disenchantment opened up the possibility of mastery through calculation was by objectification. Beginning in the sixteenth century, intellectuals separated experience into those aspects that are the way they are because the object is what it is, and those aspects that are the way they are because the viewer is who he or she is: the objective and the subjective. René Descartes (1596–1650) proposed that qualities such as heat, sound, and color are not properties of objects, but rather effects that properties of certain objects have on the creature known as man. Terms like hot and cold, loud and muted, red and blue, were thus changed to descriptors of psychological events that are related to, but different from, the objective and quantifiable facts of temperature, amplitude, and spectral frequency. It is not objective to say that the coffee is hot, since it is decidedly cool when compared with, say, the core of the Sun; but is objective to say that the coffee is 110 degrees fahrenheit. Measurement and quantification thus became *the* way in which one understood objects in the environment.

This is why C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) described the shift to a materialist worldview as one in which “the object [was] stripped of its qualitative properties and reduced to mere quantity” (Lewis 1947: 82). Among the qualitative properties so removed, Lewis would certainly include color, sound, and heat, but his primary concern was with moral and aesthetic values that are visible only to those with an ethical vision, and this carries us to the fourth aspect of disenchantment. Just as humans are disposed to perceive some objects as hot, or big, or blue, so they are, when equipped with an ethical vision, disposed to perceive some objects as good and beautiful, and others as vile and foul. So long as such attributes are taken as the *property* of these things, and not something supplied by the viewer, certain ethical consequences will follow.

This point bears some elaboration. If I sit 12 inches from a roaring fire, there will in a definite number of seconds be certain quantifiable changes in my skin (known subjectively as damage) and certain quantifiable neurological impulses (known subjectively as pain). One can view this objectively if one is prepared to view me as an object. The heating of a human body is, after all, a physical event, different in detail but not perhaps in kind from the heating of a stone, a log, or the flesh of a butchered animal. Indeed this is just how it would appear to a cat. This calculation, in the sense of cold calculation, is accomplished by suppressing the ethical vision. Lewis described it as “repression of elements in what would otherwise be our total reaction.” Such repression is “sometimes noticeable and even painful” to the person doing it, but is nevertheless necessary to those who would master their world because the ethical vision is “something that has to be overcome before we can cut up a dead man or a live animal in a dissecting room” (Lewis 1947: 81).

The human body remains the one thing that most stubbornly “resists” the “movement of mind” that “thrusts [things] into the mere world of [objectified] Nature” (Lewis 1947: 82). This is why, I trust, most of us feel, and do not attempt to repress

the feeling, that there are things that should not be done to and with the human body. Torture and mutilation of the human body ought not to happen, and one properly feels horror when it does. This is why the crime of rape is, in Scruton's words, "a dragging of the subject [person] into the world of things" (Scruton 1996: 133). Torturers, murderers, and rapists who have, through suppression, lost the capacity for revulsion and horror, who have as we say hardened themselves, we quite rightly regard as nonhuman monsters.

It should be noted, however, that objectification of the human body is a precondition for mastery. In order to mend the body a surgeon must overcome squeamish aversion to blood. Soldiers must objectify the enemy in order to kill him, and think of civilian fatalities as collateral damage. It is instructive to think about the human body because it is, perhaps, the only thing that we today commonly regard as enchanted. We do this because our ethical vision discloses it as the embodiment of a person, a being who has intentions and values, who offers and responds to reasons, and who should not be objectified. It appears to us as something sacred, something that can be desecrated. This is why reflection on obscenity, which is objectification of the human body in pornography or violence, is perhaps the best way to begin to grasp the meaning of disenchantment, for obscenity is the human body disenchanting.

Disenchantment reduces nature to brute matter (quantification) that can be mastered (technology), and that there is no reason not to master (desanctification) if humans value this manipulation (anthropocentrism). At the very least, then, there is no ethical significance to environmental modifications that do not positively harm human values. Environmental manipulation by a person who views the world through this ethical lens is constrained and obliged only by consideration of the interests of other human beings.

Toward Postmodern Environmental Ethics

The modern environmental ethic of disenchanted nature places limits on the ways in which humans ought to think about the natural world. It is an ethical vision that discloses a transcendental reality, a vision of nature quite unlike that apparent to the unaided human eye. Like all ethical limits, these purport to liberate, and in a very real sense do liberate, for in adopting this ethical vision the modern person threw off the scruples that had trammled his ancestors and, through science and technology, made himself veritable master of the natural world. The modern ethical vision imposed limits on what one might *think* about the environment even as it removed the moral limits on what one might *do* to the environment. Indeed, there were for it no *moral* limits. Human manipulation of the environment was constrained only by technical feasibility and the preferences of individual humans as these were expressed in politics or the market. It recognized and refrained from the impracticable, the unpopular, and the imprudent; everything else was fair game. As William James (1842–1910) put it, once belief in enchanted nature is discarded,

Visible nature is all plasticity and indifference, – a moral multiverse . . . and not a moral universe. To such a harlot we owe no allegiance; with her as a whole we can establish no

communion; and we are free in our dealings with her several parts . . . to follow no law but prudence in coming to terms with such of her particular features as will help us to our private ends. (James 1923: 43–4)

James likens disenchanted nature to a harlot because it is treated as if it possessed only instrumental value; the prostitute, like the pornographic image, being a human body reduced to mere means or perfect instrumentality. To one outside the modern ethical vision however, this is obscene and desecrating, the mastery it permits is diabolical. As Oswald Spengler (1880–1936) put it, “he who was not himself possessed by this will to power over nature would necessarily feel all this as *devilish*” (Spengler 1932: 85).

Nineteenth-century Romantics were among the first to suspect that modern mastery was devilry at heart, and through poetry, painting, fiction, and philosophy they attempted to reenchant nature. They failed. Rather than create a new ethical vision, Romantic art followed a course “of ever deeper mourning for the life of ‘natural piety’ which Enlightenment destroyed,” and the characteristic Romantic attitude became languid longing for the world that was lost (Scruton 2000: 49). Individuals may find solace in Romantic reenchantment (most recently in new-age pantheism), but this does not arrest disenchantment.

In the twentieth century other skeptics began to suggest that the modern ethical vision of nature was a true primrose path, a deceptively attractive course by which the multitude might make their lazy way to hell. Some like Aldous Huxley (1894–1963) foresaw the disenchantment of the human body; others were alarmed by perceived environmental degradation. Much divided these skeptics, but they agreed on the need to fetter humans with something more permanent than temporary technological impossibility and fickle popular taste. It was in response to the fear that, in time, everything would be possible and every possibility would be desired, that the search for a postmodern environmental ethic first arose. This search generally consists of attempts to identify nonhuman axiological grounds within the nature that is known to natural science. It attempts to go beyond anthropocentrism without reverting, like Romanticism, to a spurious and untenable anthropomorphism. The argument has taken three general forms.

The first asks us to consider, more seriously than we presently do, our obligation to future generations. Humanity at some distant future date is thus an axiological ground outside present-day humanity, whose claims on resources deserves respect. Because humans have generally recognized some duty to posterity, this ethic is not odious to the general public, who rightly see in it little more than old-style conservation. Posterity ethics is not without problems, though. Foremost among these is that future generations do not yet exist and so cannot express preferences that we today are obliged to honor. Without knowing these preferences it is very hard to honor whatever rights future generations may have, since their right is not to any particular resources, but only to resources sufficient to permit them to live as well as we do. We might choose to conserve a resource that will in future have little or no value, due to technological change. What is more, denying ourselves such a resource must diminish output, and whatever we fail to make because the resource was left in the ground might be the very thing that future generations will need. The argument of duty to future generations is therefore tangled in paradox: for to

save a resource may be in fact to waste it, and to use a resource by converting it into something else may be in fact to save it.

The second form is biocentric ethics, which holds that we should extend moral consideration to some set of nonhuman creatures, and regard these creatures as axiological grounds. This is often described in terms of rights such as animal rights. The various positions differ primarily in the suggested qualifications for admission into the moral community. More restrictive views limit the franchise to creatures that closely resemble humans, and thus may be thought to suffer in something like the way humans suffer. More expansive views extend moral consideration to all conscious, or even all living, beings.

Such ideas are already to some extent living in popular thought. It is, for instance, commonly believed that animals should be made to suffer and die only for good reasons. This is not anthropocentric because it recognizes that an animal may have a value to itself that is higher than at least some of the values that a human might assign to it (as a marksman's target, say, or medium of sadistic pleasure). This weak form of biocentric ethics maintains that human values do not always and everywhere trump other values, and therefore accepts the possibility that a human can treat an animal in ways that are morally wrong. Biocentric ethics takes a stronger form as it accepts fewer reasons why a human might justifiably impose his values on an animal, and thereby cause it to suffer.

The most basic problem with biocentric ethics is that it is impossible to extend the rights of the moral community without at the same time extending the ethical vision and its motivations. Imagine that we were to enlarge the moral community to include all mammals, and that we humans succeeded in treating all mammals with the moral consideration we presently give to other humans. Those who killed a mammal would, for instance, be charged with murder and forced to pay heavy retribution before readmittance to the moral community. Yet the lions would still kill and eat the gazelles, and there would be no way for a lion to repent and atone for the damage he did to the moral community. This would present us with one of three options: (1) redefine the community as one that tolerates killing within its ranks; (2) concede that some members of the community do not recognize community rules, and that the community does not, therefore, exist; (3) hold humans to a different standard, and thereby implicitly recognize the continued existence of a distinctly human community. All of these options strike me as intolerable.

The third approach is ecocentric ethics, which compel humans to act for the good of the ecosystem. It is thus a form of communitarianism, with the community here combining natural systems and human institutions. As a communitarian ethic it derives value from the whole, which it believes has intrinsic value. Individual parts possess instrumental value only insofar as they add to the stability of the community. The human individual is thus no longer an axiological ground, valuing and disvaluing according to his more or less unconstrained pleasure, but rather the object of an external source of value, valued or disvalued according to his more or less beneficial function.

At first glance such efforts to maintain the viability of the total community, or ecosystem, might appear no different than prudential maintenance of the environment on which human life depends, something that can be accomplished within the instrumental reason of the modern ethical vision. The essential difference, as I under-

stand it, is that ecocentric ethics is animated by gratitude, not prudence. Prudence is a virtue, but it is a virtue of control, over one's self and one's affairs. Gratitude on the other hand is a warm sense of benefits received coupled with a desire to do something in return. To revert to language used earlier in this chapter, prudence speaks only in hypothetical imperatives. Gratitude entails categorical imperatives, for the grateful person recognizes and accepts that she lives under an indefeasible obligation to the social and natural systems that sustain her.

Although today associated in the minds of many with liberal or leftist politics, this manner of communitarian or ecocentric thinking is in spirit essentially conservative and antiliberal. It rejects as false the liberal view of the individual as essentially free and self-determining, as sovereign over himself and the relations he establishes with other persons and things. Instead it sees the individual as dependent on human society and the natural world, and due to this dependence, which begins in the womb, locked in obligations he has not chosen and cannot escape, but can only honor through a lifetime of gratitude and piety.

Such an attitude does not stipulate actual behavior, and must be taken as a mere foundation for a postmodern environmental ethic. Such an ethic will be postmodern not simply because it follows the modern vision, but because it incorporates and transcends that vision. Its sense of gratitude will be rooted in the knowledge of natural systems and organic interdependence that disenchanting science has revealed, but it will also understand that disenchantment is dangerous because it ultimately leads to disenchantment of ourselves. This may be avoidable if we do not again separate environmental from human ethics, but rather devise a fused ethic of the *human* environment as a foundation for future human geographies.

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