Introduction: The Asian Traditions as a Conceptual Resource for Environmental Philosophy

J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames

Environmental philosophy first came on the scene during the early seventies in the form of relevancy offerings in progressive curricula primarily at teaching-oriented undergraduate institutions.[1] The first literature in environmental philosophy, correspondingly, took the form of hastily assembled multidisciplinary anthologies for classroom use.[2] Then, in the mid-seventies, environmental philosophy became more narrowly defined as a subdiscipline of philosophy proper, and there began to be produced a more specialized, technical literature, not directly designed for or related to pedagogy.[3] By the end of the decade, a journal, *Environmental Ethics*, had been established by Eugene C. Hargrove (the first volume was published in 1979) to provide both a forum and professional identification and recognition for environmental philosophy as a legitimate area of philosophical research.[4]

Superficially, environmental philosophy appears to be one among several new fields of "applied ethics," all originating almost simultaneously in the same context of curriculum reform in mid-century academic philosophy. Generally, applied ethics (epitomized by bio-medical and business and professional ethics) apply familiar, well-worked out (and worked over) ethical theories—utilitarianism in its multifarious forms, Kant, Aristotle, Hare, Rawls, or whatever—to novel problems emergent in modern technology: life support systems, genetic screening, genetic engineering, organ transplantation, and so forth in biology and medicine; and whistle blowing, mass media manipulation, electronic eavesdropping, global market control, and so forth in business and the professions.

"Environmental ethics," on the other hand, is actually a sort of *anti*-applied ethics. The real-world problems which taken together constitute the so-called "environmental crisis" appear to be of such ubiquity, magnitude, recalcitrance, and synergistic complexity, that they force on philosophy the task not of applying familiar *ethical* theories, long in place, but of rethinking the underlying moral and metaphysical assumptions that seem to have had a significant role in bringing on the crisis. Environmental philosophy, in other words, begins with the idea that traditional metaphysics and moral theory are more at the root of environmental problems than tools for their solution. Environmental philosophy, therefore, has been more

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critically and conceptually oriented than the historically grounded and narrowly problem-centered species of applied ethics with which it is often confused. Environmental problems provide less the occasion for the exercise and application than for the criticism and recasting of Western moral and metaphysical presuppositions.

One of us (Callicott) attempted to articulate the difference between environmental philosophy and applied ethics in a recent, synoptic article in a mainstream philosophy journal:

> Over the last decade, environmental ethics has emerged as a new subdiscipline of moral philosophy. As with anything new in philosophy or the sciences, there has been some controversy, not only about its legitimacy, but about its very identity or definition. The question of legitimacy has been settled more or less by default: professional philosophical interest in environmental philosophy seems to be growing as, certainly, work in the field proliferates. The question of identity—just what is environmental ethics?—has not been so ingenuous.
>
> Environmental ethics may be understood to be but one among several new sorts of applied philosophies, the others of which also arose during the seventies. That is, it may be understood to be an *application* of well-established conventional philosophical categories to emergent practical environmental problems. On the other hand, it may be understood to be an *exploration* of alternative moral and even metaphysical principles, forced upon philosophy by the magnitude and recalcitrance of these problems. If defined in the former way, then the work of environmental ethics is that of a philosophical yeoman or underlaborer (to employ Locke's self appraisal); if defined in the latter way, it is that of a theoretician or philosophical architect (as in Descartes' self-image).[5]

A less than entirely sympathetic philosopher, Thomas E. Hill, agreed with this general assessment in a review of a recent collection of essays in environmental philosophy:

> The underlying project in almost all of the essays . . . is the search for fundamental theoretical grounds for an environmentalist stand on current issues. Unlike much recent work in medical ethics, the focus is not on deciding what should be done in "hard cases" posed by new technology. A wide area of agreement on what should be done seems to be taken for granted by the authors; their concern is rather how to articulate the philosophical grounding of environmentalist policies. Is a radical revolution in ethics required? Is traditional Western religion adequate to the task? Do alternative world views provide better models? Should ethical theory abandon the fact/value distinction—or return to belief in "intrinsic values"?[6]

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In light of some of the essays included in this volume, however, even this description of the project of environmental philosophy might not go far enough. A deeper break with traditional Western philosophical commitments may be required: The problems implacably posed by the environmental crisis for environmental philosophy are so basic that the exploration of an alternative *metaphysics* or attendant ethical *theory* might not be a sufficiently radical solution.

II

The complex of problems constituting the "environmental crisis" (in chronological order of their popular notice) include environmental pollution, the aesthetic degradation of nature, human overpopulation, resource depletion, ecological destruction, and, now emerging as the most pressing and desperate of problems, abrupt massive species extinction. These problems are largely Western in provenance, albeit global in scope. They are big, tough, and interrelated. And they all appear to be symptoms of a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of nature and of a tendency to exclude nature from moral concern or consideration.

Hence, to begin adequately to address environmental problems, philosophical presuppositions must be revised to jibe with an ecological description of nature and (since and ecological description of nature, most generally conceived, subverts the concept of ontologically independent *entities*) ethics must be enlarged so as to valorize and enfranchise nature *as a whole* as well as *individual* nonhuman natural entities. The project of environmental philosophy on each of these two heads—order and value—has two basic phases, the first critical, the second constructive.

Initial criticism (mostly by intellectual historians, not philosophers—who were slower to react) focused, simplistically, on the so-called Judeo-Christian tradition.[7] This criticism was primarily theological and cosmological, but has clear moral implications and overtones. These seem to be the main points which came under attack:[8]

1. God—the locus of the holy or sacred—transcends nature.
2. Nature is a profane artifact of a divine craftsman-like creator. The essence of the natural world is informed matter: God divided and ordered an inert, plastic material—the void/waters/dust or clay.
3. Man exclusively is created in the image of God and is, thus, segregated, essentially, from the rest of nature.

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4. Man is given dominion by God over nature.
5. God commands man to subdue nature and multiply himself.
6. The whole cognitive organization of the Judeo-Christian world view is political and hierarchical: God over man, man over nature—which results in a moral peck order or power structure.
7. The image-of-God in man is the ground of man's *intrinsic* value. Since nonhuman natural entities lack the divine image, they are morally disenfranchised. They have, at best, instrumental value.
8. The theologically based instrumentality of nature is compounded in the later Judeo-Christian tradition by Aristotelian-Thomistic teleology—rational life is the telos of nature and hence all the rest of nature exists as a means, a support system, for rational man.

A particularly strident, but representative and widely influential example of this first, essentially nonprofessional phase of the criticism of Western cognitive and moral traditions from an environmental point of view was expressed by landscape architect Ian McHarg:

> The great Western religions born of monotheism have been the major source of our moral attitudes. It is from them that we have developed the preoccupation with the uniqueness of man, with justice and compassion. On the subject of man-nature, however, the Biblical creation story of the first chapter of Genesis, the source of the most generally accepted description of man's role and powers, not only fails to correspond to reality as we observe it, but in its insistence upon dominion and subjugation of nature, encourages the most exploitative and destructive instincts in man rather than those that are deferential and creative. Indeed, if one seeks license for those who would increase radioactivity, create canals and harbors with atomic bombs, employ poisons without constraint, or give consent to the bulldozer mentality, there could be no better injunction that this text. Here can be found the sanction and injunction to conquer nature—the enemy, the threat to Jehovah.
>
> The creation story in Judaism was absorbed unchanged into Christianity. It emphasized the exclusive divinity of man, his God-given dominion over all things and licensed him to subdue the earth.[9]

As Eugene C. Hargrove points out in the foreword to this volume, the attack on the Judeo-Christian tradition by McHarg, Lynn White, Jr., and others provoked a veritable flood of apologetic literature. In the ensuing debate about the causes and cures of the environmental malaise, critical attention remained riveted on only half of the story of the Western heritage of ideas. In the most general sense, modern Western intellectual culture is rooted in Greco-Roman as well as Judeo-Christian thought. And, in fact, it

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can be argued that the Greco-Roman legacy, which is less visible to lay persons than to philosophers, has more powerfully informed the prevailing assumptions and premises of modern Western thought than distinctly Judeo-Christian ideas.

But precisely because it is less manifest, the Greco-Roman legacy has not received anything like the thorough and systematic critical discussion that has been visited upon the Judeo-Christian tradition by environmentally oriented intellectual historians. Indeed, historian Lynn White, Jr., author of the landmark classic "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," who is followed by historian J. Donald Hughes and political scientist John Rodman, all look to Greek myth and philosophy—pagan naturalism (a sacred nature), Milesian hylozoism (a living Earth), Heraclitus (a process ontology) and Pythagoras (human-animal kinship) for ecologically fitting or environmentally useful ideas.[10]

The first Greek philosophy was natural philosophy, and although many ecologically adaptable or environmentally useful ideas were broached, the natural philosophy which was culturally selected by this dialectic of Western intellectual history, and thus survived to bequeath its characteristics to the modern period, is atomism.

Nature is represented in atomism as particulate, reductive, material, inert, quantitative, and mechanical. This concept of nature became institutionalized in early modern science and was pragmatically translated into an engineering agenda.[11] It is expressed in the ongoing Western Industrial Revolution by what is known as "modern technology." The environmental crisis may in large part be diagnosed as a symptom and a measure of the mismatch between the atomistic-mechanistic image of nature inherited from the Greeks, institutionalized in modern classical science, and expressed in modern technology, on the one hand, and the holistic-organic reality disclosed by contemporary ecology and quantum physics (and in a sense by the environmental crisis itself) on the other. Clearly, these two paradigms—the atomistic-mechanistic and the holistic-organic—sponsor widely divergent conceptions of entities and the nature of their relatedness.

Greek philosophical anthropology, meanwhile, which was revived and institutionalized in the West roughly contemporaneously with the revival and institutionalization of atomism, was paradigmatically expressed by Plato: Human nature is dualistic—composed of body and soul. The body (at least in Descartes' modern version) was, as any natural entity, exhaustively describable in atomistic-mechanistic terms. The soul, on the other hand, resides temporarily in the body—the ghost in the machine—and is of an otherworldly origin and destiny. Human beings, thus, are both essentially and morally segregated from nature. The natural environment, therefore, might be engineered to human specifications, no matter with what natural

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consequences, without either human moral responsibility or ultimate human penalty.

To these observations might be added those of David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, who find in Greek philosophy, especially as paradigmatically and most influentially represented by Plato, the concept of transcendental principles of natural and moral order.[12] The Platonic forms are a metaphysical hypostatization of a logico-mathematical order assumed to be imposed upon a passive and chaotically inclined material to effect an ordered natural world. Modern ecology, on the other hand, represents the incredibly rich and complex order of the biosphere to be emergent and reciprocal, and for things to have become what they are through a process of mutual adjustment and evolutionary co-determination.

From the point of view of the dawning awareness of the environmental crisis of the late sixties and early seventies, modern Western civilization seemed erected on the worst possible mix of ideas inherited from both its Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman roots (although the critique of the Greco-Roman heritage was only implicit). Given the metaphysical and axiological conceptual composite at the core of the predominant and prevailing Western world view, the environmental crisis is the predictable, the inevitable outcome, it was argued:

> Our failure is that of the Western World and lies in prevailing values. Show me a man-oriented society in which it is believed that reality exists only because man can perceive it [Berkeley], that the cosmos is a structure erected to support man on its pinnacle [Aristotle, Aquinas], that man exclusively is divine and given dominion over all things [Genesis], indeed that God is made in the image of man [Genesis inverted], and I will predict the nature of its cities and their landscapes. I need not look far for we have seen them—the hot-dog stands, the neon shill, the ticky-tacky houses, dysgenic city and mined landscapes. This is the image of the anthropomorphic, anthropocentric man; he seeks not unity with nature but conquest.[13]

So, it has been argued, in much of the literature to date, that to solve the environmental crisis, it is necessary to construct or to adopt a different world view and a different set of values and duties.

III

Since environmental problems were laid at the door of the *Western* world view and value premises, some thinkers naively leaped to the

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conclusion that, by contrast, *Eastern* traditions could provide, for these essentially Western ills, an alternative world view and set of values ready-made, as it were, to establish harmony between man and nature. Political scientist Hwa Yol Jung prescribed such an exotic intellectual elixir in an especially pure and innocent manner in 1972:

> I wish to challenge those Western writers who refuse to accept Zen (and indeed Eastern ideas in general) as an answer to the global problem of ecology . . . . And if . . . it needs "a Copernican revolution of the mind" to avert the impending ecological catastrophe, I suggest that Zen could be the fountainhead of that revolution.[14]

The way was paved for this journey to the East in search of a philosophical remedy for the environmental crisis, we conjecture, by a somewhat earlier (in the fifties) fascination with Eastern ideas in the then new prototype of a disaffected/alienated American subculture called the Beat Generation. The Beats read Alan Watts and Herman Hesse avidly, cut their hair close like Zen monks, and produced novels with titles like *Dharma Bums*. In the most widely read and quoted classic of the early literature in environmental ethics, Lynn White, Jr. makes the following revealing remark:

> What we do about ecology [i.e., the natural environment] depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one. The beatniks, who are the basic revolutionaries of our time, show a sound instinct in their affinity for Zen Buddhism, which conceives of the man-nature relationship as very nearly the mirror image of the Christian view.[15]

West Coast Zen Buddhism and the newly emergent environmental movement were further integrated in the popular imagination by Beat hero, California nature poet, and student of oriental thought, Gary Snyder, during the sixties. Among the most delightful as well as popular pieces by Snyder is his underground environmental poem, "Smokey the Bear Sutra," which parodies the format of Mahāyāna Buddhism's famous *Lotus Sutra (Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka)* but supplies it with an evolutionary-ecological world view and an environmental activist message:

> Once in the Jurassic, about 150 million years ago,/the Great Sun Buddha in this corner of the Infinite/Void gave a great discourse to all the assembled elements/and energies: to the standing beings, the walking beings,/the flying beings and the sitting beings—even grasses,/to the number of three billion,

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each one born from a/seed, were assembled there: a Discourse concerning/enlightenment on the planet Earth.

"In some future time, there will be a continent called/America. It will have great centers of power called/such as Pyramid Lake, Walden Pond, Mount Ranier, Big Sur,/Everglades, and so forth; and powerful nerves and channels/such as Columbia River, Mississippi River, and Grand Canyon. /The human race in that era will get into troubles all over its head, and practically wreck everything in spite of/its own strong intelligent Buddha-nature . . . .

In that/future American Era I shall enter a new form: to cure/the world of loveless knowledge that seeks with blind hunger; /and mindless rage eating food that will not fill it."

And he showed himself in his true form of/SMOKEY THE BEAR . . . .

Wrathful but Calm, Austere but Comic, Smokey the Bear will/illuminate those who would help him; but for those who would/hinder or slander him,/HE WILL PUT THEM OUT.

Thus his great Mantra:/Namah Samanta vajranam chanda maharoshana/Sphataya hum traka ham man/"I DEDICATED MYSELF TO THE UNIVERSAL DIAMOND/BE THIS RAGING FURY DESTROYED"

And he will protect those who love woods and rivers,/Gods and animals, hobos and madmen, prisoners and sick/people, musicians, playful women, and hopeful children;

And if anyone is threatened by advertising, air pollution,/or the police, they should chant SMOKEY THE BEAR'S WAR/SPELL: DROWN THEIR BUTTS/CRUSH THEIR BUTTS/DROWN THEIR BUTTS/CRUSH THEIR BUTTS

And SMOKEY THE BEAR will surely appear to put the enemy out/with his vajra-shovel.[16]

Yale biophysicist Harold Morowitz, in a 1972 discussion (reprinted here in full), attempted to link the metaphysical implications of contemporary ecology with a specific ontological doctrine in Buddhism:

In a book entitled *Science and Buddhism*, P. Dahlke has elaborated the thesis that in theology everything stands, in science everything falls and in Buddhism everything burns. The notion of burning is a metaphysical expression of transience and impermanence . . . . Although the Buddhist syntax is entirely different from that of modern science, the notion is clearly present that everything is process—a process which only persists by virtue of some universal kind of energy flowing through the world. From this point of

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> view, the reality of individuals is problematic because they do not exist per se but only as local perturbations in this universal energy flow. As originally presented this must have been a very mystical idea, but a similar kind of idea seems to emerge from modern science. Everything we know of is indeed process, which is mediated on the surface of our planet by the flow of solar energy through all organized structures.[17]

William R. LaFleur in a 1974 article (reprinted in condensed form in this volume) connected the Mahāyāna Buddhist valorization of nature to matters which were simultaneously emerging as issues in environmental ethics. LaFleur reviewed, in his scholarly discussion, the debate in East Asian Mahāyāna concerning the status and religious value of plants and trees. This protracted discussion in the tradition gradually elevated the valuation of plant life in Japan. It began with the fundamental question of the possibility of Buddhahood for plants and trees, and issued ultimately in the emblem of plant life as a model for human salvation. This extended class of religiously validated beings resulted, for many Japanese Buddhists, in an extension of the moral community.[18]

The first round of criticism of Western ideas and orientation to the Orient was largely descriptive, and even when sophisticated regarding the Asian cultures, as in the case of LaFleur's discussion, did not have systematic philosophical goals. In much of the earlier environmental literature, however, the very different traditions of Eastern philosophy, particularly those of the Indian subcontinent and those of the Far East, were conflated—so that it appeared that just as there was one fairly unified Eastern tradition, there was one fairly unified Western tradition. For example, in a celebrated classic of environmental history Roderick Nash wrote,

> Ancient Eastern cultures were the sources of respect for and religious veneration of the natural world . . . . As early as the eighth century B.C., the Indian philosophy of Jainism proposed that man not kill or harm any living creature. While the Jains were largely intent on maintaining absolute detachment from the world, early Buddhists and Hindus professed a feeling of compassion and a code of ethical conduct for all that was alive. Likewise, China and Tibet produced philosophies which honored life other than man's and promulgated elaborate dietary rules in this interest.
>
> In the Far East the man-nature relationship was marked by respect, bordering on love, absent in the West . . . . Man was understood to be a part of nature. And wilderness, in Eastern thought, did not have an unholy or evil connotation but was venerated as the symbol and even the very essence of the deity. As early as the fifth century B.C., Chinese Taoists postulated an infinite and benign force in the natural world . . . . Far from avoiding wild places, the ancient Chinese sought them out in the hope of sensing more

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> clearly something of the unity and rhythm that they believed pervaded the universe . . . . In linking God and the wilderness, instead of contrasting them as did the Western faiths, Shinto and Taoism fostered love of wilderness rather than hatred.[19]

Huston Smith, whose academic post as Professor of Philosophy at MIT and whose books and articles on Eastern philosophy and religion provide him no excuse, has been guilty of a similar conflation, when speaking to environmentalists:

> Asia retained a deep, unquestioning confidence in nature, appreciative of it, receptive to it. Had the Chinese and Indians not risen above the natural plane at all, they would not have spawned civilizations. The way in which they did transcend it, however, was by confirming it. They dignified it by affirming it consciously. By contrast the West oppositioned [sic] herself to nature in a stance that was reserved and critical. Its civilization receded progressively from the natural and instinctive and set itself up against them . . . .
>
> China with her "Tao that can be spoken is not the true Tao" and India's Upanishadic truth that can be comprehended only through living in the presence of a life through which it actively shines . . . hold closer to tacit dimensions of knowing.[20]

In addition to the broad popular appeal of Gary Snyder's work, these remarks by Lynn White, Roderick Nash, and Huston Smith are typical of the early environmental literature and were also widely influential. (Those of Morowitz and LaFleur are less typical, albeit more interesting and insightful; and they were certainly less influential.) However, perhaps for the reasons Hargrove suggests in the foreword to this book, there has been very little subsequent work which carries through on these early mostly casual suggestions (and, until the recent conference forums which yielded many of the essays included in the present volume, there has been practically none by scholars whose expertise is primarily in Asian and comparative philosophy).[21]

Some recent work by specialists in Asian thought is relevant to environmental philosophy, even though no comparative reference either to environmental concerns or the description of nature in the environmental sciences (ecology first and foremost) is to be found in them. For example, with apologetic verge, Chung-ying Cheng has written:

> I think that we can derive the following three principles from the Confucian and Taoist metaphysics, which will lead to a characterization of causality in the Chinese perspective.

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> There is, in the first place, a *principle of holistic unity* . . . .
>
> Second, there is the *principle of internal life-movements*. By this I mean that all things in the world have an intrinsic life-force which moves them in a way in which motion is not imposed from other things or a God but is derived from the inexhaustible source of energy of life, which is the Way. As the source is intrinsically related to an individual thing, the derivation of energy for movement is intrinsic as in an organism rather than extrinsic as in a machine. Similarly, as all things are interrelated to form a network of interchange of processes, the transmission of moving force is conceived of as an exhibition of life activity, in the absence of which the individual things will cease to be defined . . . .
>
> Finally, there is the *principle of organic balance*. By this I mean that all things and processes in the world are related in processes which proceed toward a balance and a harmony . . . .
>
> The model of causality in Chinese philosophy is exactly contrary and converse to the mechanical-atomistic model of scientific Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Whereas the Western scientific concept of causality is atomistic, externalistic, and mechanistic, the Chinese model of causality is antiatomistic and therefore holistic, antiexternalistic and therefore internalistic, antimechanistic and therefore organistic. The very radical differences between them is not difficult to explain: It is the difference between the Image of Life and the Image of Machine. Insofar as life is a concrete experience of man and a machine is built from an abstract design and quantitative draft, one may also say that the Chinese model of causality is basically reflective of the concrete experience of life, history, and time, whereas the Western scientific model of causality is basically a reflection of abstract thinking and quantitative calculation.[22]

The world view emerging from contemporary science (especially ecology and quantum theory) is remarkably similar to Cheng's characterization of Chinese philosophy.

IV

In the relatively new literature of environmental philosophy there has been an intense interest in finding new integrative and moral paradigms by means of which to establish a more harmonious and mutually fulfilling and beneficial relationship of man to nature. There has been a general assumption that Eastern traditions of thought could provide important conceptual

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resources for this project, and there has been lots of loose talk about how they might. But, with the exception of a handful of essays, no direct and extensive work by experts in Eastern thought has been undertaken on the environmental philosophy problematic.

The inspiration for the present volume, then, has been to redress this situation by bringing the Asian traditions to bear on the problems of environmental philosophy as they have been here generally defined—and on the very problematic itself.

The appropriation of "conceptual resources" for environmental philosophy from Asian cultural traditions, however, is an undertaking fraught with a variety of dangers, the most salient of which do not go unnoticed in several of the papers included here. As editors of this volume, therefore, we believe that it is important to state clearly, here at the outset, just what may—and may not—be expected of an extended exercise in comparative environmental philosophy.

Comparative *environmental* philosophy faces the same general problems that attend *any* comparative study in philosophy. Perhaps the most obvious general problem is that the ideas of Eastern cultures must be made intelligible to non-specialists in the West through the syntax and semantic discriminations of Western languages (and vice versa). A full discussion of this problem would, of course, require a volume of its own.[23]

There are two radically opposed positions that generally limit such discussion. Some students of comparative culture are inclined to believe that, when all is said and done, representatives of other traditions are pretty much like us (in the West); others do not. Some believe that behind all the divergences, thinkers East and West inquire into universal problems that transcend cultural differences; others believe that beyond the more obvious gross physical and cultural similarities—ten fingers and toes, an upright gait, language, art, music, social and political institutions, and so on—there are profound and exotic differences that derive from culture-bound ways of thinking and living. Some believe that failing to regard the common characteristics as most important is to deny other peoples their humanity; others believe that to assert such an essential community is to deny other cultures the full value of their uniqueness. The difference between these two positions can be diagnosed, perhaps, as the difference between those who begin with the assumption that we are primarily and most significantly members of a single species, and those who begin with the assumption that we are, in the last analysis, particular and unique persons constituting and constituted by our peculiar social, cultural, and natural environments.

There is much at stake in this debate. On one extreme are theorists whose intellectual system-building and universalizing make them liable to hubris, condescension, and reduction as they force elements of one culture to

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fit a mold endemic to and derived from another. On the other extreme, are cultural apologists whose claims of incommensurability, and often superiority, can lead to arrogance, isolationism, and uncritical parochialism.

It is between these two extremes that we must confront the cultural specificity of philosophy itself. Philosophy proper may be an intellectual activity unique to Western civilization—as several of the papers in this volume imply. To seek conceptual resources of environmental *philosophy* in Asian traditions may thus be otiose—like trying to find, say, distinctly political institutions, for comparative or assimilative purposes, in tribal societies—because to do so rests on an ethnocentric "category mistake." If this is so, of course, all efforts at East-West comparative philosophy are just as ill-conceived—whether the focus be on ethics, metaphysics, aesthetics, epistemology, or any of the other well-established subareas of (Western) philosophy—because there is no Eastern philosophy.

Philosophy, of course, may be so narrowly defined that, by definition, nothing outside the Western tradition will count as a bona fide case. However, the very planetary and ecocentric perspective of environmental philosophy would suggest a more inclusive than exclusive understanding of the larger philosophical enterprise. In fact, as we have already suggested, if any set of issues is going to occasion the redefinition of philosophy as a broad engagement with and openness to the world, it is that concerning our shared human biocultural relationship with the environment.

One of our primary purposes in assembling this anthology is to challenge the aforementioned willingness among non-experts in the Asian traditions to combine what are, in fact, many (and often competing) philosophies into a generic "Eastern Wisdom." This presumption that there is some identifiable and, on some basis, unified "Eastern Wisdom" (if not philosophy)—a counterpart to the Western philosophic dialectic—is one signal of the absence of sophistication that has attended much of popular comparative environmental discussion.

There is a more persuasive argument for discovering this kind of unity in the development of Western philosophy, and it is perhaps by analogy with the Western tradition that this presupposition about Eastern philosophy is entertained. Though fed by a variety of tributaries and flowing into a similar variety of sloughs and backwaters, there has been, in the West, a main channel of thought. To shift metaphors, much of the edifice of the Western philosophic tradition has been constructed on the shared assumption that certainty is possible—the belief, bequeathed to us by Pythagoras, that on the model of mathematics, a unified and systematic structure underlying both the natural and moral order is in principle available to the human being in explanation of the surrounding world. And much of the contribution of Western philosophy has been the consequence of our confidence in this quest

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for certain knowledge. The successes in the natural sciences that followed upon the application of hypothetical reasoning occasioned the extension of similar methods in the pursuit of the same certainty in human philosophy: ethics, politics, economics, and so on.

The assumption that there might be some universal logical or causal principle that makes knowledge of both fact and value and its systematic explanation possible, has been broadly efficacious. On the back of a science of first principles, not only were the natural sciences possible, but, further, the social sciences could reach for respectability. It is the dominance of this rationalistic tendency in the development of Western philosophy that has established metaphysics and epistemology at its center, and that has encouraged the development of the theoretical sciences, both natural and social. And it is this emphasis on rational evidence over rhetorical that accounts in important measure for the seemingly universal features of the Western philosophic enterprise, establishing as it does the priority of methodology and demonstration over analogical thinking and praxis.

Of course, the Western philosophic tradition is rich and complex; and, particularly since the middle of the eighteenth century, the commitment to the underlying rationalist principle that has made systematic philosophy viable has become an increasingly serious complaint among those Western philosophers whom Isaiah Berlin has called the "counter-enlightenment" thinkers. From Vico to our own post-modernist thinkers, the orthodox assumption that there is discoverable some unchanging basis of order that is ultimately ahistorical and ahumanistic—be it Plato's realm of forms, the self-evidently clear and distinct ideas of Cartesian philosophy, Kant's categories of the understanding, or a fixed and universal human nature sought by a spectrum of philosophers from the natural law theorists to the structuralists—has come under intense scrutiny.

Now, the Eastern traditions are not devoid of systematic philosophies. On the contrary, analogous in role to the counter-current thinkers in the mainstream of our modern tradition is the existence of rationalistically oriented movements and personages within the domain of the alternative Asian cultures: the later Mohist logicians in classical China, the Nyāya logicians and grammarians in India, and so on. Audible within the Asian traditions, especially India, there are voices that resonate readily with the central rational enterprise of the Western philosophic tradition and that fit without force into the categories derived from the assumptions and presuppositions upon which that tradition rests. To the extent that these rationalistic elements are prominent, one may speak without error or equivocation of a unified tradition of "Eastern philosophy."

But the fact is that these rationalistic components do not occupy center stage in the Asian theater. On the contrary, the dominant prejudice in what

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we might perilously organize as "Eastern Wisdom" lies in the priority of the unique particular, a characteristic which in its nature, discourages systemic unity, promoting in its stead an aesthetic rather than a scientific sense of coherence. As Plato, at the fountainhead of Western rationalism, plainly recognized, particulars qua particulars cannot be grasped by a rational method. In the absence of a hypostatized rational system by means of which to organize experience, Eastern philosophy has typically sought analogical similarities—rather than identities—among particulars. By means of this approach one may at once preserve the uniqueness of particulars and at the same time achieve a coherency in one's intellectual grasp of nature and society. Since, for major components of the Eastern traditions, order is not reducible beyond a discernible harmony in the dispositioning of unique particulars, there is a significant resistance to abstract (*abstractus:* to move away) notions that are dependent upon the assumption of universalizing principle: system, unity, objectivity, transcendence, uniformity, conceptualization, and so on. And it is precisely these characteristics which unify the Western tradition. What makes things clear in the distinctly Eastern mode of thinking, on the other hand, is often an effectively focused image, not a theory; an inexpressible and inimitable experience, not an argument; an evocative metaphor, not a logically demonstrated truth. The aesthetic sense of coherence more typical of Eastern philosophical reflection fosters a pluralism in Eastern philosophies that is not present in the same degree in the Western tradition. While even the most strident cultural chauvinists would allow that other cultures can generally be explained by appeal to our established disciplines—history, sociology, economics, and so on—there has been at the same time a stubborn resistance among philosophers to acknowledge that other cultures have philosophies. We suggest that this resistance is attributable in large part to the disparity between the dominance of systematic philosophy in the West and its relative absence in Asia (and other parts of the world). And we also suggest that the relegation of Eastern reflection on fundamental natural and moral questions to something less than philosophy proper has been compounded by the way non-Western philosophies have been introduced to Western philosophical audiences—through categories and presuppositions which often do not belong to them, but rather to their Western counterparts. In consequence, Asian philosophies appear to be rather confused and inferior variations on Western themes. In other words, by Western paradigms, either there is no Eastern philosophy worthy of the name, or, if there is, it is of an inferior grade.

How then can Western philosophers critically and dialectically engage Eastern thought in the absence of shared goals and evaluative standards? Whatever the answer to this question may be, the first step is to appreciate the full degree of difference between Western and Eastern thought. A

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common understanding, East and West, of the philosophical enterprise may or may not be attainable; but to organize Eastern philosophy by means of Western philosophical categories and evaluate it by Western criteria of evidence, argument, and proof is as idle as it is parochial. Eastern philosophy lacks a unity similar to that so remarkably present in Western philosophy not only for the simple reason that Asia is larger, geographically more fragmented, and ethnically and culturally more diverse than Europe, but also because the unity characteristic of Western philosophy flows from its rational search for abstract structure and explanation. Hence the assumption that there is an analogous unity in Eastern philosophy can be pernicious.[24]

More directly and specifically to the present undertaking, Holmes Rolston, III, in a recent paper, critically poses the question, "Can the East help the West to value nature?"[25] To assume a posture of openness and receptivity to the difference in Eastern modes of understanding, and tentatively to answer this question affirmatively, immediately raises another question: "How exactly?" Even in the early enthusiastic and naive literature of environmental philosophy, the notion that an alien set of ideas could be mined from its cultural matrix, exported to the West, and intellectually consumed with therapeutic effect was skeptically greeted. For example, immediately after mentioning Zen Buddhism, Lynn White goes on to say, "Zen, however, is as deeply conditioned by Asian history as Christianity is by the experience of the West, and I am dubious of its viability among us."[26] White is certainly correct to think that Westerners cannot simply cut themselves loose from their cognitive roots and graft onto others.

To try to see the world through an alternative frame of mind, however, can be very revealing of one's own. One clear way that the East can help the West to understand and value nature is, therefore, by revealing certain premises and assumptions—concerning the nature of nature and who we human beings are in relation to it, as well as the kind of knowledge of it that we seek to obtain—which lie so deep within or which so pervade the Western world view that they may not come to light any other way. Western philosophy since Socrates has made self-examination a way of life. But the history of Western philosophy also shows how many of the intellectual biases that constitute the very ground of our philosophic inquiries elude even the most dedicated and sincere efforts to dig out and critically evaluate them. Comparative environmental philosophy may certainly contribute to the revelatory and critical phase of environmental philosophy.

The dissatisfaction with Western *traditions* of thought—that is, with *historical* Western philosophical paradigms—and the appeal of Eastern alternatives, often experienced by Western environmental thinkers, is not arbitrary or accidental. A dialectic internal to Western intellectual history has fostered the recent interest in Eastern ideas, an interest that goes well beyond

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merely a passing fascination with the exotic. The classical foundations of Western science have been steadily eroded during the twentieth century. Certainly, objectivity, dualism, and determinism have been abandoned. And the fundamental features of the natural world—albeit still, to be sure, theoretically and mathematically represented—are conceived very differently in contemporary Western science from the way they had been in the two thousand-year history of Western natural philosophy from Democritus to Newton. The emerging Western world view is nondualistic, nonreductive, integrative, systemic, holistic, and relational rather than substantive, and organic rather than mechanical. However, the conceptual foundations of contemporary science remain exceedingly abstract and remote from ordinary (cognitively conditioned Western) experience. Eastern traditions of thought, it has been suggested (perhaps most roundly by Fritjof Capra in the *Tao of Physics*), share certain untraditional insights into nature with contemporary Western science; but they express these insights, unlike contemporary Western science, in a rich vocabulary of imagery, symbol, and metaphor. If indeed there is a convergence of traditional Eastern philosophy and contemporary Western science toward a common understanding of the nature of nature, then the East may help the West express its own new natural philosophy (together with its new natural values) in a vocabulary more accessible to a lay public than the arid formulae typical of Western science. Eastern modes of thought, in short, may resonate with and thus complement and enrich the concepts of nature and values in nature recently emergent in the historical dialectic of Western ideas.

Accordingly, we begin this volume with several papers that attempt in very different ways and from very different points of view to characterize the recent developments in Western thought which bend its trajectory in an Eastern direction.

In "Pacific Shift," William Irwin Thompson provides a panoramic overview of the major episodes of Western geointellectual history from the Babylon-Memphis "Riverine" axis to the Tokyo-Los Angeles "Pacific-Aerospace" axis. We are presently experiencing, he suggests, the last of four major revolutions in Western cultural ecology. Thompson's popular discussion invokes Gregory Bateson's ecology of mind, Dōgen's Zen Buddhism, electronic technology, and Marshal McLuhan's theory of mass media to characterize the archetypal consciousness of the coming age of an integrated planetary culture.

Harold Morowitz's "Biology as a Cosmological Science" is included as a more focused and disciplined effort to explore the ecophilosophical ramifications of the contemporary ecological understanding of nature. Although Morowitz's central concern is with neither Asian traditions of

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thought nor environmental issues, his argument leads him to relate his primary theme to both.

J. Baird Callicott wrote "The Metaphysical Implications of Ecology" especially for this exchange of ideas among environmental philosophers and students of Asian thought. He attempts deliberately to articulate the new ecological paradigm in the context of the history of Western natural philosophy as a contemporary Western cognitive baseline to which the Asian intellectual traditions may be compared. From the point of view of ecology, the natural world is not, as represented in *classical* Western science, an aggregate of essentially independent entities. It is a relationally unified, differentiated, and integrated system. Human beings, moreover, are both emergent from and immersed in the ecosystem. To that extent, the world view of ecology is "holistic," and the man-world relationship "integrated" and "organic." Further, there is an immediately discernible complementarity between the scientific newcomer, ecology, and the fundamental metaphysical ideas of the most fundamental contemporary science, quantum physics. Both ecology and quantum theory gravitate toward the same holistic/integrated world view. A consolidated metaphysical consensus in the sciences, therefore, might be emerging that will occasion a broad revisioning of the human relationship with nature in Western thought.

Looking toward the Chinese tradition as a possible resource for compatible ideas and a more concrete vocabulary for expressing the nascent Western natural paradigm, Tu Wei-ming, in "The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature," authoritatively outlines the organic model of nature characteristic of classical Chinese philosophy. More particularly, he explicates the central and ubiquitous but elusive concept of *ch'i* (both "vital force" and "basic stuff") in traditional Chinese thought.

Graham Parkes, in "Natural Man in Nietzsche and Taoism," develops a comparison between Nietzsche and the classical Taoists that, in addition to drawing upon novel definitions of nature from the Chinese world, alerts the reader to conceptual resources for environmental philosophy within the Western tradition itself that have not been fully excavated. Parkes, more than the other contributors to this volume, attempts to clarify Eastern thought—Taoism in this case—by comparing it with what he perceives to be a similar expression in the West, namely, certain aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy.

David L. Hall, in "On Seeking a Change of Environment," suggests that environmental *philosophy* is a specific case in point of the broader crisis in Western modes of thought. The environmental crisis challenges rationality and philosophy itself as a rational enterprise. It calls into question at a very fundamental level our most familiar understandings of the nature of order and relatedness. As a possible resource for an alternative understanding of order, Hall looks to classical Taoism and its elaboration of an alternative

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interpretation of order which, while adumbrated in the Western tradition, has not been fully developed. This interpretation of order, by appeal to several of the central ideas that structure philosophical Taoism—such as *wu-wei, wu-chih, wu-yü,* and *tzu-jan*—articulates a modality of relatedness that has application in understanding particular people in their environments.

In "Putting the *Te* Back into Taoism," Roger T. Ames argues that the problems of environmental philosophy are so basic that the exploration of an alternative metaphysics or attendant ethical theory is not a sufficiently radical solution. Like Gerald James Larson and David L. Hall, Ames suggests that the assumptions entailed in a definition of systematic philosophy that gives us a tradition of metaphysics might themselves be the source of the current crisis. We might need to revise the responsibilities of the philosopher and think in terms of the "artist" rather than the "scientist of first principles." Taoism proceeds from art rather than science, and produces an *ars contextualis:* generalizations drawn from human experience in the most basic processes of making a person, making a community, and making a world. He then develops this idea of an "aesthetic cosmology" as a basis for redefining the nature of relatedness *(wu-wei)* obtaining between particular and world—between *te* and *tao*.

"Units of Change—Units of Value" is a tour de force by Robert C. Neville which seeks to outline a moral metaphysics by appropriating and developing insights from the Taoist tradition. The problem as he sees it is to conceive of value as an achievement of enduring individuals who at once express their own integrity while remaining internally related to ecological processes. There is considerable agreement among Neville, Hall, and Ames about the Taoist understanding of order and relatedness.

In "The Japanese Concept of 'Nature,' " Hubertus Tellenbach and Bin Kimura introduce the Japanese world view by outlining the various ways in which "nature" is expressed in the Japanese language. Tellenbach and Kimura contrast the emergent Japanese concept of nature with the nexus of connotations evoked by the Latin *"natura"* and cognates in Western languages.

Complementing William R. LaFleur's ground-breaking essay discussed above, David Edward Shaner, in "The Japanese Experience of Nature," corroborates his insights and gives Japanese philosophy its due by highlighting those themes and presuppositions in the classical tradition that have led up to the peculiarly Japanese valorization of nature.

The penultimate section of this anthology is devoted to Buddhism, the first Eastern tradition to attract the interest of Western environmental thinkers. Francis H. Cook's "The Jewel Net of Indra" unfolds the Hua Yen Buddhist understanding of reality. In a style reminiscent of Alan Watts, Cook appeals throughout his discussion to analogies and contrasts available in a

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Western vocabulary. There is much in the Hua Yen version of Buddhism that illumines the Taoist position on the nature of relatedness discussed in Part II, and registers the impact of indigenous Chinese ideas on the Indian import.

In "Environmental Problematics," Kenneth K. Inada focuses his discussion on Buddhist ontology as a basis for stimulating an alternative attitude to the world in which we live. He argues that what he would call the "parity principle of existence," originating with Buddha and elaborated by Nāgārjuna, grounds and permeates the central doctrines constituting the continuous core of Buddhism. Drawing an interesting parallel between the contemporary interface between Buddhism and Western culture on the one hand, and the introduction of Buddhism into East Asia on the other, Inada then posits this parity principle as a Buddhist resource for constructing an environmental ethics in the West. Perhaps most significantly, he is keen to underscore his conviction that the starting point for resolving environmental ills is the relationality of people and the natural environment.

In "Man and Nature: Toward a Middle Path of Survival," David J. Kalupahana analyzes the classical Buddhist conception of nature and human life that carefully avoids substantialist conceptions of opposites. On the basis of his interpretation of Buddhism as a radical empiricism, he argues that in the Buddha's articulation of "dependent arising" *pratītyasamutpāda),* his concern was with the fruit—the effect or consequence that defines a thing or event. Given the obvious similarities between this interpretation of the early Buddhist tradition and American Pragmatism, Kalupahana suggests that the Westerner might be better off looking to his own Pragmatic tradition for answers to the ecological crisis than demanding more exotic solutions from the East.

Turning finally from South Asian Buddhism to other indigenous traditions of Indian thought, Eliot Deutsch's "A Metaphysical Grounding for Natural Reverence: East-West" is an argument against the adequacy of addressing the ecological crisis by relying entirely upon utilitarian moral values in combination with scientific understanding of the way in which natural systems function. Beginning with a critique of Kant's treatment of the sublime, Deutsch looks to Indian philosophy for inspiration in developing his notion of "natural reverence."—He posits this creative and spiritual "being together with nature" as an alternative to the rhetoric of superiority, dominance, and separation.

Gerald James Larson, in his essay " 'Conceptual Resources' in South Asia for 'Environmental Ethics,' " begins by rehearsing the several metaethical positions that are conventionally regarded as constitutive of South Asian philosophy, and shows how they might serve as conceptual resources for environmental philosophy. He then takes umbrage at the "economic" metaphor of exploiting alternative traditions as "resources" for

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profiting our own philosophical marketplace, and, further, at the appeal to a "conceptual" resource that signals our own theoretical presuppositions and consequent definition of philosophy. For Larson (as for David Hall), given what we define as "philosophy," there is *no* philosophical answer to our environmental crisis. On the contrary, philosophy itself (in the contemporary Western sense of the word, at any rate) is very much a part of the problem. Beyond his critique, Larson then outlines contributions that comparative philosophies might make toward a revision of the *problem* by positing alternative metaphors, by undertaking more broadly based cross-cultural and interdisciplinary inquiries into the crisis, and finally, by pointing out that in reenvisioning the environmental crisis from a comparative stance we are attempting nothing less than to reshape the power relations that structure our world, both economically and politically.

It is hoped that this exercise in bringing together scholars and philosophers from different areas of expertise to address a common and vitally important question will foster a continuing dialogue that will in some measure have an impact on environmental quality and ecological integrity. While it is indeed naive to expect immediate resolutions to our current crisis from exotic quarters, the perspective of alternative cultural traditions does at least provide us with a fresh and, it is hoped, a stimulating vantage point from which critically to clarify the assumptions in the Western legacy that have generated both the technological achievements and the environmental problems so emblematic of Western civilization. Moreover, this same project makes available alternative clusters of important ideas that have defined the way in which Asian peoples live in the worlds that they have created for themselves, and provides Westerners with the opportunity to draw inspiration from them in defining a new ecological world view.

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