who reveal the company's dark secrets to 60 Minutes or 20/20. The world will probably always need such people who risk career, reputation, and life in being responsible to a moral ideal beyond profits.

Serious reform also requires change in the design of the company itself. James Coleman offers examples of what he believes are post-bureaucratic reforms. For example, each section of an assembly line would have the authority to accept or reject the product of an earlier part of the line. Responsibly to takes on a clearer meaning here with personal and communal qualities. I think it is unlikely that bureaucracy is about to disappear. But the physical design of a building, as well as ordinary rituals of the workday, can either facilitate or obstruct the flow of moral knowledge. A person in a communal setting is likely to be truthful. An individual in a noncommunal setting (the classic bureaucratic arrangement) cannot tell the truth. Not mainly because people lie. The inferior's knowledge is piecemeal, and the superior can only hear a fragment of that.

Companies do bad things not because they are composed of bad people who deliberately sacrifice moral goods to high profits. Companies do bad things mostly because they are composed of self-divided people who are expected to block out what is irrelevant to the company's purposes. Not enough in their immediate environment engages their full range of listening. They cannot hear their own bodies, their co-workers, the ambiguities in their product's effects, their desire to be human beings. To exercise their personal and corporate responsibility they need to feel that they are working in an organization so designed that it does not suppress the best part of themselves.

CHAPTER 6

HUMANLY RESPONSIBLE

This chapter is in some respects an extension of the previous one. The field of responsibility broadens here beyond the human world. The last chapter moved from interpersonal concerns to interaction with the largest corporations. If "corporation" refers to any organized body, then one could speak of the world itself and all the great forces of nature as corporations that human beings interact with. We readily speak of the ocean as a body of water and, though it has been less common in modern times, the earth has traditionally been imagined as the mother's body from which we all come.

The responsibility discussed in this chapter, therefore, certainly has a corporate character. The caution that I need to express immediately is that the movement to extend ethical concerns beyond the human is not merely an extension to larger objects or more objects. "Environmental ethics" is not a coda to regular ethics, nor is it one more practical application of ethics. Instead, the last three decades have seen the beginning of a challenge to what ethics has been assumed to mean. No one is sure where this will lead us, but we are confronted with rethinking the most basic ideas we have used to categorize experience.

The distinction used in the previous chapter between natural person and artificial person suggests there is more to say about person. But environmental concerns do not seem to fit within this distinction. They do turn our attention back to the meaning of natural person and the relation of human beings to a natural (in the sense of nonartificial) world around them.

What the humans invent as artificial persons are necessarily at a remove from natural beings. The business corporation, in particular, interacts with the environment mainly on the basis of use. No one expects Exxon's relation to the earth's oil to be one of friendship, won-
der, and tolerance. The humans create artificial persons to engage in use and control. That is not immoral, but it expresses only one attitude of the personal. The practices of the business corporation need a context in which natural persons encounter “natural nonpersons” in ways other than control, use, and exploitation.

The fundamental connection between human and nonhuman is found in responsibility: the humans have to be responsible to the entire nonhuman world. And subsequent to that, in being responsible for their actions, they have to study the consequences of those actions throughout the nonhuman world. Unfortunately, this is not the language that is prominent in the ecological movement. In the topics of the previous chapters, “responsible” was almost ubiquitous. That does not apply, however, to ecological literature.

We are in a confusing situation in which everyone seems to agree on the need to preserve the environment. Once past that principle, however, very little is agreed upon in economic and political policies. Underneath this confusion is the lack of agreement on an ethical basis for the ecological/environmental movement. Until the term “responsible” is more prominent in the discussion and the meaning of the term clearly developed in this context, the gap between protestation of concern for the environment and serious damage to the environment will continue to widen.

In recent centuries, the ethical problem with the nonhuman was the incapacity of the humans to recognize its existence in an ethical context. Among the five rifts in modern ethics that this book addresses, the one in this chapter is different because it has seldom been named as a rift at all. Modern ethics has been built around how humans should treat one another and how they should use property. The division of ethics into individual and social exemplifies and solidifies the bias. When liberal thinkers try to correct the narrowness of an individualistic ethic by looking at human groups, the nonhuman world is still not rendered visible.

A rejoinder to this complaint is that ethics is in fact and of necessity a human affair. The humans are apparently the only ethical or moral beings; they are the ones faced with ethical decisions. And is not the term “nonhuman” that I rely on in this chapter reflective of a human bias? If dolphins, redwoods, or mountains were categorizing the world, presumably human/nonhuman would not be the primary divide. I do not claim to give an argument that is not biased in a human direction; the argument is not based on the claim that all of us are equal. Still, the humans are related to the nonhuman world; to talk about human interaction assumes some relation to the nonhuman. We can only know what the word “human” means by a comparison to what is not human.

Throughout history humans have always made such comparisons. During most eras, the comparison has yielded a string of ways in which we are alike, another set of characteristics where we seem to differ. What has distinguished the period of modern Western ethics has been a conclusion, mostly implied rather than explicit, that we are so different from nonhumans that we are barely alike at all.

This movement of disjunction from the nonhuman world coincided with the full emergence of “humanity” and “humanism.” The early humanists are rightly admired for wishing not to exclude any human being from the concept of the human—whatever the race, nationality, or religion of the individual. (They were not so good at sexual differences.) To be recognized as a full partner in humanity was the necessary step to dignity, respect, and an ethical life.

What these early humanists could not see was that they were unwittingly creating a deeper split between human and nonhuman. One of the most celebrated lines in modern literature is Montaigne’s “Nihil humanum a me alienum puto” (I think that nothing human is alien to me). Stephen Toulmin points out that, although regularly quoted as a sign of liberality, it is a restrictive statement. Everything human is not alien implies that everything nonhuman is alien.

Montaigne and other early humanists should not be indicted for affirming their openness to all things human, while calling the nonhuman world alien or other. But in the absence of affirmations of kinship and similarity with the nonhuman world, “alien” quickly became a morally loaded term. Marx found it a readily available term to describe laborers separated (alienated) from the product of their labor. Early psychologists were called “alienists,” people concerned with the patient’s separation from a healthy self. In discussions of immigration policy, “alien” is not a friendly category. And unfriendly visitors from another planet are not unexpectedly called “aliens.”

Throughout the twentieth century there has been a current of philosophical thought that has attacked “humanism.” This line runs from Nietzsche to Heidegger to Foucault and beyond. For most people who identify themselves as “humanists,” any criticism of humanism is
totally incomprehensible. They had assumed that their only opponents were fading religionists who found humanism to be antireligious. And indeed humanists such as Marx readily admitted that humanism required “taking back what heaven had stolen from earth”; that is, the expansion of the human was at the expense of the divine. But the post-Nietzschean attack on humanism has arisen at the heart of the secular world. Having won the battle with heaven, people began questioning the meaning of “humanism,” which had long seemed secure.

It was easier to invent the concepts of humanity and humanism than to devise political and economic arrangements that would allow everyone to experience a human community. It is also easier for us in the twentieth century to see blind spots of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries in their perception of the human. The most telling bias was a failure to explore the relation of men and women. Early modern humanists did not invent the bias; it was centuries old. However, it is surprising that in the context of trying to encompass all of the human, there was not more attention to this central question. And the twentieth-century critics—Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and their descendants—have not been in the best position to offer a new language for man–woman relations.

This whole complicated story of humanism is relevant to this chapter in that confusion and conflict within the human inevitably reverberates in the world of the nonhuman(s). In the previous two chapters, I said that a split between individual and collective could only be addressed by rethinking each side of the split; problems reside within the notion of “individual” and in the vagueness of “collective.” Something analogous applies in this chapter. In the question of relating human and nonhuman, there are conflicts hidden in the abstract notion of the human; there is also the need to name, at least occasionally, the nonhumans within the nonhuman.

I do not propose to substitute new terms for human/nonhuman. Actually, they are already a reform of the language bequeathed to us by the seventeenth century, namely, the language of “man and nature.” Any attempt to work out a new, comprehensive relation within man/nature is doomed to failure. The two abstractions are locked into a historical relation that offers almost no alternatives except conquer or surrender. “We are always conquering Nature, because ‘Nature’ is the name of what we have, to some extent, con-

quired.” It is not impossible, of course, to retrieve an older and wider meaning of “nature,” but that is unlikely to happen so long as man/nature is assumed to be a comprehensive pair. I find it astounding that the word “nature,” (or the phrase “natural world”) in the vast majority of cases, still means the world of the nonhuman. No complex relation of the human and nonhuman can be worked out until this meaning of “nature” is admitted to be inaccurate.

As noted above, human conflict has usually spilled over into the nonhuman world. Wars are not only deadly to human combatants but scorch the earth and its nonhuman inhabitants. The man who beats his wife is not going to be gentle with animals. Cut-throat competition between fishing companies eventually wrecks the fishing beds. The trees, dogs, and fish are used to bearing the brunt of intramural human squabbles.

What is a genuinely novel development in the late twentieth century is a human attempt to apply to its relation with the nonhumans the supposed solution to human problems. For many people, progress in human affairs has gone on under the banner of “equality.” And some of those people are convinced that the next logical step is to extend that ideal to the nonhuman world. The ideal of equality is often joined to the more particular claim of rights. In the span of a few decades, the phrase “animal rights” has gone from being incomprehensible to being the name of a well-established movement that is casually included with other movements demanding equal justice. More than ten million people in the United States belong to some kind of animal rights group.

Many people concerned with law are skeptical about this extension of rights language. Before tying up the courts with a new world of questions that courts are ill equipped to handle, we have to look carefully at the idea of rights itself. Human rights, besides being a protection of individuals against oppressive governments, were an assertion of what distinguishes human from nonhuman. One should at least notice the paradox of now trying to extend (human) rights to nonhumans. Extending such rights without limit would at some point evacuate the term of meaning. Even advocates of “animal rights” do not mean to extend rights to every animal organism. A theoretical and practical line is drawn somewhere, perhaps at mammals. No one can even imagine a judicial system enforcing the rights of all animals.

I should acknowledge here that there are individuals and religious
groups who, taking equality and rights in some broader and nonjudicial sense, profess to include all life in their ethical concerns. Such people are often admirable in their commitment, challenging the rest of us to examine our attitudes. They may have a lesson to teach that the human race will eventually have to learn. Nevertheless, the jump from valuing human individuals to valuing life involves a dangerous leap to what seems even more abstract than “humanity.”

If one applies the test of responsibility, it is clear enough to speak of being responsible to the dog or responsible for feeding the dog. Human beings are indeed responsible for preserving the life of this redwood or the cleanliness of this pond. Is it clear what it means either to be responsible to life or responsible for life? I do not mean to dismiss the issue with a rhetorical question. Ethics may in large part be an attempt to answer this question. But unless “life” is concretized in living beings that we respond to and respond for, ethics disappears into a mist.

One of the most famous “life philosophers” of the twentieth century is Albert Schweitzer. He was not an armchair philosopher speculating on life while benefiting from “man’s conquests of nature.” After a career as a biblical scholar, Schweitzer followed a personal call to go to Africa and care for the sick. His Civilization and Ethics is a great work of ethics, foreshadowing developments of a half century later. His words ring strong today: “The time is coming when people will be amazed that the human race was so long before it recognized that thoughtless injury to life is incompatible with real ethics.” I have no problem endorsing that sentiment, but I am left unclear about his use of responsibility. He writes that “ethics, then, is subjective, extensively and intensively limitless responsibility for all life within his sphere. . . .” That seems to overstep what the human is responsible for, especially in the case of animals. Human responsibility is never limitless; it is limited by the responsibility others have for themselves.

Schweitzer believed that he had discovered the needed fundamental principle of morality: “It is good to maintain and cherish life; it is evil to destroy and to check life.” Can humans live without “checking life”? Would the attempt to avoid destroying or even checking life lead to a homogenized vision of life, while ethics still involves sometimes taking sides? Schweitzer and other religious figures in history have tried to shake people out of their mindless trampling under foot the beauty and the vitality of the world. Behind his fundamental principle of morality is reverence, the attitude that would infuse all ethics. Schweitzer figured out what this attitude required of him. I would be cautious about carrying the political language of equality into the ethics of ecology. Equality has problems in settling human disputes; when applied to the nonhuman world, in the form of respect for all life, its limitations become more obvious.

Equality and Inequality

I wish to argue here that “equality” is not adequate to the task it is being asked to handle. Its limitations should be noticed in the intramural struggles of politics before it is put to use for a wider purpose. It would be stupid to attack the word “equality.” But one can respect all the great achievements done in the name of equality while still arguing that equality can only deal with certain well-defined problems. The attempt to expand its proper sphere of operation gets us into bitter, unresolvable disputes. I do not wish to argue that we need more inequality and less equality. We need a way of speaking with other available choices than equal/unequal.

“Equality” has its most obvious place for use in mathematics. Two factors or elements are equal when they are the same. The language of equal or unequal makes most sense if an object is measurable and the dimensions can be expressed numerically. If a judgment pertains to qualities of things, then equality does not apply.

The term equality can be and has been stretched beyond its etymological meaning. We can say that the artist’s use of red in this painting is the same or equal to the red in another painting. We can say that the team’s performance was the equal of its best performances. We may say of two children that they are equally gifted. If pushed to clarify such statements, we would say that in the factors most relevant to our judgment, the two cases seem to be very similar; the admitted differences are not what interest us.

As a rough way to measure what cannot be quantified, we use equal/unequal. So long as there is some awareness of what we are doing, the effect is not reductionistic. R. H. Tawney, reflecting on the work of physician or schoolteacher, notes that “equality of provision is not identity of provision.” I think a clearer contrast would be that “equality in the care to provide is not the same as (equal to) equality in
what is provided." The word equality, outside a mathematical-like setting, cries out for the phrase "in regard to what?" To say that two people or two cities or two nations are equal would be meaningless without an explicit or implied specification. Two people can be equal in height; two cities can be equal in population; two nations can be equal in gross national product.

In modern times, the empirical and mathematical sciences have provided a firm basis for many judgments of equality/inequality. Probably more influential has been modern economic theory and the way economic metaphors influence modern politics (starting with the word "economics," originally meaning household now meaning numbers). A favorite metaphor of twentieth-century politics is "the marketplace of ideas." The quality of ideas is subsumed under market power and market price. Is one idea qualitatively better than another? What is its selling price?

Equality need not always be expressed in dollar values, but its effectiveness is closely tied to measurable quantities. One of the most famous statements of an argument is Thomas Jefferson's "all men are created equal." Taken in isolation, it would not be a false statement but an unintelligible statement. Simply to say that "all men are equal" is—literally and precisely—meaningless. Jefferson, of course, neither started nor stopped with the phrase on equality. He began with the statement "we hold these truths to be self-evident." Then followed several dependent clauses, the first of which is that all men are created equal. The second clause gives a rough account of the way they are equal: "that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Jefferson made appeal to a creator who sees that all men start out equal in regard to having human rights. The rest of the document is about the long and painful efforts to "secure these rights." Jefferson was certainly aware that in regard to almost anything measurable in history, inequality has been the condition of most men, and even more so most women.

How can we tell when "equal rights" have been secured? For the basic rights of not to be killed or imprisoned, we have reasonably good indicators. Amnesty International publishes annual statistics on how many people are being killed, tortured, imprisoned by their own governments. Each nation has its own story about those numbers (the United States has a lot of explaining to do about its per capita prison population); but the numbers themselves speak loudly. Some nations are renegades, systematically in disregard of fundamental rights.

When one looks at a particular situation to determine equal rights, there are often precise, measurable signs. If Rosa Parks could sit in row twenty-four on the bus but not row two, that is a measurable insult whose remedy is obvious; everyone has an equal right to every seat. If "Denny's" took fifty minutes to serve African American customers and ten minutes to serve white people, the legitimate demand is: equal service. The hamburgers should take equal time whether the eater is black or white.

It is not surprising that "equality" has been a word of great rhetorical power throughout modern times. Jean Bethke Elshtain writes: "American society is, perhaps, unique among nations in that from the first, equality ("all men are created equal") has been one of the touchstones of its national identity and political culture." That touchstone of equality is a mark of great national pride for the United States. It is also the reason why, in the absence of other ethical language, the country is so contentious and puzzled by its own problems.

Elshtain's book is itself a reflection on the seemingly intractable nature of our present problems. She places her hope on a defense of equality that does not mean sameness. For example, she says "in education and the academy, the equation of equality with sameness led to a muddleheaded assault on any notion of distinctiveness or value." Similarly, she writes of liberal critics of policies confining equality to legal recognition: "Rather than challenge the equation of equality with sameness, many critics implicitly embraced the idea: the more we were the same the better."

I find this line of argument unpersuasive. "Equal" does mean sameness, applicable to two cases where the length, width, size, or some measurable category is the same. Equality means submitting to an impersonal, objective standard so as to escape from discriminating, subjective judgment. That is the strength of the term and the value that it has had in history. Even if one could change the equation that equal equals same, which is unlikely, the result would not be an improvement. We need a language of both sameness and difference for the peculiar combination of these two in human life. Equal does very well when the issue is sameness; it cannot bear both same and different.

Elshtain seems to want equality to be the one main player. Any challenge to the ideal of equality becomes an attack on democracy. She
describes a feminist conference that she attended where women invoked a "discourse of difference." They were suspicious of the word equality because they believed it was biased by male history. Elshtain writes: "The rush to eliminate equality from our political aspirations struck me as daft." Certainly, anyone trying to eliminate equality from the political idiom would be as Elshtain concludes "not too keen on constitutional democracy itself." Perhaps that is what the particular women at that conference were doing: choosing difference to the exclusion of sameness (equality). However, what one finds in daily news stories and books, as well as innumerable conferences, is people groping after a language that can identify in what ways "we" are the same and in what ways "we" differ. The "we" can be races, nations, genders, or a reference to humans and nonhumans.

There were several movements of the 1950s and 1960s that flowed like tributaries into the environmental river. The Negro civil rights struggle marched under the banner of equality at least until the 1970s. If you have started off by being counted as three-fifths of a person, the indispensable step is to get recognized as five-fifths. If you have been a slave with no legal rights, you want equality before the law. The chief symbol of political equality is at the ballot box where "each one shall count as one." The court can step in to see that the majestically impersonal law is applied without discrimination against selected groups.

The Supreme Court finally did its part in 1954, striking down school-segregation laws. The decision began a long struggle to change the way the nation thinks about race. The court had to admit that its decision in the late nineteenth century had solidified the dominant white power. The court could not undo the ensuing history; it could only take away obstacles and restrain some evils. The doctrine of "separate but equal" had worked out badly even though "separate but equal" is a logically coherent idea.

In the regular condemnations since then of "separate but equal," the impression may have been generated that "together and equal" is the only desirable alternative. However, just as separate does not necessarily entail unequal, neither does together guarantee equal. More basically, an exclusive concern with equality was not adequate for the long-term changes in race relations. The court's job is to eliminate gross inequalities regarding opportunity; it is not equipped to say how experience of racial difference might enhance people's lives.

Any oppressed group in modern times when asked what it wants is likely to reply: freedom and equality. Compassionate and justice-seeking individuals outside the group may help the group to change the laws. Then a moment comes when, great progress having been made and equality almost achieved, prominent members of the group say: "Maybe equality is not what we most need." What is meant, though it can be lost in charges and countercharges of disloyalty, sellout, and ingratitude, is that equality is dispensable for a space to live in, but then one has to live with a much more complicated language of personal and corporate relations.

A key test is the meaning of the term "discrimination." If one consults the Oxford English Dictionary, one could never guess that discrimination has a negative meaning. Through centuries of use, the word has expressed one of the greatest human powers: to discriminate means to think carefully, to judge with concern for quality not just quantity. Of course, it has always been possible to discriminate against someone, which is the opposite of discriminating for someone. But discriminate itself simply means a human exercise of the power to judge. To make the word discrimination a totally negative term is to place all hope in equality, a term that does not ask for discriminating choice, only for quantitative measurement.

The conflict between equality and discrimination is painfully evident in the most recent history of African American struggles. "Affirmative action" has been the attempt to look for qualified people in unaccustomed places. The government tried to nudge the academic and business worlds to recognize the existence of black talent, to think of a person's black race as a possible enhancing quality when the person is as qualified as anyone else. In other words, the school or employer would have to discriminate, think with qualities in mind.

Affirmative action could have been a way to challenge the reductionistic use of quantitative criteria, especially in the academic and professional worlds. How about caring for one's community as a test of professional competence? But if one cannot discriminate, the alternative is numbers. Opponents of affirmative action programs complain that it is a quota system, and that is in fact a vulnerable spot. If discrimination (complex thinking) is outlawed in favor of equality, then a quota system is almost inevitable.

Some day people will probably marvel that race was ever a question. Imagine a visitor from Mars trying to figure out what all this talk about race inside the human race is about. The humans divide them-
selves with a half-dozen color codes, none of which is accurately descriptive. At the present and for well into the next century, equality is not going to be adequate to the problems of overcoming current injustices. Nevertheless, equality remains a meaningful standard here because racial differences are not among the most interesting ways that human beings differ. Emphasis upon sameness is appropriate.

Sexual differences, in contrast to race, do seem profound. That there is some important difference between male and female, men and women, goes back to our origins and continues to be a crucial fact in daily life. The contemporary women's movement got its impetus in World War II but emerged in the wake of the black struggle in the 1960s. An earlier woman's movement also had affiliation with the racial struggle. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, race and sex were placed in the same conceptual world. Emphasis was upon equality or sameness (despite the fact that the woman's movement itself was afflicted with a good bit of racism).

Anthropologists led the way in emphasizing that there were no essential differences between the races; this was in opposition to a crude application of Darwin's ideas that made blacks inferior to whites. The emphasis became even stronger when Nazism proclaimed its doctrine of superior and inferior races. Sex got included in this insistence on equality. The one thing that the woman's movement (also given the name "feminism" in the 1910s) agreed upon was the vote. Women should be equal to men, and enfranchisement was the symbol of that equality.

The women's movement of the 1960s began with a renewed demand for equality. The difference between men and women had been used to women's disadvantage and for segregation from public life. The demand seemed clear at first: an end to "house arrest," access to the workplace where the power and money are, equal rights of employment, marriage, credit cards, insurance, and every other sphere where contractual rights hold. For a decade, the women's movement struggled to get a hearing, to be taken seriously.

Then, just as real progress was evident, some women began saying: "Maybe equality is not the main thing or the only thing we want." Perhaps we are different and should be different in significant ways. Thus began in the late 1970s a much more contentious phase of the women's movement, in which the disputes are as much between women as between men and women. Katha Pollitt coined the phrase "difference feminism," which she thinks represents something regressive. Since feminism has been so associated with equality, the phrase "difference feminism" is almost self-contradictory.

The emergence of these debates within the women's movement parallels debates within ecology. What I take many women to have discovered is that equality in regard to x, y, and z is indispensable. But to say that "men and women are equal" would obscure the ways women have differed from men and may wish to differ in the future.

For thousands of years there have been two approaches to this issue. The first opens with the statement that "men and women are the same." In response to the protest that the statement is obviously not true, the statement is modified to "men and women are the same, except for x." Plato in the Republic says that men and women are the same—"except for birth and begetting." Plato wanted a military in which men and women would be equal. The United States military is probably coming closer to Plato's ideal than has any group in history. Men and women are now treated equally, starting in boot camp (except that women do fewer pushups). Some people consider this elimination of difference to be progress.

The second approach is to say "men and women are different." To the cries that this is not true, the statement is modified to "men and women are different, except for y." Rousseau says that in what pertains to sex, men and women are completely different; he adds that in what pertains to their humanity they are the same. His emphasis is on the difference between the sexes for the sake of complementarity. The woman's equality in humanity tends to disappear into the shadow. Complaints about a lack of equality for women are met with the banter that equality would lower women. In 1991, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that in cases of sexual harassment against women, the standard of judgment is not the "reasonable person" but the "reasonable woman." Some people consider this recognition of difference to be progress.

The relation between men and women (and less overtly the relation in same sex love) has always been intertwined with human/non-human relations. I noted in chapter 4 that the self-dividedness of the person is somehow related to sexual division, though the relation is more complex than man=active, woman=passive. Some kind of dialogue occurs within men and within women, making possible more
complicated and interesting relations of men and men, women and women, men and men. (Plato’s myth of the androgyne has all three of these possibilities.) It seems to me that the premise which has to be used today is: men and women are the same in important ways; men and women differ in important ways; we are sure about some of the sameness and some of the differences. We have to listen some more and study some more to discover which differences should stay and which should go.

Ecology

The environmental movement is sometimes given its symbolic point of origin at Earth Day in 1970. The movements that preceded it (black, feminist, gay) had long histories of lonely individuals struggling for justice before the rise of a media-supported movement. The environmental movement had a history too, although even in the late 1960s only a handful of people had ever heard the word “ecology.”

The environmental movement seemed to be the most comprehensive one imaginable. It also seemed to be the one that triumphed immediately. Earth Day in 1970 was experienced by many people as a victory celebration; everyone spoke in favor of the honored guest, earth. No Martian protesters appeared on the scene to denounce solar system discrimination. What particular human groups had so long struggled for—equality and justice for all—was truly to include “all” without restriction to the human. The New York Times proclaimed: “Conservatives were for it. Liberals were for it. Democrats, Republicans, and independents were for it. So were the ins and outs, the executive and legislative branches of Government.”

In subsequent decades it is becoming apparent that victory celebrations should be postponed until the battle lines are clearer and progress is secured. The hope is eventually to go beyond the metaphor of battle and struggle, but long-standing conflicts have to be recognized before they can be transcended. In the past, “nature” has been portrayed as a vicious competitor with “man”; nature had to be conquered, subdued, beaten into submission. Today “nature” is spoken of as what “man” should be in harmony with. Nature means balance, unity, peace; all we have to do is recognize our place as “simply one group of many in a greatly expanded biotic community.” A biotic community sounds like a place where all that political infighting is resolved and no species claims superiority.

Sexual attitudes in the seventeenth century are glaringly reflected in the way “nature” was approached by “man.” The metaphors for the new science were explicitly sexual with the scientist portrayed as a gallant suitor. “Let us establish a chaste and lawful marriage between mind and nature,” said Francis Bacon. The new science can expect a fruitful issue from this furnishing of a “nuptial couch for the mind and the universe.” Nature was passive, ready to be taken; all man had to do was climb on top. Bacon in one place draws a comparison between science and the inquisition of witches. “Neither ought a man to make scruple of entering and penetrating into these holes and corners, when the inquisition of truth is his whole object.”

If today one cites such expressions of sexual/ecological relations, it is likely to draw gasps from an audience. How crude to think “man” is on top of nature, looking down as the superior who dominates the inferior. How lacking in an egalitarian spirit. “Man” has to give up his pretensions and reoccupy the position he broke out from within the harmony and unity of nature.

One of the essays that helped to spark the environmental movement was a brief piece by a historian of science, Lynn White, Jr. In “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” White traced the problem to Christian arrogance that placed man over nature. He allowed that there was one exception in Christian history: Francis of Assisi. Over the last three decades, Francis of Assisi has been hailed as the patron saint of ecology. Francis is certainly an admirable figure, but White’s characterization is misleading: “The greatest revolutionary in Western history, St. Francis, proposed what he thought was an alternative Christian view of nature and man’s relation to it: he tried to substitute the idea of the equality of all creatures, including man, for the idea of man’s limitless rule of creation.”

The statement is wrong on both counts. Francis did not propose man’s equality with all creatures, nor was man’s limitless rule of creation an idea that had to be opposed. Francis, like nearly all orthodox Christian theologians, believed in a hierarchy of God’s creating in which the human being has a special responsibility to and for creation. Since human power is one of listening and answering, the attribution of limitless rule is absurd. White’s contention that in Christianity “no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s pur-
poses" misses the point that the purpose of every item was to glorify God. The human being was the high priest of creation; all things were related to, taken up into the human, as the greatest expression of the glory of God.26

My purpose is not to write an apologetic for Christian doctrine nor to deny that Christians in practice violated their professed beliefs. But the strong strain of anti-Christian (and anti-Jewish) writing in ecological literature is an obstacle to exploring new ways of thinking that might be linked to very old ways.27 A wholesale condemnation of the Bible on the basis of a verse in the first book of the Bible ("Fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth") presumes that there is nothing to be learned from studying the actual history of both Christian and Jewish religions.28

Lynn White, Jr.'s essay was somewhat different in his trying to find a redeeming feature in Christian history. But in contrasting Francis of Assisi's "democracy of all God's creatures" to the standard Christian view, he compounded a problem that was already severe enough. He fed a romantic, overly simple idea into a movement whose temptation was to romanticize equality and avoid discriminating judgments. One author, in a careful study of Francis's view on this matter, writes: [The Bible] asserts the belief in divine creation, organized according to a plan that is hierarchical and unchanging, with all parts having their established positions and dependent on divine will and action. This was the most fundamental basis for Francis's conception of the natural world.29

Serious study of Francis would throw light on how language and attitudes are drastically different today, but those differences could shake us into discovering where indeed there might still be sameness. For example, despite Francis now being hailed as the patron saint of nature, he never used the word "nature" in his writings. How could he have got along without the word? He did not deal in such abstractions. G. K. Chesterton writes that "St. Francis was a man who did not want to see the wood for the trees." He did not respond to nature; he was responsible to particular beings that we abstract from with our term nature. "He did not call nature his mother; he called a particular donkey his brother or a particular sparrow his sister."30

As to his responsibility for the nonhuman world, Francis showed unusual respect for animals and inanimate objects. He could praise God for them; he engaged in listening and speaking to animals. Like any mystic, Francis believed that there is one respect in which creatures are equal: they are all equally nothing apart from divine creation. Within the hierarchy of what God has created, the humans are the morally responsible creatures. The humans have a power (on loan and in humility) that the other animals do not have. "After his preaching to the birds, for example—an act which stressed hierarchy and community at the same time—Francis gave the birds permission to leave."31

One response to Lynn White, Jr.'s portrait of Christianity was an essay by René Dubos, asserting that the true patron saint of ecology is Benedict of Nursia, the founder of the Benedictine monks. The Benedictines, both in the development of farming and the copying of manuscripts, have a sizeable part in the origin of Western civilization. The Benedictine rule, writes Dubos, is inspired by the second chapter of Genesis "in which the Good Lord places man in the Garden of Eden not as a master but rather in a spirit of stewardship."32 Dubos's recounting of this strand of Christianity was helpful, although pitting Benedictine against Franciscan traditions was somewhat unfortunate. Each tradition was an exercise in responsibility, bringing out different but legitimate responses to the needs of the time. The last line of Dubos's essay could include Benedictine, Franciscan, and dozens of other Christian strands: "Reverence for nature is compatible with willingness to accept responsibility for a creative stewardship of the earth."33

One testing point for the direction of ecology, the one that receives the most attention in the news media, is the human attitude to nonhuman animals. Extraordinary changes for the good have happened here. Public awareness has dramatically changed in the last two decades. The only drawback is a skewing of the larger movement into using a political language which can be misleading here. Since the publication of Peter Singer's Animal Liberation in 1975, the category of "animal rights" has come into common use. Singer's adoption of the term "speciesism" has not been very successful, but the idea behind it has spread rapidly.34

That idea is that beyond racism, sexism, ageism, classism is the ultimate bias, namely the claim that humans are superior to other species. As with previous -isms, court action can be required to protect the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness of all species. The courts have in fact been helpful in preserving the existence of some
species that were threatened with extinction. The ethical principle underlying these legal forays remains cloudy.

In a blistering review of Roderick Nash's The Rights of Nature, Mary Midgley notes that "'rights' is a legal term, describing the privileges of each contractor. It is a competitive, confrontational term (they have rights against one another), not a term which helps at all to arbitrate these clashes." Our ecological problem is in part a lack of categories beyond rights and equality. For thinking of whales or apes, the principle that "each one shall count as one" may be of service. What are we to do when we think about the two million species scientists have so far named among what may be one hundred million species?

When the Endangered Species Act of 1973 was passed, not many in Congress realized what they were doing; no senator voted against it and only four members of the House. The snail darter, the spotted owl, and a few hundred other species received a right to life. The list has gotten longer over the years; for each species removed, thirty new ones have been added. But over the last two decades several hundred thousand species have become extinct.

Is the only possible response to this fact a more aggressive attempt to extend equal rights? Or is the idea of equal rights subsidiary in a world where humans have to listen and then answer. In a book critical of the approach taken by the Endangered Species Act, Charles Mann and Mark Plummer conclude: "Crying 'no more extinctions,' produces a noble sound, but it does nothing to stop extinction. And it has the potential to worsen the plight of biodiversity, because demanding the perfect can prevent us from obtaining the merely good. To do better, we will have to accept the responsibility that comes with being human at this time in history."

We seem to be only in an early stage of developing an ethical language rich in distinctions for responding to our animal kin. The human race has had various distinctions, for example, between animals as pets and animals used for food. We intuitively distinguish between our relation to horse or dog and our relation to mosquito or cockroach. Does each housefly have the same importance as each whale? The more one asks such questions, the more enticing becomes a single principle: equal justice for all. But a pronouncement that all nature has rights and that all life is to be revered could be an escape from our responding to nonhuman beings with whom we have actual contact, and deciding what we are responsible for in our actions that affect the world of nonhumans.

The most fundamental ethical category relating to animals should be "care" rather than rights. Care of varying degrees and kinds can be directed toward the entire animal world. Care would lead to responsibility toward animals before we decide what actions to perform. Responsibility toward krill and plankton is of a different order than responsibility toward the family dog. One has to respond to personal experience of nonhuman beings, experience that includes information about their place in the universe.

There clearly are occasions when individual animals try to communicate with us. Only if someone cares, will he or she bother trying to understand. Elizabeth Thomas writes: "Our kind may be able to bully other species not because we are good at communication but because we aren't. When we ask things of animals, they often understand us. When they ask things of us we're often baffled. Hence animals frequently oblige us, but we seldom oblige them." The issue in these instances is not best handled by equality/inequality. When there is mutuality in relations, a different scale is at work, one that respects the relative autonomy of each party and tries to work out acceptable compromises.

Aldo Leopoldo in A Sand County Almanac, one of the founding books of the environmental movement, wrote that "all ethics rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts." That might be an acceptable principle, but the phrase "interdependent parts" requires clarification. Interdependency signifies that we are not talking of a part to whole relation. Community is composed of beings that become themselves by and in communion. Each being is responsible to all the others.

The humans are morally responsible to all the rest because of the power to perfect or to do damage to the community. The humans are the ones who have partially broken out. Their order is a restored order in the finding of their place. They are killers, not only in meat factories and fur farms but in bulldozing to build a house, walking across the grass, or breathing the air. For this human characteristic they need rituals of thanksgiving and forgiveness, as well as determination to avoid causing unnecessary suffering and to reduce suffering.

The humans are also the great producers; they make things not seen before, even by fellow human beings in previous eras. What the
humans make they have a right to use. Ethical questions have mostly revolved around ownership rights: which human has the right to use which piece of property. Laws exist to sort out what belongs to whom. When ownership is extended to land and other natural beings, rights are easily abused. If rights and obligations flow from within responsibility, then the ownership of land means to listen to the land and care for it.

The idea that one should take care of what one owns has not worked out well with what humans call “waste.” Since no one owns waste, who is supposed to take care of it? The solution to the problem of waste starts with one simple premise: there is no such thing as waste. Living bodies consume in the sense of using up. “They do not produce waste. What they take in they change, but they change it always into a form necessary for its use by a living body of another kind. And this exchange goes on and on, round and round, the wheel of life rising out of the soil, descending into it through the bodies of creatures.”

Hierarchy and Uniqueness

The image in the last quotation—a hierarchy of unique beings in a cycle of interdependence—suggests the direction for an ethical language that would properly bridge human and nonhuman. The language of equality is powerful though not fully adequate to racial problems; it is more markedly incapable of handling sexual interdependence. Ecological interdependence includes relations between humans, and human interdependence with nonhumans. Equality here is mostly irrelevant.

In a cycle of interdependence we might say that each is equally important to the existence of the cycle; with one missing link there is no chain. That seems to be what people mean by saying that all species are equal. But there is life beyond merely existing. The image of a chain is somewhat misleading. If one imagines a cosmos, a three-dimensional sphere, then all elements are necessary to the whole, but some are more central than others. Equality is a two-dimensional term, exact in its judgments about height, area, population, and anything reducible to quantity. The meaning of life, the beauty of the world, and the significance of human action are not measurable by equality/inequality.

Human responsibility is a three-dimensional term. It is conceivable that one can measure the response of a tuning fork or even the response of a dog. And Pavlov in his famous experiments showed that humans share with other animals in patterns of stimulation followed by response. But moral responsibility signifies the way in which humans differ. They can listen at various degrees of attention, they can evaluate their previous responses and then commit all or some of their energy in their answering activity. The humans, as Martin Buber said, are “the center of all surprise in the world.” People even surprise themselves, sometimes in disappointing ways, but often in accomplishing good things they did not know themselves capable of doing.

Does that mean humans are more important than other species? If “important” is a question of meaning, value, and significance, then humans are immeasurably more important, that is, important in ways that are impossible to state as a measurement. I am unpersuaded by scientists who, after surveying the skies or looking into a microscope or studying the archaeological record, declare that “man” is an insignificant speck who should stop trying to assert his importance. Such statements from individuals who spend their waking hours trying to achieve status, reputation, control of data, power of persuasion, money, breakthrough in knowledge, the Nobel prize, and endless other marks of achievement do not ring true.

The humans, as far as the humans know, are the center of meaning. Without the humans there simply are no judgments of meaning. It could be, as religions claim, that there is a greater mind, consciousness or source of meaning, in which humans only participate. That would not lessen human meaning but enhance it. No scientist can pronounce with certainty on that matter. What scientists could do is to stop telling (other) people that they are not really important.

If one sticks to measurements of size, then the human being is a barely visible speck. Modern astronomy was not needed to tell us that. As G. K. Chesterton said, “it is quite futile to argue that man is small compared to the cosmos; for man was always small compared to the nearest tree.” Human greatness depends on the ability to take in the entire universe in the form of knowledge and then respond in ways that reverberate without fixed limit. Aristotle saw intellectual knowledge as the human ability to become other than itself without ceasing to be itself. This mysterious human power invites endless inquiry and scientific data, but nothing can eliminate the mystery within this fragile animal.
Frederick Turner, acknowledging that measured in time and space human kind is a tiny speck, adds: "Measured in a more fundamental way, by density and complexity of information, we are already the largest objects in the universe." This statement turns against itself to try to shake up the understanding. Measuring the humans as the "largest objects in the universe" is a metaphorical way to go beyond mere objects to "density and complexity."

The statement relies on the word "information," which has become a favored word in the computer age. At least until recently, information was that aspect of knowledge reducible to quantity and measurement. The computer screen can provide a number for exactly how many bits of information are stored there. Many writers today are using "information" with a richer meaning, signifying (human) density and complexity. They may succeed, given that the term’s etymology does not confine the word to the superficial, mechanical, and impersonal meaning it has recently had.

For the present, however, I would be resistant to saying that "responsible to" is all a question of information. There are "well-informed” people who lack moral depth. There are other people who, though lacking the requisite material to play Jeopardy, are knowledgeable in morally complex ways. That is not a glorification of ignorance and lack of information. Rather, it is a denial that education consists in acquiring information and that the person having the most information is the best educated. Alfred North Whitehead criticized a view of education as preparing someone to some day read off answers to the universe. A better view, thought Whitehead, was that education was what remained after you have forgotten all (the information) you had learned.

Since all of our language implies spatial imagery and measurements of some kind, we can never entirely escape from physical models with shape and size. For imagining an organizing of elements, our language in recent centuries has been dominated by pyramids of power. The language of organization and moral discourse reflect each other. The superior is above, the inferior is below. To have high ideals is desirable because a person should strive to go higher in life. In Lawrence Kohlberg’s scheme of moral development, it is assumed without question that higher is better. The "man" who can abstract to a higher and higher level will be motivated by principle, not dragged down by his body, his feelings, his family, or his friends.

A morality of responsibility, when it has to use direction, would trust more to depth than to height. For the morally mature person, judgment comes from deeper down. Of course, depth can be taken in a two-dimensional way, "down" being a linear path. Responsibility needs a three-dimensional, organic movement, which can include movement to the depths and then rising, to a within and then outward, to a circling about a center that gathers in the periphery.

When imagery is confined to a triangle or pyramid, then change is limited to a form of leveling. Modern political revolutions have been intent on getting rid of class structure, of changing human relations from status to contract. The individual would be freed from the domination of aristocrats and nobles. But even in the United States we end up with an upper class, middle class, lower class; the pride of the country is that the middle class is large and can keep expanding. People who would like to get to the top may feel resentment toward those who are there. Did they really earn their way up there? Does the top deserve their power and wealth, or is it at the expense of the bottom and middle?

Except for a very few people at the pinnacle, rebellion in the name of egalitarianism sounds desirable. Despite the supposed liberty of the individual, people experience their work life and much of the rest of life as caught up in pyramids of power over which they have no effective power. One can count on applause when the politician delivers the line: Let’s get government off the backs of the people.

It is not surprising that, in the absence of any other imagery and language, ecological literature absorbs this rhetoric. Faceless bureaucrats have built a pyramid of privilege on the backs of the (equally) oppressed. The surprising part in an ecological application is that the oppressive bureaucracy is the human race. All the other species play on a level field. The humans—apparently because they were told by the Bible—broke out of the pack and declared themselves sole rulers and owners. Their brief period of delusion now coming to an end, their task is to climb down from the heights in their picture of the universe and recognize what they have always been: one of the millions of species that populate the earth. Join the democracy of all creatures in which equality reigns. Life will be more harmonious when "man" finds his place in "nature."

The one word that is used to summarize what is wrong is "hierarchy," an ordering of elements according to rank and importance. It is
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difficult to find any uses of "hierarchy" with a positive meaning in contemporary writing. Even people in business and government who are trying to reform organization say they are opposed to hierarchy, apparently having a pyramid in mind as the only possibility for hierarchic arrangement.

A profile of Arthur Sulzburger, Jr., publisher of the New York Times, quotes him as saying, "for the New York Times to become all it can and for it to flourish in the years ahead, we must reduce our dependency on hierarchy in decision-making of every sort." One gathers from the article that Sulzburger wishes to encourage open discussions in the newsroom and on retreats, better employee-management relations, more equitable treatment of blacks and women. While the publisher can say "we are trying to become more egalitarian," the newspaper is surely one of the most precisely structured organizations in the country; it carefully prepares people years in advance to take the next step into key positions at the paper. A New York Times without any kind of hierarchy is simply unimaginable.

Similarly, in the complicated centers of government, power is channeled by organizations that determine order and importance. Elizabeth Drew, in a description of the Clinton White House, quotes one advisor: "The president doesn't want hierarchy... He wants all kinds of advisors swirling around him constantly." She also quotes cabinet secretary Robert Reich's explanation that those close to the president are products of the 1960s "who when young were in reaction to the hierarchical society we inherited." The president may want advisors "swirling around him constantly," but there is some process by which those few dozen or hundred got chosen to be those advisors; and "swirling" has a rhythm and order to it; otherwise, listening and answering by someone in the middle cannot happen.

Hierarchy is a word that means sacred order. An objection to the sacred part (hier-) would be understandable, but when people dismiss hierarchy they seem to be rejecting the order of either human design or the natural world of patterns that rank elements within a whole. The attempt to reject the order in hierarchy can only lead to anarchy, a chaotic transition to some new hierarchy. All "men" are not equal in all ways. Some have bigger bodies than others; even more important for establishing their kind of order, some men have more guns.

The term hierarchy goes back to a pseudonymous Syrian monk in the sixth century, whose writings had profound effect in the Middle

Ages. The character known today as Pseudo-Dionysius wrote a treatise on hierarchy, the sacred order of the universe. He imagined a world similar to that described in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel: circles within circles. As in nearly all religious traditions, the imagery is circular and spherical. God was not imagined as a CEO in an office at the top of a skyscraper but as the ultimate power at the still center of the universe. The humans in this image were not at the top (there was no top), but somewhere near the center. Humans were not the most important creatures; angels were superior to them. Angelology plays a key role in Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologica. Perhaps there is some significance to the unexpected and widespread reemergence today of angels.

Whether or not there are beings superior to the humans, men and women played a central role in the hierarchy of creation. Everything was oriented around the center, and that is where human kind was imagined to be. In that sense, everything was for the human, but only a very small part of the world could and should be used by humans. The world was there for being blessed, listened to, appreciated, cared for. By entering human life, things were further exalted in their importance.

Everything in the hierarchy had its place, although the humans were not so arrogant as to think that they knew the place of each thing. Standing in the middle of a small clearing, the humans cannot see over the heads of the giraffes, the whales, the dolphins, the bears, and their other close kin. Eventually, they developed a looking glass to survey the sky and another to see creatures invisible to the human eye. They must still listen deep within themselves for the voice of each creature, somehow present in the human, the "workshop of all creation."

I think that this imagery is not irrelevant to the organization of the New York Times or the White House. The place to listen is not at the top but in the middle. Knowledge needs to move in a community exchange rather than up a single line from individual to individual. Of course, a pyramid is sometimes the best ordering if a task is precisely defined and the aim is to assemble a product. However, as a comprehensive basis for organizing political, religious, or educational communities, the pyramid is disastrously confining. Even in the business world today, advances in technology or the production of a good newspaper require another form of hierarchy than a pyramid.

In the nonhuman world of organization, we usually do not have to
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design circles within circles; they are already there. Magnificent cyclical designs surround us, most of them beyond our view or comprehension. Throughout history, humans have tracked their way through these designs, never seeing a complete picture of the cycles they were interfering with. Conflict and pain are part of the cycles of nature. Humans cannot eliminate the pain, but they should try to avoid adding to it.

On regular occasions, I hear a bang on my window as a bird flies into it, usually knocking itself unconscious. I know that shortly afterward a cat will come by and will proudly display to me the live bird in its mouth. As I go out to try to revive the bird and let it fly away, I am aware of being in the slightly absurd position of stopping a cat from doing what cats naturally do. However, since my window seems to be built on an ancient flight path, I also feel it is my interference (or the house builder’s) that has brought this bird to its current plight.

Much of ethics today is not much more effective than temporarily saving one stricken animal, a gesture ridiculously disproportionate to the sea of violence, suffering, and destruction all about us. But responsibility requires responding to the situation we are in. Devoting one’s time and energy to the care of one small being is the basis for any universalistic claims. Small gestures have to restrain grand visions.

The loss of a hierarchic principle would not bring humans closer to the rest of the world. Denial of hierarchy is simply an evasion of responsibility. The humans are superior in receptivity; their superiority is an obligation, a burden. Humans are the best at suffering, the basis for their glory and also the reason for their fears. It is because they suffer the world, that is, receive it into themselves, that their lives are richer in quality than are other species. They can also foresee their deaths and suffer not only in dying but in thinking about dying. Other animals can suffer painful deaths, but only the humans get the news six months in advance so that they can start experiencing a long process of dying.

Suffering is the basis of human uniqueness. The humans are the most unique of all the animals; they are the most different of animals because they are like all the animals. The term “unique” offers one possibility for dealing with the issue of same and different. It is a quite commonly used word but one whose paradox is seldom noticed. “Unique” is one of the most unique words in the language.

As a start to exploring the meaning of “unique,” one must acknowledg that grammarians often insist that terms such as more, very, or most cannot be placed before unique; either a thing is unique or it is not. But people regularly say “very unique” or “most unique” because they sense that unique is always a comparative term. When people say “very unique” they mean “very nearly unique” or closer to unique than another. “Unique” means different from all others. But since a thing cannot be different from all other things (they are at least the same in being things), uniqueness is a way of describing a process of increasing difference.

There are two directions that this process of increasing difference can take. One is a process of exclusion, the other a process of inclusion or at least the power to include. In the sequence 333M, 33M, 3M, M, the last element in the set can be seen as the most unique. It has the fewest notes in common with the other elements. It is almost totally different by way of exclusion. In an opposite direction, with the sequence a, ab, abc, abcd, the last element can be called the most unique. It is different from all the others by having the most notes in common and by being the most inclusive.

In neither case is the last element finally and totally unique. In the first set, the last element has one note, but it is still the same as the other elements in being an element. In the second set, there is the possibility of an element abcd following in sequence. No being can have no notes in common with all others; no being, so long as history endures, can have all notes in common with the others.

Uniqueness by increasing exclusiveness belongs to the two-dimensional world. As one slices up space, or time imagined spatially, one can approach a uniqueness of exclusion: “this was a unique event.” The Greeks thought there were atoms, so named because they had no characteristics except their indivisibility. We now know that not only can atoms be split, but a new, complex world is inside. Atoms have lots of common notes with others; protons or electrons have fewer. When humans try to make themselves unique in this way, they look for a characteristic that no one else has; the result is usually eccentric and unsuccessful. There are only so many notes to establish such difference. Adolescent fads in rebellion against authority produce a depressing sameness: the clothes, the hairstyle, the drug. A haircut cannot be totally unique; it cannot even be very unique once a few other people start imitating it.

The specifically human uniqueness can only be achieved by not try-
ing to assert one’s unique property. The paradox, which every postadolescent should have learned, is that the formation of the self comes about by communion. One has to let go and become unique by letting the whole world flow in. What we discover is our kinship with everything and everyone. The I becomes utterly distinctive, humanly unique, because of its incorporation of human and nonhuman life.\(^{58}\)

A nonhuman animal has a degree of uniqueness based on a process of openness to the other. A dog or a horse can have a distinct personality, different from all the others. But the human being’s nature is to be unique; its nature is an openness to all other natures. The human being is born unique; its vocation is to become more unique. Born with little or nothing that can be called instincts, the human is the most open to development. Being less programmed at birth makes for more excitement, joy, and fear. Becoming unique requires a constant process of being responsible to the world and responsible for one’s actions.

Some recent thinkers have come to the conclusion that there is no self. The human self having been “decentered,” it is now declared “fictive.”\(^{59}\) This stream of thought is badly in need of both feminist and ecological movements. The self needs a recentering, but it cannot be the dictatorial self of early modern thinking. A self that listens to men, women, children, animals, trees, and rocks will be able to relax and let conversation and organic flow carry the burden. “Such a self,” writes Jane Flax, “is simultaneously embodied, gendered, social, and unique.”\(^{60}\)

The experience of the contemporary person is often one of suddenly finding no one who will give orders: neither a father in heaven nor a father on earth and no stern, rational rule-giver within the self. Too narrow a focus on fathers and sons left us unprepared to deal with “mother nature.” The man who had thought nature was under his feet and was totally under control may now feel engulfed by nature. Peaceful surrender may seem preferable to a hopeless attempt to conquer, but it means the disappearance of moral responsibility.

If one begins with the question “to whom and to what am I responsible,” then today’s ecological upheaval holds the possibility of regrounding politics, business, ethics, religion. Neither Christianity, Judaism, Islam nor other major religions are necessarily opposed to ecology. Religions, in fact, are needed sources of the imagery, language, and attitude needed today. In turn, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and other religions need to rethink their doctrines in light of our new awareness of human–nonhuman relations. It is not an exaggeration to say that the chief religious movement in the world today, especially after the fall of communism, is ecology or environmentalism. But it is badly in need of conversation with older religions that have more experience with directing passionate feelings into at least harmless and possibly productive expression.