

## CHAPTER 9

# Gluttony, Arrogance, Greed, and Apathy: An Exploration of Environmental Vice

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Search on *vice* in the *Philosopher's Index* and not much comes up. Along with a lot of articles with “vice versa” in their abstracts there is one book, which is not about vice but about just political arrangements, and half a dozen articles, none well known, actually dealing with vice or particular vices.<sup>1</sup> Yet there are good reasons to explore vice. Dramatically speaking, vice is more interesting than virtue: think *Inferno* versus *Paradiso*; think Lucifer versus any other character, including God, in *Paradise Lost*. More important, the exploration of moral character has been one of the great steps forward in the “virtue ethics revival” of the past two decades, and considering vice in addition to virtue leads to a more complete treatment of moral character. How human beings fail can tell us much about ourselves. Perhaps nowhere are our failures more apparent than in our treatment of nature.

Public opinion polls repeatedly have shown that most Americans self-identify as “environmentalists” and support strong policies to protect the environment.<sup>2</sup> Yet these same people routinely behave in environmentally irresponsible ways. They plant thirsty bluegrass lawns and pour poisons on them to keep them free of dandelions. They buy gas-guzzling SUVs and drive them four blocks for a loaf of bread. We need to ask why, when it comes to the environment, our actions are so out of sync with our professed values, and we need to ask why in a way that leaves room for both political and personal answers.

To some degree our political, economic, and technological systems present us with environmentally unsustainable choices or strongly incline us in those directions. Our politicians fund highways, not bike paths or mass transit; corporate advertising stimulates environmentally costly desires, rather than encouraging contentment with what we have. Still, as consumers and citizens we usually have real choices, and we often choose the environmentally worse ones. No one forces us to buy big SUVs, build three-car garages, or let our bicycles rust. This chapter argues that we do these things because we are not the people we should be. Our poor environmental behavior stems, in part, from particular character defects or vices. Among the most important of these are gluttony, arrogance, greed, and apathy.<sup>3</sup>

To anticipate one criticism, exploring environmental vice at the individual level does not mean ignoring the larger, systemic causes of environmental degradation. Creating

sustainable societies will demand fundamental political change. Citizens across the globe should work for the passage and enforcement of strong antipollution laws, more national parks and wilderness areas, funding for mass transit and taxes on personal cars, and measures to limit human population growth. Above all, we should work to end the power of large corporations to set environmental policy, directly or through their political tools. At the same time, those of us who care about nature have a responsibility to choose wisely in our everyday environmental decisions. The failures of our neighbors, or our leaders, do not absolve us from our personal environmental responsibilities. The world is an unjust place, but we should live justly within it.

## Vice Defined

In common usage, a “vice” is a personal habit, a social practice, or an aspect of human character of which we disapprove.<sup>4</sup> We may speak of a person’s habitual lying and nose picking as vices, of more or less widely practiced activities such as smoking and gambling as vices, and of character traits such as greed and gluttony as vices. From here on in, when I speak of a vice, I mean it in the sense of a character trait.

In many cases, when people call a character trait a vice, there is nothing more in their minds than a picture of certain behaviors and a swirl of negative emotions. Thinking human beings aspire to something more than this. We believe that our vice judgments can be right or wrong—or at least more or less plausible. We try to correct or improve them. How?

Traditionally, Western philosophers have invoked the concept of *harm* in order to clarify and justify their judgments about vice.<sup>5</sup> A vice harms the vicious person, those around him, or both. So, for example, gluttony may undermine the health of the glutton or predispose him to pay insufficient attention to what is really important in life. Avarice may tempt us to cheat our business partners or neglect the claims of justice and charity. Sloth undermines our ability to pursue valuable projects that give our lives meaning and which benefit society.

Judgments about the vices are thus derivative: they rest on particular conceptions of the “goods” that make up a good human life and on the general presupposition that the flourishing of the individual and society are important.<sup>6</sup> Lists of key vices and specific conceptions of particular vices have changed, as notions of flourishing have changed. Aristotle imagined human flourishing to consist largely in fulfilling the roles of friend, householder, and citizen in a fourth-century Greek polis. His “vices of character” hinder our performance of these roles and cut us off from the benefits they provide.<sup>7</sup> For Thomas Aquinas, human happiness finds completion in knowledge of and right relationship to God, in this world and the next. Therefore, he defined the vices partly in terms of them separating human beings from God. Hence “worldliness” became a vice in the medieval tradition in a way that would not have made sense to the Greeks. For Montaigne and increasingly in the modern world, a sense of the preciousness and fragility of the individual self comes to the fore. Thus, cruelty emerges as a major vice (and diversity becomes a societal virtue).<sup>8</sup> Once again as in Greek times, a vice’s evil is described not in terms of dis-

obedience to God but in terms of how it undermines the happiness of individuals or their unlucky neighbors.

Throughout the evolution of the Western tradition and despite much variety, four commonalities tend to hold. First, selfishness and self-centeredness are condemned, whereas legitimate self-concern and self-development are praised. For Aristotle, “every virtue causes its possessors to be in a good state and to perform their functions well”; the vices undermine proper human functioning and well-being.<sup>9</sup> For Aquinas, too, the notion of virtue “implies the perfection of a power,” whereas vice leads to weakness, failure, and, in extreme cases, a sort of disintegration of the self.<sup>10</sup> Even Kant, despite his caution that love of “the dear self” lies at the root of immorality, also argues that we have a duty to develop our talents and capabilities.<sup>11</sup> Vices hinder this legitimate self-development.

Second, and as a consequence, the tradition insists that vice is both bad for individuals and harmful to their communities. Indeed, individual writers have sometimes gone to extreme lengths here, arguing, for example, that we never benefit ourselves when we wrong others.<sup>12</sup> More sensibly, the tradition has argued that moral shortcuts to happiness in fact *tend* to place us on winding roads toward unhappiness. Sharp dealing in business leads people to distrust us, and hence we do not prosper; avarice helps us amass great wealth at the expense of our fellow citizens, who then hate us or plot our demise. In this way, the tradition often appealed to a broadened self-interest in order to convince people to act morally: our happiness is bound up with the happiness of others. This approach has largely been abandoned by modern moral philosophy, which has focused on direct appeals to altruism.

Third, the tradition sees vice as contradicting and eventually undermining reason, hence destroying our ability to understand our proper place in the world and act morally. Aristotle expresses this in his distinction between incontinence (the tendency to pursue pleasure even when we know it is wrong to do so) and the full-blown vice of intemperance (where the continued pursuit of illicit pleasure has so clouded our judgment that we no longer recognize right from wrong).<sup>13</sup> The vices are habits of thought and action. Left unchecked, they tend to cloud reason, the voice of both conscience and prudence.

Fourth, and partly as a consequence of this diminished rationality, the tradition sees vice as cutting us off from reality or at least from what is most important in life. This is most obvious in the late ancient and medieval periods; for Augustine and Aquinas, sin and vice cut us off from God, the highest reality.<sup>14</sup> But we also see this notion at work in Aristotle, where intemperance leads people to pursue gross physical pleasures at the expense of activities such as science and contemplation that connect us to higher things.<sup>15</sup> We see it in early modern times in Montaigne, where the vice of certainty blocks sustained inquiry into existence, and intolerance blinds us to our common humanity and a true understanding of the human condition.<sup>16</sup>

What holds these four aspects of vice together is that they all involve harm: to ourselves, to those around us, or to both. What constitutes harm, particularly beyond a core of obviousness, has varied widely in the tradition, along with the particular conceptions of human nature and the ultimate commitments held by philosophers. And until recently, philosophers have paid scant attention to human harms to the environment—or to the potential for those harms to rebound and harm us in turn.

## Vice and Environmental Harm

Take a look at the arguments for environmental protection in op-ed pieces in the newspapers, in articles in *Sierra* or *Audubon* magazines, or in the classic works of Aldo Leopold or Rachel Carson.<sup>17</sup> Sometimes environmentalists appeal to human altruism. Air pollution from Midwestern power plants is killing trees and acidifying lakes in the Appalachian Mountains; a proposed dam out West will drown a river and perhaps extinguish a rare fish species. This harm to nature is, or would be, wrong, based on nature's intrinsic worth—a worth that may be expressed more in aesthetic or spiritual terms than directly in what philosophers recognize as ethical terms. As we are powerful, these arguments assert, so we should be just and merciful.

At least as often, environmentalists' arguments appeal to human self-interest. We should rein in water and air pollution because they harm human health. We should preserve an undeveloped tract of prairie, an unroaded forest, a wild and undammed river, because opportunities to know and appreciate nature will disappear if we do not do so. Scientists and artists will lose chances to study and appreciate wild nature; hunters, fishermen, and backpackers will lose recreational opportunities. We might be able to live without these activities, but at least some of us would not be able to live well or live the way we want to live.<sup>18</sup>

Both sorts of arguments are ubiquitous in the environmental literature. Both can be effective. One need not preclude the other. The first sort of argument finds direct (or intrinsic) value in nature's flourishing; the second sees human flourishing as dependent on nature's flourishing, which thus has derivative (or instrumental) value. In either case, harms to nature are ethically important. During the past thirty years, most environmental philosophers have focused on making the case for altruism, refining and developing the first sort of argument. Recently some philosophers have focused on refining and justifying the second sort of approach, arguing that we will be better and happier people if we appreciate and protect nature.<sup>19</sup>

The key idea behind such an *environmental virtue ethics* is that we cannot harm nature without harming ourselves. A basic human flourishing depends on a healthy environment (lead exposure can damage children's brains, leading to lower intelligence, mental retardation, and death, at progressively higher levels of exposure). Full human flourishing depends on a varied and stimulating environment, including accessible wild areas that preserve the native flora and fauna (children who grow up without chances to experience wild nature miss opportunities to appreciate beauty, understand human history and prehistory, and reflect on their place in the world). The complementary insight is that human flourishing does *not* depend on high levels of material consumption. In fact, when the acquisition of material possessions leads us to ignore higher pursuits, or when society's overconsumption undermines nature's health and integrity, our own lives suffer.

In her book *Dirty Virtues*, Louke van Wensveen shows that environmentalists often assert that certain vices are at the base of environmentally harmful behavior.<sup>20</sup> A *greedy* factory owner dumps untreated pollutants into a stream, even though she knows that it may harm fish in the stream or people who eat the fish. *Gluttonous* Americans

consume too much food, energy, or raw materials; thus, we take more than we need from the Earth. To justify such vice judgments, environmental philosophers must provide convincing accounts of the motivations behind antienvironmental behavior. And they must show harm.

Consider how Aristotle discusses vice. In the *Ethics*, certain persistent and cohesive aspects of human personality are defined as character traits, and certain character traits are judged vices because they harm vicious individuals and those around them. Because for Aristotle a human being can only flourish in a polis and because one's happiness cannot be completely divorced from that of one's family, friends, and descendants, even the vices that seem primarily to harm others have a potentially self-destructive aspect. There are a number of well-worn paths by which other-directed harms may harm a selfish person, including poisoning his relationships with others and undermining the social cohesion on which a functioning polis depends. Ultimately, self-harms and other-directed harms cannot be completely separated.

The way to justify environmentalists' vice talk is similar. We need to show how environmental vices—which may be largely the same as the traditional vices or may include many new ones—harm the vicious person directly. We need to show how they harm those around him and future generations, people about whom he should care (for one thing, the selfish person's happiness is not so easily separated from theirs as he thinks). We must also show that there is another legitimate circle of moral concern, not recognized by Aristotle or the philosophical tradition, pleaded for in Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* and by legions of environmentalists since then: the wider circle of nonhuman nature. Harm within this circle is bad in itself, for it is real harm to entities that can flourish and are wonderful when they do flourish. And such harm rebounds, harming human communities and (sometimes) the individuals inflicting the environmental harms. Aristotle places us in a social environment and defines human flourishing accordingly. The fact that we also live in physical environments shows the need for this more encompassing view of human flourishing and moral concern.<sup>21</sup>

To anticipate another criticism, some philosophers will say that only when we show how vices harm vicious persons themselves have we given the strongest possible argument for their viciousness. Although I do think that showing the connection between vice and self-harm is one benefit of a virtue ethics approach, I see no reason to limit our conception of harm to self-harm. Self-concern and concern for others are both legitimate and necessary within ethics. There is something wrong with a person who brings all of her actions to the test of her own happiness, even when they obviously affect others. Similarly, there is something wrong with ethical philosophies that do so. An environmental virtue ethics may give us good self-interested reasons to rein in our environmental vices; it does not seek to reduce all vice to self-interest.

On the other hand, I see nothing wrong with curbing our vices because we believe that it is in our self-interest to do so. My colleague Holmes Rolston is worried that you will treat nature right for the wrong reasons.<sup>22</sup> I am more worried that you will not treat nature right at all, and I believe that any reason that convinces you to treat nature more gently is a good reason. Furthermore, a better understanding of our self-interest should lead to less materialistic lifestyles and more time exploring nature. Rolston's arguments for nature's intrinsic value deserve to prevail; they are more likely to

prevail among people who have had experiences that help them understand and appreciate them.

In the end, as in interpersonal ethics, a complete environmental ethics will have to make a place for both altruism and enlightened self-interest. In truth we are all self-interested, although not exclusively so. In truth, our flourishing and nature's flourishing are intertwined. In what follows, I discuss four key environmental vices: gluttony, arrogance, greed, and apathy.<sup>23</sup> If I can show how these vices lead to harm, that will be all the justification you should need that they are worth reforming (certainly it is all the justification you will ever be able to get). The greater the harm—to oneself, to others, to nature, or to all three—the greater the incentive to reform.

## Gluttony

“Gluttony: excess in eating and drinking” says my *American Heritage Dictionary*; the *Oxford English Dictionary* adds that the word may also refer to an excessive *desire* for food and drink and by a natural extension to many kinds of overindulgence (I may be a glutton for punishment, learning, or cheap romance novels). Despite the word's pejorative connotations, we tend to take a relatively benign view of this vice today. Few moralists treat overeating as a serious personal failing, on a par with such qualities as selfishness or cruelty. Earlier thinkers took gluttony more seriously. Aristotle devoted extensive attention to intemperance, defined as the vice regarding the pleasures of touch: primarily food, drink, and sex. Saint Paul inveighed against those “whose God is their belly.” Not only was *gula* considered one of the seven deadly sins, but early church thinkers often put it at the head of the list.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps the classic picture of the glutton is a man at table, stuffing in food with both hands, sauces dribbling down his chins, belly pushing back the table as he occasionally lurches into it. Unconcerned with quality, he is going for quantity. He does not talk to his dinner companions, even to comment on the food. He is all desire; there is something brutal and inhuman about him. Another picture of gluttony involves two women sitting in a fancy restaurant, simpering over the tomato bisque. One compares it with the soup she had at another restaurant three weeks ago; the other describes a version she made from a recipe taken from *Gourmet* magazine. We might call these women epicures rather than gluttons, and many would see nothing wrong with their behavior. Gregory the Great, who helped define the seven deadly sins for the medieval tradition, took a sterner and more encompassing view: “In another manner are distinguished the kinds of gluttony, according to Saint Gregory. The first is, eating before it is time to eat. The second is when a man gets himself too delicate food or drink. The third is when men eat too much, and beyond measure. The fourth is fastidiousness, with great attention paid to the preparation and dressing of food. The fifth is to eat too greedily. These are the five fingers of the Devil's hand wherewith he draws folk into sin.”<sup>25</sup> Monkish quibbling? Or a recognition that beyond the health harms of gross gluttony, gourmandizing wastes our time and causes us to pay less attention to what is truly important? It depends on your view of human flourishing and the purpose of life.

Neither of these pictures is particularly appealing, yet our disapproval could be merely aesthetic. To show why gluttony is *morally* wrong, we must discuss the harms it generates. In the case of gluttonous eating, the most obvious harms fall on the glutton himself. Excessive eating leads to obesity, and the health dangers of obesity are well documented in the scientific literature. Of the ten leading causes of death in America, four show positive correlation to being overweight or the diet and activity patterns that lead to being overweight.<sup>26</sup> These include the three leading proximate causes of death—heart disease, cancer, and cerebrovascular disease (stroke)—as well as diabetes mellitus, the seventh leading cause. In addition to direct harms to health, obesity decreases happiness and well-being in less obvious ways that are harder to measure.<sup>27</sup> Overweight people tend to feel more lethargic. Obese individuals participate less often in many enjoyable physical activities, from sports to sex (this is a positive feedback problem: less physical activity leads to less energy, leading to less physical activity, etc.). The surgeon general has concluded that obesity is a major health problem in the United States.<sup>28</sup>

With fine gluttony, the argument that it harms the glutton is less clear. Gourmands may find a lot of pleasure savoring the sauces and comparing the wines. Gregory did not have to worry about whether his monks were enjoying themselves, but for most of us today pleasure is at least part of what we want out of life. Even from a hedonistic perspective, however, we may wonder whether developing a taste for finer things will lead to happiness in the long run. If we are no longer able to enjoy simple meals, or forget Seneca's words that "hunger is the best spice," or pay more attention to how our cooking turned out than to the friends around our table, or eat such rich foods that we get gout, the gourmet life may lead away from happiness. Too, our time is limited. Attention to trivia can lead us to neglect more important things.

So gluttony takes a direct toll on gluttons, but it also has environmental costs. In America, 1,265 species are listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act: 519 animals and 746 plants.<sup>29</sup> The causes of extinction are complex, but scientists generally agree that habitat loss is primary. A comprehensive study has found habitat degradation/loss implicated as a cause for 85 percent of threatened and endangered species in the United States.<sup>30</sup> Crucially, in analyzing the causes of habitat loss, the study identifies agriculture (principally row cropping) as the leader, affecting fully 38 percent of all endangered species. Livestock grazing is also important, affecting 22 percent. In addition, agriculture is an important contributor to several other major causes of endangerment, including water developments such as reservoirs and dams (affecting 30 percent of species) and pollutants (20 percent).<sup>31</sup>

Now just as food consumption drives agricultural production, so food *over*consumption fuels a more environmentally harmful and intensive agriculture. A recent, comprehensive study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Unit estimated that in 2000, Americans consumed an average of 2,800 calories per day, 25 percent more than the 2,200 calories needed to supply their nutritional and energy needs.<sup>32</sup> This translates directly into increased agricultural demand. All else being equal, Americans' habit of consuming approximately 25 percent more calories than necessary increases the amount of land needed to grow crops and graze animals by 25 percent. It increases the amount of pollutants dumped onto agricultural lands and running off into

rivers and streams by 25 percent.<sup>33</sup> Excess food consumption harms Americans' health; if we take *ecosystem* health to include clean rivers and streams and robust populations of our native flora and fauna, we must conclude that excess food consumption also harms environmental health.

Because ecosystem health and human health are connected, a complete account of the harms of gluttony must extend further. Unhealthy ecosystems lead to direct human harms, for example, when people sicken from the air or water pollution generated by huge livestock confinement facilities. Ecosystem sickness also leads to intellectual and spiritual losses, as a dull and lifeless agricultural landscape becomes a bore to live and work in. Even if this landscape remains productive of agricultural products, it may no longer be productive of happy and healthy human beings.<sup>34</sup> In Illinois only one-ten thousandth of the original 37 million acres of tall-grass prairie remains: 3,500 acres occurring in small, isolated conservation areas.<sup>35</sup> Living in a monotonous sea of corn and soybeans has probably taken a toll on the minds of Illinois farmers.

Gluttony reminds us that the vices, although often selfish, harm both ourselves and others. Food overconsumption harms our health and lowers life expectancy, but it also harms nature. These harms to nature rebound, in turn, and cause new kinds of harm to human and nonhuman beings. So that in the end, it becomes difficult to separate harms to self and harms to others, harms to people and harms to nature. Our flourishing is tied up with the flourishing of others.

On the other hand, the example of gluttony reminds us that the calculus of harms does not always come out as neatly as moralists want it to. For the past thirty years, books like Frances Moore Lappé's *Diet for a Small Planet* have argued that overeating in the wealthy nations leads to Third World hunger.<sup>36</sup> The argument has developed momentum by virtue of endless repetition, but empirical studies show that the connection does not hold. Work by Amartya Sen and others suggests instead that political and economic factors within Third World countries are most important in causing famines and malnutrition, particularly civil war, indifferent governments, and terrible poverty.<sup>37</sup> This does not mean that rich, fat Americans should not do more to help the world's poor; it means that eating less food is unlikely to help feed them. However, eating less *will* lessen our agricultural footprint, helping all those other species that compete with us for habitat and resources. Gluttony's other-directed harms fall primarily on nonhuman others.

Again, the moralist may want to say that gluttony, like all vices, inevitably harms the glutton herself. But gluttony shows us that we may refine our vices, so as to direct more of their harm—perhaps *all* of their harm—toward others. I may dine out three times a week in spectacular restaurants, eating and drinking my way through my children's inheritance—without neglecting to hit the gym the next day, thus staying quite healthy. I may cook spectacular meals for myself and my friends, thoroughly enjoy both, and maximize my own pleasure—while greatly increasing my environmental harms. On average, it takes one cup of oil to grow, harvest, store, ship, and sell each cup of food (dry weight) consumed by Americans. Fine gluttony greatly increases this aspect of our agricultural footprint, as “the market” flies fish from New Zealand to Denver or strawberries from Chile to New York in January. This causes *us* no harm; furthermore, we may still get out and enjoy nature, perhaps even flying to New



Zealand or Chile to hike and ski. Still, a more comprehensive and accurate account of harm will teach us that we should limit our agricultural footprint and accommodate ourselves more to locally available foods. All important, unnecessary harm is wrong. Although it is possible to live a life in which we largely externalize the costs of our gluttony, we should not do so.

Virtue ethicists emphasize the childishness of gluttony. Aristotle believed that there is something crude and undeveloped in a person who seeks all happiness in the simplest ways.<sup>38</sup> “The gross feeder is a man in the larva state,” wrote Henry Thoreau, “and there are whole nations in that condition, nations without fancy or imagination, whose vast abdomens betray them.”<sup>39</sup> Similarly, virtue ethicists assert that self-development and lasting satisfaction come not through gluttony but through pursuing more adult pleasures and activities. “When someone lacks understanding,” wrote Aristotle, “his desire for the pleasant is insatiable and seeks indiscriminate satisfaction.”<sup>40</sup> In contrast, the pleasures of love and friendship, aesthetic appreciation and the pursuit of knowledge, will not pale or lead us to behave unjustly.

Traditionally, the virtue opposed to gluttony was *temperance* or moderate use. We may also speak of *gratitude* as a complementary virtue. Consider an American Thanksgiving. Originally it was a day set aside to thank the Lord for physical and spiritual sustenance, with roots in Indian green corn ceremonies with similar motivations. Now Thanksgiving is often just another excuse for Americans to pig out. The next day, we go shopping. I do not think that the answer to this is to fast on Thanksgiving but, rather, to give thanks, thoughtfully and sincerely. With gratitude will come understanding and acceptance of our environmental responsibilities.

## Arrogance

With no other virtue/vice complex have Western attitudes varied so much as with pride, humility, and arrogance. The Sermon on the Mount exhorts us to live lives of meekness and humility. For Christians pride is a vice, because human beings are infinitely inferior to God and essentially equal to one another. We often go wrong in our social dealings precisely through a desire to assert our superiority over others. Contrarily, the ancient pagans tended to view pride as a necessary part of a good life. Because self-knowledge and striving to live well helped define the good life, if one lived well, one knew it and commended oneself for it. Humility was at best a just judgment of one's own mediocrity and at worst a failure to understand true human excellence and whether one had achieved it.<sup>41</sup>

We are heirs to this complex heritage. On the one hand, we condemn those who lord it over others. We dislike braggarts and prefer heroes who credit others for their successes or who downplay them. On the other hand, we scoff at obsequious people. We encourage our children to take pride in their schoolwork and other efforts and are proud of their achievements.

If we look to the harm criterion, I believe we will make a place for a proper pride as a virtue, with obsequiousness as one vice and arrogance as another. As Kant, our greatest exponent of egalitarian morality, puts it, we have no right to disrespect humanity in our

own person; nor should we encourage others to do so through excessive meekness. Furthermore, part of our legitimate motivation for treating others morally is a sense that we exalt our own humanity in the process.<sup>42</sup> Still, arrogance—an overvaluation of ourselves and an undervaluation of others—remains a vice. The human harms that arrogance leads to are obvious, as we selfishly place our own interests far ahead of other people's.

Environmentalists and environmental philosophers see a similar arrogance in much of our treatment of nature. "Christian as well as non-Christian ecowriters warn against the prideful attitude that makes us humans think we are number one in the universe," Louke van Wensveen writes, "that we are . . . 'central and in control.'" She notes that "the Latin term for pride, *superbia*, translates the Greek *huperbios*, which means 'above life,'" and "the Latin term *humilitas* literally suggests closeness to 'humus,' i.e., 'soil' or 'ground.'"<sup>43</sup> An early attempt to articulate a better environmental ethics was titled "the arrogance of humanism."<sup>44</sup> Today philosophers speak of the arrogance of "anthropocentrism," the vain and selfish view that human beings alone are worthy of respect, whereas everything else in the world, including several million other species of life, only has value if it is useful to humans.

Arrogant indifference to nature and arrogant indifference to people often go together. For four decades, Chevron and Shell have been drilling for oil in the Niger Delta, making billions of dollars for their companies, their shareholders, and Nigeria's successive military and civilian dictators. Little of this wealth has made its way into the hands of the delta's inhabitants, who have had to bear the brunt of the environmental harms of oil drilling. These have included poisoned water and diminished fisheries, leading to sickness and hunger for many inhabitants. Efforts to protect the environment and other local interests have been brutally suppressed. Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other leaders of the Ogoni people were executed following a show trial in 1995. Since then other activists have been jailed and tortured, as documented in a 200-page report from Human Rights Watch.<sup>45</sup>

In May 1998, more than 100 activists from the Ilaje people occupied a Chevron drilling platform and service barge in an effort to force the company's management to negotiate with them. Activists' demands included clean drinking water, electricity, environmental reparations for nearby villages, and rebuilding of eroding riverbanks. With work on the barge stopped, Chevron was losing money. After four days and while the activists believed they were still in negotiations, Chevron flew in members of the Nigerian military, who opened fire on the unarmed occupiers, shooting two of them dead. The rest were taken off to prison and tortured.<sup>46</sup>

The Nigerian armed forces were brought in on Chevron contractors' helicopters and given bonus pay by the contractor; the decision to bring them in was made by Chevron management. Nigeria's armed forces and police are notorious for human rights abuses. By bringing in the military and sending the activists off to jail, oil company managers knew what they were buying.

Bola Oyinbo, one of eleven protesters arrested, reported being handcuffed and hung from a ceiling hook for five hours, in an effort to extract a confession of piracy and destruction of property. The radio program *Democracy Now* asked Bill Spencer, a Chevron contractor in charge of servicing the barge, what he thought of the torture endured by Oyinbo and others:

*Spencer:* I don't think anybody here was under the impression that when you go to jail in Nigeria, it's pleasant.

*Q:* Was there concern about the young people who were held in detention. Was there any follow up?

*A:* By me? Not at all. No.

*Q:* Were you concerned about them in detention?

*A:* I was more concerned about 200 people who work for me. I could care less about the people from the village, quite frankly.

*Q:* Once your people were safe . . .

*A:* Did I personally have any concern for them, not one little bit. No.

The arrogance here is blatant. With this view of the Niger Delta's inhabitants, it is hard to imagine Spencer or the other oil men working there having much concern for the delta's fisheries or wildlife. Indeed, coming to Nigeria seems to provide them with a well-paid moral holiday. As Spencer puts it: "I'm not leading a moral campaign. We're just here to work. Strictly commercial venture. Not a political one."

But Chevron's and Shell's activities have enormous political consequences. Oil provides the government with 80 percent of its revenues. That money helped prop up military dictatorships for more than thirty years. The oil companies got what they wanted: zero accountability for the environmental and human harms caused by their activities, hence maximum profits. Only the Nigerian people suffered. Here is Bill Spencer again, on that subject:

*Democracy Now:* Do you have any reservation about working with those forces [Nigerian armed forces and police] knowing or acknowledging they can in fact be ruthless?

*Spencer:* No, I don't know. Life is tough here. And people, you often hear it said, that life is cheap here. I guess it is. It's looked at a little differently. I think that that's something that doesn't happen in our society. Life is a little more maybe precious or something. I think here or any of these developing countries it tends to be a little cheaper.

It is fascinating to see how arrogance can dim a man's sense of moral responsibility. This is how it *is* here, Spencer says, as if he and the oil companies are not helping to create the conditions in Nigeria from which they profit. But read the words of the activists describing what they hope to achieve: clean water, secure food, education for their children, and some say in how they are governed and how their environment is managed. *They* seem to think that their lives and the lives of their children are precious. Now we can begin to understand why Chevron managers prefer to send in the armed forces to kill these people and crush their spirit, rather than meet with them. If they heard them speak and looked them in the eyes, they would be forced to see them as human beings. That might get in the way of maximizing profits.

Examples of corporate arrogance are legion; arrogant environmental destruction by individuals is just as common. A good example in the United States is off-road vehicle

(ORV) use. Over the past three decades, ORVs have created major, well-documented harms to our public lands.<sup>47</sup> Four-wheelers have carved tens of thousands of miles of illegal roads onto our national forests, degrading wildlife habitat and causing erosion. Snowmobiles in Yellowstone National Park stampede wildlife and cause such serious air pollution that entrance guards have been forced to wear respirators. Jet skis dump up to one-quarter of their oil and gas directly into lakes and rivers, polluting them. While they trash nature, ORV users ruin the experience of other recreationists—who happen to be the vast majority of visitors to national parks and national forests.

The arrogance of many ORV users is palpable. Magazines such as *Petersen's 4-Wheel & Off-Road* or *4-Wheel Drive and Sport Utility Magazine* are filled with macho posturing. “Bud Vandermel chose to display some attitude coupled with Chevy prowess when building his ’78 Scottsdale off-roader,” begins a typical article: “Wanting to run with the big trucks, or wanting them to follow, Bud’s off-road machine needed to be tall, and it needed to display dominance. To get the altitude, Bud installed 8-inch Skyjacker Softride leaf springs.”<sup>48</sup> When Bud revs up his truck and heads into the backcountry, crashing through small trees and leaving tire tracks in the streams are part of the experience. At a minimum, ORVers do not care about their effects on the places they are tearing up. For some of them, harming nature is part of the fun.

These arrogant practices showcase important aspects of the vices. First, they tend to make us *selfish*. The ORV magazines rarely mention the obvious environmental harms ORVs cause or how annoying they are to other public lands users. In an extensive review, the few mentions I found of environmental harms all focused on the “environmental extremists” or “eco-wackos” complaining about them. Second, as Aristotle emphasizes, the vices *corrupt our reasoning abilities*.<sup>49</sup> In eight years teaching environmental ethics, I have read term papers on most major environmental issues, and some of the most illogical, rhetorically overblown, and willfully confused ones have been discussions of the ethics of ORV use by ORV enthusiasts. Third, vices come from and lead to *crude views of the good life* and make it hard to appreciate better ones. In discussing the experience of off-roading the emphasis is on fun, excitement, “the adrenaline rush.” That is what people want—and it has nothing to do with understanding or appreciating nature. Indeed, it makes it harder for ORVers or anyone else to do so.

Vice cuts us off from reality, according to Thomas Aquinas. The arrogance of anthropocentrism cuts people off from the reality of nature. ORV users arrogantly destroy the wild nature that others want to appreciate and whiz through it so fast that they learn nothing about it themselves. In the Niger Delta, Chevron and Shell are arrogantly displacing traditional ways of life based on small-scale agriculture and sustainable fishing. Anthropocentrism as an intellectual outlook also cuts us off from reality, as we ignore nature’s stories and tell truncated and false stories about ourselves.<sup>50</sup>

In the pursuit of virtue, *practices and laws* are crucial. ORV use is a good example of a practice that encourages anthropocentrism. If we want to live environmentally responsible lives, we will have to cultivate practices that lock in habits and ways of looking at the world that are nonanthropocentric. As Aristotle says, we learn to act morally by instilling proper habits, not by arguments. Activities such as bird-watching, trout fishing, wildlife photography, and backcountry camping instruct us in nature’s diver-

sity and beauty each time we engage in them. They teach us nature's stories, sharpening our senses and quieting our minds enough to appreciate them.<sup>51</sup> We should encourage our children in these practices—and we should keep them from engaging in what might seem like harmless fun on ORVs.<sup>52</sup>

For the irredeemably arrogant, of course, we need laws. Current efforts in the United States to replace strong environmental laws with voluntary environmental protection must be exposed and defeated. And as Peter Singer has recently argued, we must create an international legal order in which Chevron, Shell, and other corporations are held accountable for encouraging human rights abuses and propping up tyrannical regimes that abuse their own people.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, we must develop strong, binding international agreements to halt global warming, preserve endangered species and ecosystems, and reverse human population growth. Nothing less than this will succeed in preserving the flourishing natural world that an environmental virtue ethics insists is the prerequisite for human flourishing.

We cannot be good people without appreciating and developing those aspects of our humanity that distinguish us from the rest of nature: our abstract reason, our complex culture. Yet exalting our humanity does not mean focusing exclusively on these differences or setting ourselves up as tyrants over the rest of creation. Rather, the more we preserve and appreciate nature's beauty, the more we will flourish ourselves. The greater our moral restraint, the more a proper human pride will be justified.<sup>54</sup>

## Greed

Greed is “an excessive desire to acquire or possess more than what one needs or deserves, especially with respect to material wealth.”<sup>55</sup> It is natural to enjoy material possessions; it is necessary, in modern society, to deal with money. But the desire for wealth may prove excessive for several reasons. It may leave us perpetually unsatisfied; as one philosopher puts it, greed is “an insatiable longing” that actual possession cannot slake.<sup>56</sup> The greedy person is often portrayed as rich. He has more than most people, more, perhaps, than he knows what to do with. Still, it is not enough. Greed may also lead us to neglect other, more important aspects of life. Another picture of greed is the miser counting gold pieces, alone in a windowless room, without friends, without interest in the world outside. The clink, clink, clink of each coin as it hits the pile echoes hollowly down the empty halls.

These are just images, of course, proving nothing. To show greed's viciousness, we must explore how too great an emphasis on money or possessions leads to harm. We must show, too, that there are limits to what we need, deserve, or really can use here.

Greed is perhaps the most selfish-making vice; in its grip we become incapable of generosity and immune to the demands of justice. When Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick broke the Homestead steelworkers strike in 1892, they were among the wealthiest men in America, but they had no intention of sharing any more of that wealth with their workers than they could possibly avoid. No claims of justice, no consideration of the good uses their workers could put that money to or the sheer pointlessness of *them* amassing any more wealth, made any impression.

Cases such as Homestead or the oil companies' injustices in Nigeria show how greed can lead to great injustice. But even everyday, small-scale greed can lead to important harms, accentuating differences in wealth, fueling envy in the poor and vanity in the rich, and undermining the social bonds necessary for a happy society. Christians have criticized avarice above all for these social harms. "Now shall you understand that the relief for avarice is mercy and pity in large doses," Chaucer's Parson says: "Certainly, the avaricious man shows no pity nor any mercy to the needy man; for he delights in keeping his treasure and not in the rescuing or relieving of his fellow Christian."<sup>57</sup> Aquinas condemned the hoarding of unnecessary possessions in clear terms, stating that "whatever a man has in superabundance is owed, of natural right, to the poor for their sustenance."<sup>58</sup> To grasp possessions beyond this limit is unjust and idolatrous: the worship of Mammon.

To the traditionally recognized social harms of greed, environmentalists add harms to nature. Greed leads to environmental harms in three ways. First, when profit is placed over all other goals, greed leads businesspeople to break environmental laws or do the minimum necessary to comply with them. For example, a factory hog farm might be highly profitable; still, its owner wants more money. He doubles his hog sheds, increasing the stink breathed by the neighbors and his poorly paid workers. The resultant increase in manure overstresses his waste lagoons, causing overflows into a nearby river. This kills fish and other wildlife, drives anglers and canoers from the river, and decreases property values for dozens of his neighbors. Unfortunately, it is easy to find real examples where businesspeople break or bend environmental laws in pursuit of profit.<sup>59</sup>

Second, greed undermines the democratic political process. In his final year as CEO of Halliburton, an oilfield services and construction firm, Dick Cheney earned \$26.4 million in compensation.<sup>60</sup> Upon taking office as U.S. vice president a year later, Cheney's main job was to chair a task force charged with setting U.S. energy policy. Its recommendations, developed in meetings closed to the public but open to friends and colleagues from the energy industries, read like a wish list from those same industries, including rollbacks of environmental regulations and tens of billions of dollars in unnecessary subsidies for new energy development. In the Bush administration, in one governmental department after another, industry lobbyists and managers are "regulating" their own industries, lining their friends' pockets just as their own pockets will be lined when they return to private life. In Cheney's case he does not even have to wait, for he continues to receive compensation from Halliburton while serving as vice president.<sup>61</sup> These are clear cases of greed trumping the public interest.

Third, greed leads to environmental harms by helping drive overconsumption among the general populace. Americans use vastly more oil, coal, water, metals, and other resources than our grandparents did, largely because we purchase lots of unnecessary things. Four and five year olds badger their parents for the latest plastic action figures and video games, which soon enough are dispatched to overflowing landfills. Middle-aged men with flagging libidos acquire mysterious desires for large, powerful cars—no matter that they already own cars or that the new Porsche or Hummer gets one-third the gas mileage and generates three times the CO<sub>2</sub> of the family's Taurus. All this overconsumption makes a pitiful enough spectacle, but the more important point is that it leads to great harms to nature. Human beings compete with millions of other

species for the habitat and resources needed to survive. Like Carnegie and Frick 100 years ago we are willing to destroy other lives or monopolize the resources needed to preserve them for the most trivial reasons. At a minimum, justice would seem to demand that we avoid consumption that does *nothing* to further our happiness. But greed leads us on to ever more consumption.

In these ways, greed harms nature. But it also harms greedy people themselves. In the first place, there is no strong connection between increased wealth and happiness. Sages and philosophers have taught that “money can’t buy happiness” for millennia—now science is starting to confirm it. Numerous studies in America have shown that beyond the poorest 10 to 15 percent of the population, there is no statistically significant correlation between wealth and subjective or objective measures of happiness.<sup>62</sup> You are no more likely to be happy earning \$4,000,000 per year than \$40,000. The factors that correlate most strongly with happiness are *security* of income—having some assurance that you and your family will have enough—and getting along well with your fellow workers and your spouse. But having some assurance that one has enough depends on being able to *recognize* that one has enough. Greedy people find this hard to do. Furthermore, studies have shown that people with more materialistic outlooks on life tend to have poor interpersonal relationships.<sup>63</sup> So the most proven, effective means to happiness tend to be beyond the reach of greedy people—no matter how wealthy they are.

Beyond the fact that material possessions are largely irrelevant to happiness, psychological studies show that a materialistic *outlook* on life tends to undermine happiness. One group of psychologists report:

A growing body of research demonstrates that people who strongly orient toward values such as money, possessions, image, and status report lower subjective well-being. For example, [several studies] have shown that when people rate the relative importance of extrinsic, materialistic values as high in comparison to other pursuits (e.g., self-acceptance, affiliation, community feeling), lower quality of life is also reported. Late adolescents with a strong materialistic value orientation report lower self-actualization and vitality, as well as more depression and anxiety.<sup>64</sup>

Other studies have replicated these findings with college students and older adults.

Why are materialists less satisfied with life? One review article has considered various hypotheses and concluded that there is good evidence for three of them. First, materialists have poorer social lives, thus undermining their subjective well-being (but whether materialism is cause or effect remains unclear; unhappy people may grasp at materialistic values like straws). Second, it appears that “working toward material goals is less rewarding in the moment than working toward other goals.” Anyone who has worked jobs that were enjoyable and challenging and jobs that were not knows this already. Third, the evidence suggests that the gap between what people have and what they want is more pronounced in the material realm than in other areas of life; hence focusing on material goals fosters dissatisfaction. It leads to a race to get and spend that leaves many people feeling hurried and harassed.<sup>65</sup>

Philosophers, following Thomas Aquinas, will add that materialism pales because it involves turning away from real goods to apparent goods.<sup>66</sup> When we are greedy, we

neglect the real goods of activities for mere passive possession (the bird-watcher with top-of-the-line Zeiss binoculars who rarely gets up to hear the dawn chorus, the spoiled teenager with a fifteen-piece drum kit sitting unused in the basement). We reject the real goods of relationships for the apparent goods of triumphing over others (the CEO who cheats his employees out of their expected pension benefits and trades in his wife for a younger model). We neglect fulfilling, socially useful work for the trappings of status or success (the millionaire plastic surgeon specializing in boob jobs versus the humble pediatrician who volunteers at a free clinic twice a month).

In an excellent study of the seven deadly sins, Henry Fairlie notes that different societies predispose their members to different vices.<sup>67</sup> In America, we are raised to be greedy. Never before has a nation been so relentlessly bombarded by advertising; the average American child sees hundreds of thousands of television commercials by the time he or she reaches adulthood. Advertising emphasizes consumption as the primary means to happiness and works by increasing our dissatisfaction with life. As one marketer puts it: "Advertising at its best is making people feel that without their product, you're a loser. Kids are very sensitive to that. . . . You open up emotional vulnerabilities, and it's very easy to do with kids because they're the most emotionally vulnerable."<sup>68</sup>

This education in greed does not stop with childhood. Our colleges and universities teach applied avarice in their economics classes and business schools. At election time, candidates work to convince us that they can increase economic growth, without asking whether that growth will make us happier or better people. Institutions that once spoke out against materialism, above all the churches, have largely fallen silent about its dangers.<sup>69</sup>

We cannot eradicate the vices from human beings. However, there are practical steps we can take to limit greed and promote its contrasting virtues: thrift, modesty, generosity, and contentment. Individuals can focus on engaging in activities, rather than purchasing things. We can *share* things: buying a new lawnmower with several neighbors, for example, rather than buying one alone. We can stop watching television, eliminating much of the commercial incitement to greed from our lives. We can find alternatives to "recreational shopping" and other activities that cause wasteful consumption and leave us feeling unsatisfied.

At the political level, communities should ban billboards and commercial advertising in public schools. They should *require* recycling: current voluntary systems ensure that those who most need to learn restraint do not do so. More ambitiously, communities could pass sumptuary laws: limiting the size of houses, for example, to decrease human impacts on the landscape and standing incitements to envy. Beyond their direct environmental benefits, such measures would send a powerful, socially sanctioned message that greed is bad. Taking these personal and political steps would be good for us and good for nature.

## Apathy

"Apathy" comes from the Greek *apatheia*, "without feeling"; one synonym in old English was *unlust*.<sup>70</sup> It is perhaps best understood as a lack: "lack of interest or concern,



especially regarding matters of general importance or appeal . . . lack of emotion or feeling; impassiveness.”<sup>71</sup> There is a close connection between apathy and laziness. Over the course of the Middle Ages, the two vices of *tristitia* (pessimism, despair) and *accidia* (apathy, “dryness of spirit”) merged and morphed into the cardinal sin of sloth.<sup>72</sup> Calling apathy and sloth vices, or sins, emphasizes the active nature of a good human life.

Apathy is a key environmental vice, for several reasons. Our default procedures typically harm the environment, whereas doing better takes work, especially initially: bicycling to work rather than driving a car, setting up recycling bins rather than just tossing our garbage. One pop philosopher connects *all* our moral failures to laziness, and if this perhaps goes too far, it is true that doing right requires effort.<sup>73</sup> Often, we need to *think* our way toward better environmental solutions, and apathy shows itself in lazy thinking as well as in halfhearted action or inaction. Sluggish thinking tends to be selfish, short-term, and unimaginative. It reinforces passivity, as when my students’ inability to imagine any way forward beyond American car culture, combined with their understanding of its environmental harms, leaves them feeling defeated and hopeless.

Thankfully, some of my students are not apathetic but, rather, are filled with passion and energy: to save Yellowstone’s buffalo or Colorado’s prairie dogs, to convince the university to purchase more recycled paper and wind power. Here, though, another problem can crop up, for too often their passions burn bright and flare out after a semester or two of activity, leaving them apathetic and disengaged. This is not just an issue for students learning about environmental issues for the first time; “burnout” among activists is a major problem for environmental groups, which depend on grassroots strength to combat the overwhelming monetary advantages of their opponents. When activists burn out, particular environmental efforts lose continuity and focus.<sup>74</sup>

The harms to nature from apathy are obvious: the old growth is cut, the refuge is drilled, the endangered species disappears. Polls might say that the great majority of the population supports preserving old growth, wilderness areas, or endangered species, but it is no matter if an active, eloquent few do not speak up on their behalf. “The broadest and most prevalent error requires the most disinterested virtue to sustain it,” wrote Henry Thoreau, discussing his own society’s apathetic acceptance of slavery.<sup>75</sup>

Apathy’s harms to people are just as clear. Most simply, *apatheia* feels bad. A passive life is dull and boring. It lacks the engagement and interest in the world that are keys to happiness. It makes life seem meaningless, and meaning is as important as bread for living a fully human life.<sup>76</sup> Environmental apathy is especially pernicious for environmentalists; arguably, a person who has a strong sense of nature’s beauty and worth, yet who cannot summon the energy to try to protect it, fails to live up to his or her full humanity.<sup>77</sup> Nothing makes us more fully human than the ability to articulate and live up to our ethical values. Environmentalists who do not act on their beliefs forfeit moral integrity.

With its focus on human flourishing, the virtue ethics tradition has generally praised the active life.<sup>78</sup> According to Aristotle, “Virtue is an ability [or power; *dynamis*] that is productive and preservative of goods, and an ability for doing good in

many and great ways, actually in all ways in all things.”<sup>79</sup> “By *virtue* and *power* I mean the same thing,” wrote Spinoza: a power that allows us to become more fully ourselves.<sup>80</sup> Giving in to apathy means acquiescing in powerlessness. It means allowing others to circumscribe your life and your children’s lives. Fighting for a special place or a beloved species, although it opens us up to disappointment, engages a basic human capability for political action. One of my students astutely suggests *vulnerability* and *ambition* as two virtues opposed to apathy.

A fear of vulnerability was partly behind the Stoic cultivation of *apatheia* as a virtue. Indifference toward “externals” beyond one’s control allowed a person to take charge of his life and achieve happiness, the Stoics believed, while an unemotional rationality helped further just and successful action out in the world. The Stoic approach holds some appeal. It can further focus, hence effectiveness. Environmentalists do need to avoid fretting about events beyond our control, in a world with immense environmental problems and too much information about them. Nevertheless, cultivating environmental apathy seems misguided, for our happiness and flourishing depend, to an important degree, on flourishing natural and human communities. These must be defended. Environmentalists also *want* to explore and connect with these communities, which necessarily involves caring for them. There are many benefits to caring—but they cannot be divorced from the pain we feel when that which we care for is harmed.

Still, a person sometimes might be happier not caring about the environment and just living in it. From an individual point of view, being a free rider might make sense. In my home state of Colorado, many people take the attitude: “I’ll float the rivers and ski the mountains, build my second home in prime elk habitat, enjoy it while I can, and not worry about tomorrow.” These people may be happier than the people sitting through four-hour-long city council meetings, waiting nervously for a chance to speak for two minutes in favor of a new zoning ordinance. After all, you cannot sit in a meeting room and ski fresh powder at the same time. But with too many free riders, too much selfishness, the environment will be degraded, and soon enough the people living within it will suffer. I believe that those of us who enjoy nature’s benefits have a duty to try to preserve it: for our communities and for future generations, for nature’s sake and for our own.

In a recent article, Louke van Wensveen argues that genuine virtues must help ensure ecosystem sustainability.<sup>81</sup> As the virtues are virtues because they contribute to human flourishing and as flourishing is an ongoing project, the virtues must help secure the conditions necessary for their own cultivation. Traditionally, philosophers have emphasized the need to sustain the *social* conditions necessary for flourishing; today the evidence is clear that sustaining necessary *environmental* conditions is just as important. Wensveen’s position seems unassailable.<sup>82</sup> It sets minimum standards for environmental concern that any plausible virtue ethics needs to uphold. Generalizing the point and shifting the focus from virtue to vice, I contend that any character trait, habit, institution, or way of life that cannot be sustained indefinitely is vicious. Furthermore, any character trait, habit, institution, or way of life whose current pursuit jeopardizes the well-being of others, now or in the future, is unjust. Apathy and indifference are socially and environmentally unsustainable. They cause, or allow, great harm. By these criteria, they are vices.

To fight apathy, we must find sustainable ways to engage in politics. Ideally, we will find political roles that we enjoy. Failing that, we will have to come up with tasks that we can tolerate for restricted amounts of time. Here we see particularly well the limits of general rules and prescriptions in ethics. People are different and suited to different social roles. The idea that you *should* engage in particular political activities will almost certainly fail to motivate sustained action. Instead, find out what you are good at and what you find enjoyable. Perhaps you like the excitement and combat of political campaigns; or the fleeting, minor celebrity of writing newspaper editorials; or the quiet, anonymous analysis of complex government policy proposals. Perhaps you would prefer teaching children the names of the flowers and birds in the local woods. All these activities are necessary in the ongoing struggle for nature.

To fight apathy and despair, we also need to find ways to *escape* from politics.<sup>83</sup> Aldo Leopold wrote that the price of an ecological education is to walk through a world of wounds. Leopold spent a good part of his life speaking out for wildlife and wilderness preservation, working politically to heal the wounds. But he also spent many hours planting trees and filling gullies on his sand county farm and many more hours hunting, fishing, bird-watching, snowshoeing, canoeing, and horse packing. No matter how dismal the environmental policies of the Soil Conservation Service or the State of Wisconsin were, Leopold could see the slow healing of land on his farm. No matter how often the Forest Service or Park Service punched roads into wilderness or exterminated predators, he found opportunities to explore and connect with wild nature. Leopold crafted a life that he found enjoyable and meaningful, that sustained him and made possible his lasting contributions to conservation. Our challenge is to do likewise. In the end, action is the only answer to apathy.<sup>84</sup>

## Conclusion

Why do we harm nature? Because we are ignorant. Because we are selfish. Because we are gluttonous, arrogant, greedy, and apathetic. Because we do not understand our obligations to others or our own self-interest. We falsely assume that we can keep separate harms to nature and harms to humanity, harms to others and harms to ourselves. We do not see that environmental vices do not just harm nature; they harm us and the people around us. As I have shown in this essay, many of these harms are scientifically verifiable; the rest can be understood by anyone with open eyes and an open heart. The environmental vices are bad for us and bad for the Earth. For better and for worse, we really are all in this together.

## Notes

1. Why is vice so little discussed in contemporary philosophy? Perhaps the failure comes from a discomfort with appearing too judgmental. When we assert that a particular action is wrong, we typically assume that people are free to act otherwise. Vice terms imply a deeper evil in people, harder to reform, certainly not to be shaken off by an argument or two. Similarly,

when we assert that particular social arrangements are unfair or unjust, we locate the primary evil in “the system.” Vice terms, in contrast, locate evil squarely within people. It is fine to criticize particular acts or social arrangements; criticize people generally and you trespass on the sacred, humanity having replaced God as the divine object in modern secular philosophy. Locate a *persistent* evil in individuals, and you verge on a pessimism at odds with the Enlightenment optimism still at the heart of most moral philosophy.

2. See recent Gallup Earth Day polls, available at [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com) (accessed 18 February 2004).

3. My sense is that these are our four most important, or cardinal, environmental vices because they are fundamental and lead to the greatest environmental harms. Justification of this claim lies beyond the scope of this essay, depending as it would on a fully developed moral psychology and a comprehensive account of environmental degradation.

4. See the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (3d ed.).

5. Louke van Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues: The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Ethics* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2000), 103–6.

6. In this way vice judgments are similar to virtue judgments. See Martha Nussbaum, “Non-relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach,” in *The Quality of Life*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 242–69.

7. Aristotle also described human flourishing in terms of higher activities such as philosophical study and contemplation, leading to a different set of virtues and vices. These two different conceptions of happiness and virtue are incompletely integrated in his ethical philosophy.

8. See the essays “Of Cruelty” and “Cowardice, Mother of Cruelty” in Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*.

9. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 23 (bk. 2, chap. 6).

10. Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on the Virtues* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 57 (*Summa*, pt. 2, question 56).

11. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, AK 397; Immanuel Kant, *The Doctrine of Virtue: Part II of The Metaphysic of Morals*, AK 384–91, 443–45.

12. If we take moral character to be the sole determinant of personal well-being, or infinitely more important than other aspects of personal well-being, then it becomes true that we cannot improve our own well-being by wronging others. However, these Socratic and Stoic views give morality more importance than it deserves. Morality is important, but it is not all-important. We can preserve the nobility behind the view that we can never benefit ourselves by harming others by saying instead that we never *should* benefit ourselves by harming others.

13. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 110–11 (bk. 7, chap. 8).

14. See, for example, Augustine’s account of his theft of the pears in the *Confessions*, bk. 2.

15. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 48–49 (bk. 3, chap. 12), 160–61 (bk. 10, chap. 5).

16. Both these themes are treated in Montaigne’s final essay, “Of Experience.” On tolerance, see also “Of Cannibals.”

17. See Bill Shaw, “A Virtue Ethics Approach to Aldo Leopold’s Land Ethic,” in this volume; and Philip Cafaro, “Rachel Carson’s Environmental Ethics,” *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion* 6 (2002): 58–80.

18. This last point is important. We need not show that some aspect of environmental protection is a *necessary* condition for the happiness of *all* members of society; to show that it is an *important* condition for the happiness of *some* members of society may be all the justification we need for environmental protection. As Aldo Leopold wrote: “Mechanized recreation already has seized nine-tenths of the woods and mountains; a decent respect for minorities should ded-

icate the other tenth to wilderness" (*A Sand County Almanac with Essays on Conservation from Round River* [New York: Ballantine, 1970], 272).

19. The most comprehensive study so far, setting the agenda for future scholarship in this area, is Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues*.

20. Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues*, 97–103.

21. To be fair to Aristotle, he already had some sense of the importance of environmental protection to human flourishing. See Aristotle, *Politics*, bk. 7, chaps. 4–6, 11–12.

22. See Holmes Rolston III, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole," in this volume.

23. Once again, though I believe that these are our cardinal environmental vices, sustaining that claim would require further elaboration and defense. Selfishness, injustice, and ignorance are also plausible candidates for cardinal environmental vices.

24. Morton Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967), 59, 69. Bloomfield (*The Seven Deadly Sins*, 74–75) documents how, early in the medieval period, gluttony lost its place at the head of the list to pride; he speculates that as the list began to be used to guide moral life outside monasteries, sins of the flesh such as gluttony and lust came to seem less important than more socially damaging sins such as pride and avarice.

25. Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales* (New York: Covici and Friede, 1934), 603.

26. J. M. McGinnis and W. H. Foegen, "Actual Causes of Death in the United States," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 270, no. 18 (1993): 2207–12.

27. One study notes that "aside from mortality rate . . . obesity substantially increases morbidity and impairs quality of life" (D. B. Allison, K. R. Fontaine, J. E. Manson, J. Steens, and T. B. Van Itallie, "Annual Deaths Attributable to Obesity in the United States," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 282, no. 16 [1999]: 1530).

28. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity* (Rockville, MD: Public Health Service, Office of the Surgeon General, 2001).

29. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, "Summary of Listed Species," available at [http://ecos.fws.gov/tess\\_public/TESSBoxscore?format=display&type=archive&sysdate=5/01/2004](http://ecos.fws.gov/tess_public/TESSBoxscore?format=display&type=archive&sysdate=5/01/2004) (accessed 14 May 2004).

30. D. S. Wilcove, D. Rothstein, J. Dubow, A. Phillips, and E. Losos, "Quantifying Threats to Imperiled Species in the United States: Assessing the Relative Importance of Habitat Destruction, Alien Species, Pollution, Overexploitation, and Disease," *BioScience* 48, no. 8 (1998): 607–15.

31. Wilcove et al., "Quantifying Threats to Imperiled Species in the United States." A more recent study has confirmed agriculture's leading role in species endangerment; see B. Czech, R. Krausman, and P. K. Devers, "Economic Associations among Causes of Species Endangerment in the United States," *BioScience* 50, no. 7 (2000): 593–601.

32. J. Putnam, J. Allshouse, and L. S. Kantor, "U.S. Per Capita Food Supply Trends: More Calories, Refined Carbohydrates, and Fats," *FoodReview* 25, no. 3 (2002): 2–15.

33. Of course, all else is not equal. For one thing, approximately 20 percent of the food produced in the United States is exported (see M. Reed, *International Trade in Agricultural Products* [Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2001]). But this point cuts both ways: much of the food consumed today in America is imported, and its growing, harvesting and shipping have environmental costs.

34. Robert Pyle, *The Thunder Tree: Lessons from an Urban Wildland* (New York: Lyons Press, 1993); Kent Meyers, *The Witness of Combines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

35. D. H. Chadwick, "American Prairie: Roots of the Sky," *National Geographic* 184 (October 1993): 116.
36. Frances Moore Lappé, *Diet for a Small Planet* (New York: Ballantine, 1991).
37. Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).
38. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 46, 48–49 (bk. 3, chaps. 10, 12), 157 (bk. 10, chap. 3).
39. Henry Thoreau, *Walden* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 215.
40. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 49 (bk. 3, chap. 12).
41. Readers interested in the ancient pagan view should review Aristotle's discussion of magnanimity or "great-souledness" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. 4, chap. 3). Aristotle there defines magnanimity (Greek *megalopsuchia*) as a virtue specifying the proper attitude toward honor, stating that the magnanimous man "thinks himself worthy of great honors, and is worthy of them." The associated vices are overvaluation of oneself, on the one hand, and pusillanimity, thinking oneself worthy of little, on the other. Interestingly, Aristotle thinks that the latter vice is more usual than the former.
42. For a good discussion of Kantian self-respect, see Thomas Hill Jr., "Servility and Self-Respect," *Monist* 57 (1973): 87–104.
43. Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues*, 98.
44. David Ehrenfeld, *The Arrogance of Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).
45. Bronwen Manby, *The Price of Oil: Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria's Oil Producing Communities* (Washington, DC: Human Rights Watch, 1999).
46. This account of events in the Niger Delta, and the quotes from Chevron contractor Bill Spencer that follow, come from the *Democracy Now* radio program "Drilling and Killing: Chevron and Nigeria's Oil Dictatorship," produced by Amy Goodman and Jeremy Scahill, 30 September 1998, available at [www.pacifica.org/programs/nigeria](http://www.pacifica.org/programs/nigeria) (accessed 13 February 2004).
47. For a comprehensive discussion and bibliography, see American Land Alliance, *Off-Road Vehicles: A Growing Threat to Public Lands and Waters*, available at [www.americanlands.org/forestweb/offroad.htm](http://www.americanlands.org/forestweb/offroad.htm).
48. Kevin McNulty, "Off-Road Attitude," available at [www.off-roadweb.com/features/0202or\\_covertruck/index.html](http://www.off-roadweb.com/features/0202or_covertruck/index.html) (accessed 12 February 2004).
49. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. 7, chaps. 7–8.
50. The arrogance of someone who holds to belief in a literal biblical creation, its combination of stubbornness and laziness, has a lot in common with the justifications for corporate crime and personal irresponsibility above. Anthropocentrism is not just a faulty value system but also a faulty way of understanding the world. In Aristotle's terms, it is an intellectual vice as well as a character vice.
51. It is no accident that most of our environmental heroes have been naturalists. See Philip Cafaro, "The Naturalist's Virtues," *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 8, no. 2 (2001): 85–99.
52. For similar reasons, federal and state land management agencies should ban ORVs from our public lands. By allowing and often encouraging such use, they are creating a whole constituency of people who do not respect nature. They are training people *on* public lands to *trash* public lands.
53. Peter Singer, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 104–5.
54. Ron Sandler makes the good point that arrogance is as much about what we think we can do as what we think we are worth. It is the former that is most in play in genetic engineering, damming and straightening rivers, industrial agriculture, and so on.

55. See the *American Heritage Dictionary*. Greed can also refer to an extreme desire for anything; as Chaucer says, "Avarice ne stont not oonly in lond ne in catel, but som tyme in science and in glorie" (quoted in the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition for *avarice*).
56. Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues*, 233.
57. Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, 601.
58. Thomas Aquinas quoted in Singer, *One World*, 185.
59. For examples of businessmen and businesswomen who are building profitable businesses that *enhance* environmental protection, see Steven Lerner, *Eco-pioneers: Practical Visionaries Solving Today's Environmental Problems* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998).
60. Gary Strauss, "Cheney as VP Faces a Serious Cut in Pay," *USA Today*, 26 June 2000. Available at [www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/e2415.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/e2415.htm) (accessed 15 June 2004).
61. John King, "Cheney Aide Rejects Halliburton Questions," *CNN.com/Inside Politics*, 16 September 2003. Available at [www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/09/16/cheney.halliburton/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/09/16/cheney.halliburton/index.html) (accessed 15 June 2004).
62. These studies are summarized in Robert Lane, *The Market Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 524–47.
63. Tim Kasser, Richard Ryan, Charles Couchman, and Kennon Sheldon, "Materialistic Values: Their Causes and Consequences," in *Psychology and Consumer Culture: The Struggle for a Good Life in a Materialistic World*, ed. Tim Kasser and Allen Kanner (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2004), 19.
64. Kasser et al., "Materialistic Values," 29 (in-text citations silently removed).
65. Emily Solberg, Edward Diener, and Michael Robinson, "Why Are Materialists Less Satisfied?" in *Psychology and Consumer Culture: The Struggle for a Good Life in a Materialistic World*, ed. Tim Kasser and Allen Kanner (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2004), 45.
66. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 88.
67. Henry Fairlie, *The Seven Deadly Sins Today* (Washington, DC: New Republic Books, 1978), 25. Fairlie argues that American society instills avarice, gluttony, and lust in its members.
68. Nancy Shalek, quoted in Tim Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 91.
69. Of course, one can take the view that our contemporary acceptance of greed is all to the good. Almost 300 years ago, Bernard Mandeville, in his *Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Public Virtues*, argued that the vices are in fact necessary to a happy and flourishing nation.
70. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 251.
71. See the *American Heritage Dictionary*.
72. Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues*, 100; Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 96.
73. M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).
74. Randy Larsen, "Tenacity as a Virtue," unpublished MS, 8. For a good discussion of issues surrounding apathy and activism, see Randy Larsen, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: Nature as Polis" (M.A. thesis, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, 1996), chap. 3.
75. Henry Thoreau, *Reform Papers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 72.
76. See Matthew 4:4.
77. David Schmidtz, "Are All Species Equal?" in *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, ed. David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willot (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 100.
78. Still, passivity remains a live option within virtue ethics, embraced in ancient times by Eastern Taoists and Western Cynics. Given how much environmental harm is caused by the human need to act, regardless of whether action is justified, an environmental focus may challenge

the traditional preference for activity within virtue ethics. Perhaps the most radical aspect of the U.S. National Environmental Protection Act is its requirement that federal managers consider a “no action” option before proceeding with projects.

79. Aristotle, *On Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 79 (bk. 1, chap. 9).

80. Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics and Selected Letters* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1982), 156 (pt. 4, definitions). We see this equation of virtue, power, and activity in various archaic uses of the word *virtue*, when botanists or physicians write of the virtues of medicinal plants, for instance. Contrarily, many contemporary philosophers could agree with Ambrose Bierce’s definition of virtue in his *Devil’s Dictionary*: “virtues: certain abstentions.”

81. Louke van Wensveen, “Ecosystem Sustainability as a Criterion for Genuine Virtue,” *Environmental Ethics* 23 (2001): 232–34.

82. Wensveen’s approach is challenged in Ronald Sandler, “The External Goods Approach to Environmental Virtue Ethics,” *Environmental Ethics* 25 (2003): 279–93.

83. For a discussion of hope, despair, and political activism in environmental virtue ethics, see Philip Cafaro, *Thoreau’s Living Ethics: Walden and the Pursuit of Virtue* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 174–204.

84. Ed Abbey echoes Leopold and well sums up the claims of an environmental virtue ethics when he writes: “Do not burn yourselves out. Be as I am—a reluctant enthusiast . . . a part-time crusader, a half-hearted fanatic. Save the other half of yourselves and your lives for pleasure and adventure. It is not enough to fight for the land; it is even more important to enjoy it. . . . Enjoy yourselves, keep your brain in your head and your head firmly attached to the body, the body active and alive, and I promise you this much: I promise you this one sweet victory over our enemies, over those desk-bound people with their hearts in a safe deposit box and their eyes hypnotized by desk calculators. I promise you this: you will outlive the bastards” (quoted in Steve Van Matre and Bill Weiler, eds., *The Earth Speaks* [Greenville, WV: Institute for Earth Education, 1983], 57). Randy Larsen points out the appropriateness of this quote in his “Environmental Virtue Ethics.”



Environmental ethics is the discipline in philosophy that studies the moral relationship of human beings to, and also the value and moral status of, the environment and its non-human contents. This entry covers: (1) the challenge of environmental ethics to the anthropocentrism (i.e., human-centeredness) embedded in traditional western ethical thinking; (2) the early development of the discipline in the 1960s and 1970s; (3) the connection of deep ecology, feminist environmental ethics, animism and social ecology to politics; (4) the attempt to apply traditional ethical theories, including Gluttony, Arrogance, Greed, and Apathy: An Exploration of Environmental Vice. Philip J. Cafaro. Search on vice in the Philosopher's Index and not much comes up. Along with a lot of articles with "vice versa" in their abstracts there is one book, which is not about vice but about just political arrangements, and half a dozen articles, none well known, actually dealing with vice or particular vices.<sup>1</sup> Yet there are good reasons to explore vice. Dramatically speaking, vice is more interesting than virtue: think Inferno versus Paradise; think Lucifer versus any other character, including God, in ... To anticipate one criticism, exploring environmental vice at the individual level does not mean ignoring the larger, systemic causes of environmental degradation. Creating. 135. Gluttony, Arrogance, Greed and Apathy: An Exploration of Environmental Vice.

INTRODUCTION. 1. How human beings fail can teach us much about ourselves. 10. Since Cafaro is willing to focus on environment vice as important part of environment problems, he must not think EVE is too judgmental. The nature of vice. 11. In common language, vices include drinking, gambling, smoking, nose-picking. 12. Vice (philosophically): A negative character trait (that harms others and typically oneself as well). 13. Vice harms: Either vicious person, those around him, or both. a. This might be a controversial claim.. b. Such as gluttony or greed (avarice) or sloth (being lazy). Gluttony, arrogance, greed, and apathy: An exploration of environmental vice. In *Environmental Virtue Ethics*, eds. Sandler, R. and Cafaro, P. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 135-58. The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming Politics in a Post-Environmental World. Available at <http://www.thebreakthrough.org>; accessed February 10, 2006. Shorey, H. S., Rand, K. L., and Snyder, C. R. (2005). *Space Exploration and Environmental Issues*. William K. Hartmann - 1984 - *Environmental Ethics* 6 (3):227-239. Separated at Birth, Signs of Rapprochement: Environmental Ethics and Space Exploration. Erin Moore Daly & Robert Frodeman - 2008 - *Ethics and the Environment* 13 (1):135 - 151. The Arrogance of Humanism. Robert W. Loftin - 1981 - *Environmental Ethics* 3 (2):173-176. A Phenomenology of Political Apathy: Scheler on the Origins of Mass Violence. [REVIEW] Zachary Davis - 2009 - *Continental Philosophy Review* 42 (2):149-169. Apathy: The Democratic Disease. J. E. Green - 2004 - *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 30 (5-6):745-768. Utilitarianism and the Arrogance Objection. John Skorupski - 2008 - *Rivista di Filosofia* 99 (3):531-552.