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ON THE COVER
Middle Pond, Ashapoo Plantation, SC.

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PHILOSOPHY, MARX SAID, ONLY INTERPRETS THE WORLD, BUT THE POINT IS TO CHANGE IT. SUCH A MOMENT OF CRITIQUE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IS URGENTLY NEEDED NOW. WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF UNUSUALLY RAPID AND EXTENSIVE SPECIES EXTINCTION, WHICH ELIZABETH KOLBERT EXAMINES IN HER RECENT BOOK, *THE SIXTH EXTINCTION: AN UNNATURAL HISTORY*. WE ARE ALSO IN THE MIDST OF UNPRECEDENTED CLIMATE CHANGE AND GLOBAL WARMING, WHICH PHILOSOPHER STEPHEN GARDINER EXPLORES IN HIS BOOK, *A PERFECT MORAL STORM: THE ETHICAL TRAGEDY OF CLIMATE CHANGE*. THESE TWO WORKS ARE ILLUMINATING TO READ SIDE BY SIDE. BUT BRACE YOURSELF.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO—ON SEPTEMBER 1, 1914, TO BE EXACT—the last known passenger pigeon died in the Cincinnati zoo. Her name was Martha. But to paraphrase the sage Ecclesiastes, let us now praise famous creatures. Today and every day in 2014, countless species and individual plants and animals, mostly unknown and nameless, disappear forever. We don’t know the details, but we do pretty well understand the processes and forces at work. They are not simply the evolutionary workings of natural selection. The great extinction going on now has a natural history to it, of course, but it also has an “unnatural history,” as Kolbert notes.

HUMAN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IS TRANSFORMING THE BIOTA OF THE WORLD BY MANY MEANS, DIRECT AND INDIRECT, SIMPLIFYING AND CULLING MUCH OF LIFE. AS WITH SO MUCH OF HUMAN ACTIVITY, THIS CANNOT BE CALLED UNNATURAL IN SOME THOROUGHGOING SENSE, FOR OUR TECHNOLOGY AND ITS EFFECTS OPERATE IN ACCORDANCE WITH PHYSICAL, CHEMICAL, AND BIOLOGICAL LAWS. LIVING ECOSYSTEMS ARE DYNAMIC AND RESILIENT: THEY TRANSFORM WITH AND WITHOUT HUMAN PARTICIPATION. THEY CAN TOLERATE AND CLEAN UP AFTER OUR MESSES, UP TO A POINT. BUT WHAT IS “UNNATURAL” ABOUT THE PRESENT TIME, WHAT MAKES ANTHROPOGENIC INFLUENCES NOW SO DESTRUCTIVE AND DELETERIOUS, IS THAT WE ARE DOING SO MUCH, SO FAST, EVERYWHERE. LET’S BE HONEST: *TOO MUCH, TOO FAST*. RIGHT NOW, THE QUANTITY, SCALE, AND PACE OF HUMAN INFLUENCE ON THE NATURAL WORLD ARE UNPRECEDENTED. THE GRAPHS OF THIS INFLUENCE AND ITS ECOCLOGICAL EFFECTS DO NOT JUST START CLIMBING GRADUALLY FIVE THOUSAND YEARS AGO WITH THE AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION AND THE CREATION OF STATES AND CITIES, OR THREE HUNDRED YEARS AGO WITH THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION; THESE LINES STAY PRETTY MUCH LEVEL OR GRADUALLY INCREASE OVER ALL THIS VAST AMOUNT OF TIME, AND THEN—ABOUT WHEN MARtha WAS BREATHING HER LAST—they suddenly begin to leap almost straight up. WITH DATA INVOLVING SOME ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES, THESE UNPRECEDENTED SPIKES TAKE PLACE WITHIN THE PAST FIFTY YEARS—WTHIN THE LIFETIMES OF THOSE NOW READING THIS, OR THEIR PARENTS.

JUST ONE EXAMPLE: SMALL, BUT NOT INSIGNIFICANT. WHERE I LIVE, SINGLE-USE PLASTIC BAGS WERE INTRODUCED IN GROCERY STORES AND OTHER PLACES IN 1985. BLOWING HERE AND THERE LIKE LITTLE TUMBLEWEEDS UP TO NO GOOD, THEY COLLECT IN STORM DRAINS, IMPALE THEMSELVES ON BUSHES, AND EVENTUALLY BREAK DOWN INTO SMALL SHARDS OF LONG-LIVED PLASTIC THAT MAKE THEIR WAY INTO THE HUDSON RIVER, ATTRACTING MICROBES AND ENTERING THE FOOD CHAIN OF RIVER LIFE. MY VILLAGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, ON WHICH I SIT, IS NOW CONSIDERING A LAW BANNING SUCH BAGS AND PROMOTING REUSABLE ONES INSTEAD. MANY CITIES AND TOWNS HAVE DONE THIS. BUT HAVING BEEN AROUND FOR A GENERATION, SINGLE-USE PLASTIC BAGS ARE...
the new normal; what is foreign to the land has become familiar in the landscape of our daily lives and habits.

This is happening from sea to shining sea. A 2007 study by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors pointed out that: “Each year, approximately 6 billion plastic carryout bags are consumed in Los Angeles County. This is equivalent to 600 bags per person per year. If tied together, these bags would form a string long enough to reach the moon and back, five times.” A 2009 study by the R3 Consulting Group of the effects of single-use plastic bags in the City of Santa Monica estimated that residents there disposed of 30 million single use plastic bags per year. (In Southern California at the time it was estimated that only about 5 percent of such bags are recycled.)

People adjust to change (in this case, change driven by the profit motive and imposed from the outside by private corporate policy) and normalize it in their minds. People feel threatened by the thought of having “their” plastic bags taken away. They don’t remember a time before them. They rationalize their virtues. In public hearings, I and my fellow trustees were told: “Plastic bags are so much more convenient.”; “My customers would go elsewhere if I could not offer them such bags for their purchases.”; and “Reusable bags are not hygienic.”

What does Earth ask of us? For starters, self-restraint.

With climate change a similar story applies, and biodiversity decline and climate change are interlinked, of course. Current temperatures and concentrations of CO2 and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are at levels unprecedented during the time of humans on Earth. We are doing so much, so fast, that we are throwing the planet into a thermodynamic imbalance.

If the story of extinction and biodiversity is a tale told in an elegiac mood (a voice of memory, regret, humility in the face of time, mortality, and fragility), then the story of climate change is to be told in a prophetic voice (a tone of prospect, warning, and a shaking off of complacency, blindness, and the illusion of invulnerability). It is in this recognition of finitude that memory and imagination—a sense of the presence of the past and a sense of the presence of the future—come together.

The metaphor of a “perfect storm” in reference to global climate change is an apt one because people remember the book and movie of that title and because people are becoming alarmed by the perceived (and actual) increasing frequency and severity of violent weather events throughout the world. The perfect storm metaphor is also apt scientifically and ethically because the nature of the challenge posed by climate change is made up of multiple dimensions that interact to compound the difficulty of successfully meeting that challenge and of weathering the moral storm that is already here and still coming.

An international group of scientists led by James Hansen recently conducted a review of the literature on the public health effects of climate change and the current projections of the IPCC. It reminds us that the consumption of fossil carbon energy (coal, petroleum, natural gas) emits massive amounts of carbon and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, some of which will remain there for millennia, and
most of which will find its way into the oceans.\(^2\) This is changing the composition and behavior of Earth’s atmosphere, and the oceanic-atmospheric interaction, in ways that have put the planet into an energy imbalance. This is increasing global temperature; melting ice masses; affecting ocean currents, salinity, and pH; altering weather and storm patterns; and changing the conditions for land ecosystems and habitats all over the world. The thermal inertia of the deep ocean, the possible release of methane deposits in the permafrost, and the prospect of rapid melting of land-based ice sheets present slow-acting threshold effects. This means that human activity leading to temperature rise beyond a certain point will set in motion geophysical processes with long-delayed effects. Once begun, they cannot be stopped by human remediation, and they will not abate for decades or even centuries.

We do not know precisely what those trigger-point temperatures are, but it is very likely that we are on track to reach and exceed them sometime in this century unless immediate action is taken. Substantial reductions in the amount of carbon entering the atmosphere is required via reduced consumption, increased natural sequestration such as reforestation, or a combination of both. Like what is called “de-extinction” (using genetic engineering to produce viable embryos with the genome of an extinct species as a response to species loss), the artificial sequestration of atmospheric carbon is a theoretically possible high-tech response to climate change, but its practical application is uncertain, its unintended side effects unknown, and its economic costs enormous (perhaps several times the current total of global gross domestic product).

Can places like the Center for Humans and Nature, together with many other thinkers and doers in the conservation movement and in the fields of environmental studies, rise to this occasion and do what the Earth asks of us? Can we make a substantial contribution to the social intelligence of our societies in coping with this crisis?

The conditions are perilous; success is uncertain; the stakes are very high. Hansen and colleagues throw down the gauntlet (again) in terms so direct that the moral challenge should be difficult to refuse or cower away from.

A set of actions exists with a good chance of averting ‘dangerous’ climate change, if the actions begin now. However, we also know that time is running out . . . [and] large irreversible climate changes will become unavoidable. Our parent’s generation did not know that their energy use would harm future generations and other life on the planet. If we do not change our course, we can only pretend that we did not know.”\(^3\)

Pretending that you did not know is what happens to you when you lack the moral imagination to sense the presence of the future. The genie is out of the bottle as far as knowing is concerned. It is no longer a question of knowing but of doing—of discovering the will to act. Pretending that you did not know is all you have to fall back on when you have no other valid moral excuse for wrongful and harmful action or inaction. Pleading ignorance and evading responsibility don’t go over well in such proceedings. Part
of what I mean by “moral imagination” involves the ability to envision a figurative dialogue with those whose lives you have touched, in which you are to be held accountable for what you have done. Conscience is the place of this accounting. Memory and foresight are its voices.4

The upshot appears to be this. The use of the most significant source of energy upon which humankind now relies must be curtailed very soon and replaced with energy sources that do not rely on fossil carbon. Most of the remaining fossil carbon deposits must be left in the ground. Economic and political ways must be found to prompt this massive change in human behavior, especially among people and nations that are the most intensive carbon users and are the world’s richest, most powerful, and most materially comfortable. Ways must be found to offset the hardship and disruption that these economic changes will cause, especially in societies that are very highly stratified in terms of wealth and income. This is a global phenomenon, so these responses must be applied not only within nations but among them. It is also an intergenerational problem. If we don’t pay these prices now, others will have to pay a much larger price for the health consequences and social disruption later, likely under much less auspicious circumstances. And climate change is only one of the planetary boundaries whose safe operating margins human technology is encroaching on.5

The atmosphere and oceans form a complex, dynamic geophysical system. Climate is intimately connected to the basics of human survival, well-being, and social order: our food supply, our fresh water supply, our shelter, our public health infrastructure, our susceptibility to infectious disease, our ongoing dependency on biodiversity and ecosystem services. Climate change will undermine and degrade each of these sources of our humanness, this planetary ground within which our being is rooted. And then, as if this weren’t enough, there is the disruption that climate change will bring about in the social systems on which we rely for orderly forms of life: transportation, distribution, sanitation, law enforcement. All these are undermined by political instability caused by the fear and disrupted expectations of large populations, and by massive population migrations caused by war, famine, drought, flooding of coastal areas, and the like.

There are powerful reasons of enlightened self-interest that by their own inner logic alone should lead to the steps required to limit the damage we are doing to the climate system and the other fundamental planetary systems of life: biodiversity, nitrogen load, fresh water, and so on. And yet look at what is happening and what seems likely to happen. The neurological markers of enlightened, long-term self-interest are not lighting up in the brain scans of our leaders. Apparently, its reasons are weaker than the logic of competitive advantage in market economics and market politics, and our institutions of governance are so constructed that they are overwhelmed by more short-term, short-sighted forces.

The hour is upon us when it is essential to reorient our predominant cultural understandings of the human place in the natural world. This is both a scientific and a philosophical undertaking. It is also essential to reconceive the predominant economic worldview of neoliberal global capitalism. This requires a new understanding
of the needs and circumstances of human societies and individuals—social welfare, human flourishing, rights and liberties, growth, progress, and wealth. It also requires new institutional forms and limits on the permitted functioning and effects of economic markets, on the organization of human labor and work, and on the basic activities of extraction of natural resources and expulsion of waste products into natural systems. Finally, it is essential to restructure our value priorities. This requires the widespread recognition and acceptance of the imperative of ecological responsibility, the present and intergenerational duties we have in our own individual and species flourishing, and also the duties humans have to all forms of life and to the sustainability and resilience of living systems.

No one should underestimate the stakes or the difficulty of the conceptual and the practical work—the moral and the political work—ahead. In his book Gardiner identifies and discusses significant challenges to be met: Do our polities have the capacity to act in time to mitigate climate change? Can we achieve just distribution of resources on a global scale and deal fairly with those peoples of the world who have done little to cause the problem but who will have to forgo much? Can we achieve intergenerational justice among those living today? In a previous column, “Just Cities,” in MN 7.1 (January 2014), I touched on these questions. Here I would like to concentrate on the further question of whether we can find a place for those yet unborn in a new global order of justice and governance.

The metaphor of a global order, like the metaphors of an ecological system or the biosphere, captures the idea of reciprocal relationality and interdependency among contemporaneous persons (human and nonhuman persons). But when we talk about relationships with persons that do not yet exist, inhabiting ecosystems and states of the world that do not yet exist, and may never exist depending on what we do, what is the moral force of those relationships with those beings and lives that are seemingly “not yet”? Surely it is incorrect to say that there is no conceivable relationship here, or that such a notion violates the meaning of the concept of relationship. What we do now will in fact affect those not yet alive and the natural world of their present in the future. Granted, this cannot be reciprocal since the future party cannot affect us in a direct sense, but the future ones can affect us through the medium of our own moral imagination and conscience, with which we craft narratives of what is to come and make judgments about it. And our actions in the present do have the power to shape substantially the quality of life and the options of future people and the integrity and resiliency of the future ecosystems they inhabit. Climate change brings the future perfect tense of ethics to the fore in dramatic fashion—the not yet, but already.

In his famous essay, “What is Enlightenment?” Immanuel Kant announced the arrival of the age of maturity for humankind. The notion of the “Anthropocene” age carries much the same connotation: we have grown into adults with great power to affect the conditions of life and have great corresponding responsibility for all life. We are aware—even, at times, to an exaggerated extent—of our power, but act as though we are unaware of our
responsibility, or pretend to be. From an ethical point of view, the time for duty and humility—conscience and caring—has come. The time for indulging our narcissism is over.

Moreover, if the future is at risk, we in the present are already adversely affected. How? Because the continuation of meaningful agency depends on the future as much as on the past and present. Referring to the day on which he thought the meaning-making capacity of his culture had died, Chief Plenty Coups of the Crow nation remarked that agency for the crow had ceased as well: “... when the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened.” 6 This puts a new twist on the notion of self-interest because it extends the concepts of meaningful agency and the self forward in time.

In his interesting book *Death and the Afterlife*, philosopher Samuel Scheffler poses the following question: If we did not believe that there would be future people, would anything matter to us? If nothing did matter to us, Scheffler maintains, then surely fundamental aspects of our humanness—the meaningfulness of our activities and projects in the present—would be altered, or even lost. If we knew that a giant asteroid would destroy the Earth in a year’s time, would anyone continue to make the effort to find a cure for cancer? If we knew that the last human being who would ever be born had already died, and the rest of humankind would die out in a few decades, would anyone take the trouble to write a great work of philosophy or a great novel? Creative work might still be done for the sheer joy of it, but not for the ages. Our belief in a human future (a key aspect of which is a viable, resilient natural future) is essential to our present. How then can we say that future people do not matter?

My sense is that we do have the capacity to muster the moral imagination necessary to appreciate the presence of the future. We can grasp the fact that we have a responsibility here and now for what we are doing to the well-being and conditions of life of those who are not yet. Of course, we can only infer in a generic way how human beings will think, feel, and act and how the biotic communities of the Earth will function in the future. That generic knowledge and that imaginative connection between present and future experience are premised on an assumption of some measure of social and biological continuity and commensurability, to be sure. But this is sufficient to motivate judgments of moral responsibility for the actions we do now. That is really all a sense of responsibility and the logic of obligation require, or have ever required. I think it is time to stop wringing our hands about the philosophical puzzle of whether anything we do in the present can be said to harm eventual people because without our actions they would not come into existence at all. And we should stop distracting ourselves with hoped for technological fixes, acting like the economist who was at the bottom of a deep hole and when asked how to get out replied, “Assume a ladder.”

Yes, we can grasp the fact that we have a responsibility here and now for what is happening to the planet. At the same time, I acknowledge that politically and culturally it is not obvious at all that this will happen. Close to the cognitive and the affective center of what
impedes us lies a cultural blindness concerning relationality and interdependency. Like a civilizational form of Capgras syndrome, it is the incapacity to acknowledge kindred beings and friends with gratitude; the terrible failing of which Robin Kimmerer speaks. And no doubt, other factors of greed and power and ideological politics may be equally important.

Most of us reading this, as men and women of ideas in the community of minding nature, have few resources to stand up to those forces. But we may be able to do something about the state of thinking and motivation in our societies at various levels. In this way, we can try to bring moral imagination and moral conscience to bear against consumption, pollution, and political and economic power that push us further toward disruptive planetary change and that promise to truncate the futures of persons for decades or even centuries to come.

In this issue, some vital resources of this kind of moral imagination are on offer. We feature lead essays by Center for Humans and Nature Senior Scholars Kathleen Dean Moore and Robin Kimmerer, who led discussion on the topic, “What does Earth ask of us?” in the Center’s series of Questions for a Resilient Future.

A humbling visit to Española Island in the Galapagos archipelago leads Kathleen Dean Moore to address the true responsibilities of human beings and the rights of Nature. Reflecting on the recent Ecuadorian constitution and contrasting it with American law, Moore shows that taking Pachamama (Mother Earth) seriously changes land use, changes government regulation, and changes us. The concept of rights is important in this way in both ethics and the law, but the issue of whether and how the notion of rights should be extended to non-human entities has been widely debated for many years. Through amendments to its constitution in 2010, Ecuador became the first nation to recognize fundamental rights and protections for the natural world. Moore’s essay contrasts the legal outlook in Ecuador with that of the United States as reflected in major Supreme Court decisions and the Endangered Species Act. But she weaves this legal and philosophical discussion through more basic personal reflections on time spent in the Galapagos National Park of Ecuador, where one can directly experience a world in which the human individual is definitely not the sovereign being, lording over all others.

Robin Kimmerer turns to cultural sources to highlight both the importance of human responsibility for the natural world and the strangeness of the Western moral and economic perspective. She provides an interesting way to think about the problematic habit in our society of asking what’s in it for us (at both the individual and the species level). She asks instead, What can I give in return for the gifts of the Earth? We need the answers, but we also need to listen and learn how to even ask the question in the first place. She brings to the forefront of attention more fundamental notions to counter that sort of self-centeredness. Gratitude rather than greed. Care rather than consumption. For this gestalt shift, she has recourse to the insight of the Potawatomi and other first peoples of the Great Lakes region of North America. Their traditional
story of the creation and beginnings of the world takes place at Turtle Island rather than the Garden of Eden. The contrasts are many between the two narratives and are important to ponder. Suffice to say here, that as the place of human being is created on the soil that became the island, it is the rest of the natural world that supports and sustains the human. Humanity’s ancestor is the Skywoman who falls into the human condition and needs the whole of life to sustain her own. Now the world needs our support: gratitude, reciprocity, and the ability to perceive that accepting responsibility and receiving a gift are actually two sides of the same coin.

In her article, Anja Claus carries on the themes sounded by Moore and Kimmerer and discusses the meaning of relationship—particularly a relationship between human beings and the rest of nature—and the importance of the concrete places in which we dwell, as well as human awareness of place and the meaning it conveys. In his essay, Luzma Fabiola Nava turns our attention to the world of water beneath, around, and among our activities and our places. He reviews a recent book by David Groenfeldt on ethical issues in water conversation and management. Finally, again touching on the theme of respect, responsibility, and place, Buddy Huffaker reviews a new documentary film centered on the life and work of Jens Jensen, one of the most important landscape architects of the twentieth century.

Diverse flora and fauna; islands on turtles and islands inhabited by them; gratitude; kindness; mutual respect; life-giving water; parks; places of caring, community, and justice; remembering and stories told of beginnings; the presence of the future—all are in this issue. All are robust, yet vulnerable; all are essential for thought in a time of future tense consequences.
What does Earth ask of us? Restraint, respect, and maybe—after all these years—recognition of the rights of Nature. What would that mean? What moral sense does it make? How is it playing out in Ecuador—the first nation to grant constitutional rights to the natural world?

On Española Island in Ecuador’s Galapagos archipelago, all the animals are crying for their mothers. Sea lion pups bawl. Nazca boobies honk and whistle. Swallow-tail gull chicks do some aggressive, clattery thing. Only the lava lizards are silent as they leap from rock to rock. If they are hissing, I can’t hear them over the belch and squawk. And the smells? Guano, above all else, and the malodor of a desiccating storm petrel, splayed on the gravel. From the turds of sea-lions, the smell of dead fish and sick dog. A booby stands on the downy corpse of an oversized chick, kneading the body with its greenish feet. Whether this is clumsy CPR or blind rage or some gruesome king-of-the-mountain game, I do not know. The lava itself exudes the sulfur and soot of creation. Something smells like a sweet pickle. I smell heavily of coconut sunscreen and sweat.

Every little island in the chain has its little cloud, and every little cloud has its island, and that’s apparently the rule: if a cloud has no island, it is obliged to vanish. The lava mounds are black and red, and so are the marine iguanas that hang vertically with their claws in rock crevices and their tails in the sea. Every rock has something gaudy standing on it and something white dripping over it, and there are many, many rocks. An alpha-male sea lion arches his back and raises his head, swaying. There is no mistaking his place in the hierarchy of living things.

As for me, I know my place too. I mean this figuratively and literally: I have been put in my place here among the wheeling lives. It’s quite a small place beside a white post, which is the only place I am allowed to sit. If I venture too close to a nest, a quick peck from a booby will remove a divot from my calf, and a park ranger will gently admonish me, “Stay on trail please.” I’m not in charge here. I have no right to rummage around or to take so much as a pebble. The animals will allow me to sit quietly for a short time, but the rights-holders in this place are the marine iguanas and the baby sea lions and maybe a couple hundred milling shearwaters. In this place, I am required to show respect: talking baby-talk to the animals or demeaning them in any other way is expressly forbidden.

I don’t have much moral standing in the park, either. I have instrumental value to the island, I suppose. I am tolerated for the modest ecosystem services I provide—a slug of shade now occupied by an iguana, and maybe a bit of moisture if I were to pee (also forbidden). My corpse wouldn’t have much value—there are no big scavengers here and there is plenty of calcium already. Certainly I have economic value—US dollars for the guides and guards who keep non-native species like me at bay. But I can’t imagine that I am regarded by the animals as having any intrinsic value at all, certainly not for my beauty: I am squatting here in baggy shorts, wearing a striped bath towel on my head. I shift my towel to hide from the ferocious equatorial sun. Another iguana sashays her great weight into my shadow. A swallow-tail gull shoots out an arc of guano. It is very, very hot, even this early in the day.
Under ordinary circumstances, I would resent being relegated without a vote to subsidiary status. I’m an adult *Homo sapiens*, for god’s sake, the pinnacle of creation, and I’m not used to animals using me and showing me this complete disregard. Before the day is out, a booby will walk right over my feet and never even care. In the Galapagos National Park of Ecuador, the animals are free to do as they please. I have to follow strict rules for their benefit or be banished, while their rights to enjoy life and liberty, and to pursue happiness in their own lunatic ways are absolute. I’ve always wondered what it would be like to live in a world that was flipped on its head—if our species had no rights, while other species had the right to walk all over us without regard or consequence. Now I know. It makes me strangely happy.

North American conservationist Aldo Leopold wrote that the history of the moral evolution of humanity is mapped by the history of the expansion of the sphere of our moral concern. As humanity has become more ethically developed, he said, people have embraced a wider and wider circle of beings as worthy of moral consideration and thus worthy of rights—first family members, then clan members, then property owners, then former slaves, then women, and so it goes. If he is correct, then human beings have just made a quantum leap forward in moral development. That’s because Ecuador in 2010 became the first nation on the planet to grant constitutional rights to the natural world—to Pachamama (sometimes spelled Pacha Mama), who is Mother Earth, Nature, the natural world of plants and animals, volcanoes and waterfalls, leaping lizards and hummingbirds. Sixty-five percent of voters approved the change.

The enumerated rights of the natural world are extensive in Ecuador. They effectively grant natural objects legal standing as persons. The rights-holders are species, ecosystems, and natural cycles, including cycles of regeneration and evolution. The rights are held directly: it is damage to the natural systems and to their members—to their existence and regeneration—that matters, not the damage to the human beings who benefit from their natural processes. The rights are both negative and positive. Negative rights prohibit actions that disrespect and damage the natural world; positive rights require government action to prevent their harm. Here is some of the language in the Ecuadorian constitution:

**Article 71.** Nature, or Pacha Mama, where life is reproduced and occurs, has the right to integral respect for its existence and for the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes. All persons, communities, peoples and nations can call upon public authorities to enforce the rights of nature...

**Article 72.** Nature has the right to be restored. This restoration shall be apart from the obligation of the State and natural persons or legal entities to compensate individuals and communities that depend on affected natural systems...

**Article 73.** The State shall apply preventive and restrictive measures on activities that might lead to the extinction of species, the destruction of ecosystems and the permanent alteration of natural cycles...

I would say that this is a very big deal. Others say that these are just words—and real change will not come until the words are put into action. A young, open-faced Ecuadorian friend, Orlando, is one of these. “Yes, yes,” he says, “but this is just for the indigenous people. No one pays attention.” But to a philosopher (as I confess to being), this is a sea-change, a paradigm shift, a new beginning, a testament to the human ability to see the world in new ways—even if (maybe, especially if) these are only words. Words express ideas, and these particular ideas are powerful and consequential. They tell a new story about who we are in relation to the world, we humans, and how we ought to live.

When I asked another Ecuadorian friend, Francisco, about the importance of the rights of Nature, he led...
me down a trail that dropped steeply into a deep and shaded river gorge (entrance fee, “un dolar”). It worried me that at six thousand feet in the Andes, every step down was going to have to be a step back up, but there were moss-roofed ice cream stands now and then, each with its Donald Duck litter barrel, so on down I went. Water dripped from lianas and pooled in bromeliads. The trail was moss-green cobbles, slick enough to require a rented walking stick (“cincuenta centavos”). Beneath fern-covered slabs of concrete dislodged by an earthquake (“Pachamama can be angry”), under a carved sun and moon (“the children of Pachamama”), through a sweet cloud of orchids (“Pachamama is very beautiful”), past a Coca-Cola booth (“un dolar”), we followed the path toward the sound of thunder (“Por favor, a plastic bag for your camera?”).

Around the corner was a stupendous waterfall. It rumbled over a ledge, bashed into a giant basalt tooth and pulverized into mist that filled the cauldron. Two rivers swirled past the tooth. The air was suddenly cold. In fact, the air was suddenly not air, but water. Water soaked my raincoat, drenched my face, and wetted my camera, because of course I had turned down the plastic bag. Who can take pictures through a plastic bag, and who could have imagined a river so completely transformed into spray?

There had been plans to build a huge hydroelectric plant at this waterfall. It didn’t happen. The local people make their living from this waterfall, Francisco explained—the renters of walking sticks and purveyors of ice cream. They told the government they did not want the waterfall destroyed. Besides, they said, the waterfall embodied Pachamama in her greatest power and beauty, and threatened to embody Pachamama in her greatest fury. The hydroelectric plant went in downstream. Who can say which argument was most persuasive?

It’s significant, though, that Ecuador’s new constitutional provisions have been upheld in court. The case: *Wheeler c. Director de la Procuraduría General Del Estado de Loja*. The issue: Can a provincial government’s road widening project dump construction debris into a river, narrowing it and so creating floods that erode downstream lands? People brought the suit, of course. But here’s what’s new and huge: they filed suit for violation of the rights of the land itself, complaining of damage not to themselves, but to the riverbank for its own sake. Never before has a riverine system been able to sue on its own behalf without being thrown out of court for lack of legal standing. And not only was the voice of Nature heard in court—Nature won the case.

The court ruled that the right of the river to be whole trumps the right of the local government to damage it. And they ruled that the burden of proof was not on the river to prove that it had been damaged; rather the burden was on the government to prove that its earthmovers had done no harm. Once again, it’s possible to say that nothing has changed because the local government has not yet removed the rocks or repaired the river. I would say that on the contrary, this precedent offers an important model to a world that has struggled (and perhaps stalled) in its effort to think in new ways about the relation of *Homo sapiens* to other living things and natural systems.

Way back in 1972, the U.S. Forest Service granted Walt Disney Enterprises license to develop an 80-acre ski resort in the Mineral King Valley, “an area of great natural beauty” adjacent to Sequoia National Park. In *Sierra Club v. Morton*, the Sierra Club sued to stop the development, arguing that its members, who used the forest for recreation, would be harmed if the forest was harmed. The Court threw the case out, arguing that the Sierra Club could not prove significant damage to its members. Nobody talked about the damage to the forest, which would be cut to stumps. Nobody talked about the damage to the rivers or to the salmon, suffocating with silt in their gills, or about the damage to the bulldozed mushrooms or nesting wrens. Nobody talked about the silencing of the frogs. The only harm that counted was to Sierra Club members in their safari vests and binoculars. And that wasn’t harm enough.

What was that about? The background is that in the United States, only persons have legal standing to sue on their own behalf. That’s what it means to be a person under the law—to be able to bring a case in your own name, claim harm to yourself, and use the awarded damages to repair the harm to you.

U.S. courts have no trouble imagining that a corporation is a person and according it rights—even the
right to free speech, which is to say, the right to influence elections. But when it comes to animals or plants or forests or natural cycles, or Mother Earth, the courts are unable to embrace them within the circle of moral or legal concern. And so Nature has no legal standing, no personhood, no rights.

The Morton case stuck in the craw of U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas—a man of the great northwest forests. In his famous dissent, he made a case for the legal standing of natural objects. What if the Court, “fashioned a federal rule that allowed environmental issues to be litigated... in the name of the inanimate object about to be despoiled, defaced, or invaded”?

Inanimate objects are sometimes parties in litigation.... So it should be as respects valleys, alpine meadows, rivers, lakes, estuaries, beaches, ridges, groves of trees, swampland, or even air that feels the destructive pressures of modern technology and modern life. The river, for example, is the living symbol of all the life it sustains or nourishes—fish, aquatic insects, water ouzels, otter, fisher, deer, elk, bear, and all other animals, including man, who are dependent on it... The river as plaintiff speaks for the ecological unit of life that is part of it.

Legal philosopher Christopher Stone followed up with his brawny little book, Should Trees Have Standing? Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects. If courts can appoint guardians to protect the rights of infants, giving voice to the grievances of those who can’t speak for themselves and protecting them from harm, why can’t they do the same for forests, which also are voiceless, but also sentient, beautiful, and full of possibility? But nothing really came of his argument. The U.S. remained a country where environmental regulations are generally not drawn to protect the natural world from harm. On the contrary, environmental regulations and the Environmental Protection Agency aim to regulate the times, places, and circumstances wherein environmental destruction can take place—to the continuing diminishment of the natural world.

Ah, but the Endangered Species Act, people protest: In effect, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) grants plants and animals a sort of right to life—once they are teetering on the edge of extinction. It’s true that under the ESA, the lives of plants and animals can sometimes trump the economic interests of those who would destroy them, their habitats, or their evolutionary processes. The ESA may not be cast in the language of rights and legal standing, but it certainly can delay economic projects and sometimes stop them in their tracks. An example is the endangered marbled murrelet, whose dependence on ancient forests has slowed the transformation of 500-year-old trees into pulp.

But I’m not the least convinced that the ESA honors the rights of plants or animals. Does it respect their rights to life, when this government waits to protect a species until the last possible moment before extinction? Or when it saves the smallest possible portion of habitat? The Endangered Species Act is the stingiest, the most miserly and grudging, the most last-ditch of all possible ways to respect the natural world. No action can be taken until some agency pronounces the situation calamitous. In what way does this respect the rights of any but the tattered remnants of the species? And even if the ESA manages to protect the “tired, the poor, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore,” it doesn’t even try to protect “the huddled masses.” What of the great herds of buffalo, the loping wolf packs, the swirling flocks of trumpeter swans, the migrating hawks, monarch butterflies by the millions, schools of silver salmon—the great abundance of lives, the wonder of their numbers? We eat away, eat away, eat away at them until they are almost gone, and then we congratulate ourselves as enlightened for saving the stragglers.

This isn’t the way rights are respected. Would it respect human rights to declare “that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, as long as these men are the last three, or thirty, or three thousand of their species left on Earth.
Until then, men are not endowed with anything”? The point about a rights-claim is that it gives effect to certain value claims about a class of beings: That they have value not as property or as means to others’ ends, but in themselves and for their own sakes; that their thriving is thus of over-riding value; that consequently, interfering with their thriving is a violation of moral and legal duties of restraint.

North American philosophers ask, when do species merit rights? Only when the species closely resembles human beings in significant ways, they answer—the ability to feel pain, for example, or the ability to reason or speak or regret, or possession of a soul. The question they don’t answer is, Why should humans be the measure of merit? One might think that two-legged creatures who possess pain receptors and reasoning brains and talking tongues and maybe even souls might be able to honor creatures whose abilities are perhaps different, but in many ways superior to their own. If they noticed. One might think that humans would realize that the truly morally significant ways in which all creatures are the same is that we all strive to live, and that all lives unfold in complex interdependence.

I’m not a particularly brave person, but I want to snorkel alongside a lava cliff, so I heave myself out of the boat. Right there, right next to me in the water, flitting like flattened ballerinas, are four spotted eagle rays. I plug in my snorkel and swim along behind them. Below me, a school of glittering cardinal fish expands and contracts, as if it were breathing. A couple of dozen Moorish idols swim past the cliff face, all finning in one urgent direction. Sergeant-majors. Groupers. Giant damsels. The sea is full of life. I know that’s a cliché, but this sea is Full. Of Life. The sea is made of life: clouds of krill and a couple of pirouetting seal lion calves, some small orange things, a vertical arrow of silver bubbles that unfolds into a fish-hunting booby, blue-green-pink parrot fish as brightly scaled as parrots themselves. A penguin splashes through bubbles and swims right past me: a tiny penguin with tiny wings. My god. Who would have thought? There are white-tipped sharks sitting on the bottom, heavy, as if they had swallowed lead shot. I see the paddling feet of a pelican. This is astonishing, a world completely hidden from any person afraid to jump.

This is a different point of view, from inside this sea of living things, from this swirl of creative energy, generative systems of generative systems. There are hierarchies of size and power in the splash and struggle, but there is no hierarchy of value. Each thing is worthy. Each fractal layer is necessary. If there is a striving in the confusion, it is to continue to live. Life itself is worthy, and so all the small lives are worthy. Floating on my stomach, looking deep through clouds of living things: Never have I seen as complete a repudiation of the idea that human beings are separate from the rest of creation, that we are better somehow, that we are in charge, that we are the point of the whole thing.

The moral center of the ancient cosmology that recognizes the rights of Nature is the ultimate and absolute worth of Nature, the source of all life, the creative genesis, the mother, Pachamama, Mother Earth. Pachamama sings with the wind. She erupts with the volcano. She trembles in the earthquake. She grows with the corn. She is the adobe house. She is the woven cloth. She is the basket of eggs in the marketplace, and the basket of chickens. She is the children. She is the spawn of fish. There is no separation between nature and culture, animals and human—we are all one interactive system, and it is a beautiful, generative, and fearsome complexity with creative, and disruptive, feedback loops. A well-ordered society, the good life, the bueno vivir, respects the rights of Nature, balancing human and non-human interests, and honors practices that celebrate and strengthen the thriving of the bio-cultural world.

It’s hard to predict the outcome of the legal protection of Nature’s rights, in Ecuador or in the United States, where some municipalities already recognize the rights of Nature. But there’s a paradigm shift going on, and it would be a mistake to think it’s a small thing. A revised set of ideas flips the presumptions that govern the relation between humans and nature.

Then: Humans have the right to destroy nature, unless they are specifically prohibited. Now: Humans have no right to destroy nature, unless they are specifically permitted.

“...there’s a paradigm shift going on, and it would be a mistake to think it’s a small thing

The Endangered Species Act is the stingiest, the most miserly and grudging, the most last-ditch of all possible ways to respect the natural world.
Then: Only damage to humans can stop a destructive practice. It’s all that counts.
Now: Damage to natural systems can stop a destructive practice. It counts too.

Then: Human well-being is accomplished by separation from and conquest of Nature.
Now: Human well-being is inseparable from the well-being of Nature.

What does Earth ask of us? What does Pachamama demand?
I’m sitting cross-legged on the bow of our little boat as it motors across a shiny black sea toward a new moorage in the Galapagos Islands. The sun set some time ago. The moon has yet to rise. The stars are brilliant, but all wrong to my eyes. In the place where the Big Dipper should be, there is a small square of stars—the Southern Cross. Orion is there, but he has wandered to the top of the sky. On the sea under each star is a yellow puddle of light. A swallow-tailed gull hangs in the dark wind directly over our bow, swinging its head from side to side, looking for a flash that will map the path of a startled fish through luminescent plankton.

“Ghost gull,” a crewman says, and I am fully prepared to believe him, in this place so unlike anything I have ever seen before. I am prepared too, more fully than I have ever been, to imagine myself an equal member of a community of living things, called to honor the rights of fellow members, called to act with respect for all life, and with a restraint that acknowledges the value of all beings.

I’m thinking about what Francisco told me earlier, as spray from the waterfall drenched us all. There is a sort of cosmic justice at work in the world, he said. Pachamama gives back as she gets. If humans live respectfully, in harmony and balance, earthquakes will still shake the mountainsides and volcanoes will continue to pour lava down the valleys. But Earth will be merciful, and the villages will not be destroyed. If humans live stupidly, cravenly, with reckless disregard for the rights of Nature, Nature’s fury cannot be contained.

In the history of the expansion of legal rights, I would point out to Aldo Leopold, I can’t think of an instance in which the people in power just up and granted rights to those who did not yet possess them. In every case, the powerless demanded their rights and the powerful granted them grudgingly. The legal rights came first, and the moral development took place more gradually, as those in power got used to the idea that the universe of moral consideration had just grown wider. Sometimes the moral development has taken a very long time.

In a time of climate chaos, humans are beginning to feel the sting, the consequences of ignoring the rights of the Earth. Pachamama’s storms and droughts and inundations demonstrate the practical wisdom and the moral wisdom of granting her the rights she merits. That means that humans are called to acknowledge new moral and legal responsibilities toward the Earth—to honor the inherent worth of Life, living things, and the natural systems that support them; to restrain their own behavior in order to bring their narrowly self-regarding urges into balance with the creative urgency of the natural world; to accept full membership in the family of living things, an interdependent whole that is beautiful and astonishing and alive.
Returning the Gift

By ROBIN KIMMERER

We are showered every day with the gifts of the Earth, gifts we have neither earned nor paid for: air to breathe, nurturing rain, black soil, berries and honeybees, the tree that became this page, a bag of rice, and the exuberance of a field of goldenrod and asters at full bloom.

My economics colleagues speak of these everyday miracles as “natural resources,” as if they were our property, just waiting to be transformed. In the ecological sciences we call them “ecosystem services,” as if they were the inevitable outcomes of the ongoing function of the ecological machine. But, to me, simply as a human person filling my basket with berries and my belly with pie, they feel like gifts, bestowed by the other beings whose lives throb around us.

Though we live in a world made of gifts, we find ourselves harnessed to institutions and an economy that relentlessly asks, “What more can we take from the Earth?” This worldview of unbridled exploitation is to my mind the greatest threat to the life that surrounds us. Even our definitions of sustainability revolve around trying to find the formula to ensure that we can keep on taking, far into the future. Isn’t the question we need, “What does the Earth ask of us?”

The premise of Earth asking something of me makes my heart swell. I celebrate the implicit recognition of the animacy of the Earth: that the living planet has the capacity to ask something of us, and that we have the capacity to respond. Can it be that an entity as vast, as whole and generous, as the Earth has need of me? Me? Could it be that we are more than passive recipients of her gifts, but participants in her well-being? We are honored by the request. It lets us know that we belong.

I’ve been told that my Potawatomi ancestors taught that the job of a human person is to learn, “What can I give in return for the gifts of the Earth?” This is a question so fundamental to our being that it holds a central place in the mythic creation story of our people, a story shared by the first peoples of the Great Lakes.

In the beginning, there was the Skyworld, where people lived much as they do on Earth, alongside the great Tree of Life, on whose branches grew seeds and fruits and medicines, all the gifts of the plants on a single tree. One day a great wind felled the tree, and a hole opened where its roots had been. When a beautiful young woman, called in our language Gizhkokwe, or Skywoman, ventured to the edge to look down, she lost her footing. When she reached out to the tree to stop her fall, a branch broke off in her hand. She fell like a maple seed pirouetting on an autumn breeze. A column of light streamed from a hole in the Skyworld, marking her path where only darkness had been. When she reached out to the tree to stop her fall, a branch broke off in her hand. She fell like a maple seed pirouetting on an autumn breeze. A column of light streamed from a hole in the Skyworld, marking her path where only darkness had been. When she reached out to the tree to stop her fall, a branch broke off in her hand. She fell like a maple seed pirouetting on an autumn breeze. A column of light streamed from a hole in the Skyworld, marking her path where only darkness had been. When she reached out to the tree to stop her fall, a branch broke off in her hand. She fell like a maple seed pirouetting on an autumn breeze. A column of light streamed from a hole in the Skyworld, marking her path where only darkness had been. When she reached out to the tree to stop her fall, a branch broke off in her hand. She fell like a maple seed pirouetting on an autumn breeze. A column of light streamed from a hole in the Skyworld, marking her path where only darkness had been. When she reached out to the tree to stop her fall, a branch broke off in her hand. She fell like a maple seed pirouetting on an autumn breeze. A column of light streamed from a hole in the Skyworld, marking her path where only darkness had been. When she reached out to the tree to stop her fall, a branch broke off in her hand. She fell like a maple seed pirouetting on an autumn breeze.
sic. She felt the beat of their wings as they flew beneath and broke her fall. Far from the only home she’d ever known, she caught her breath at the warm embrace of soft feathers. And so it began. From the beginning of time, we are told that the very first encounter between humans and other beings of the Earth was marked by care and responsibility, borne on the strong wings of geese...

The world at that time was covered entirely by water. The geese could not hold the woman much longer, so they called a council of all the beings to decide what to do. As Turtle floated in the watery gathering, he offered to let her rest upon his back. The others understood that she needed land. The deep divers among them had heard of mud at the bottom of the water and agreed to retrieve some. One by one, the animals offered their help: the otter, the loon, and the beaver. But the depth, the darkness, and the pressures were too great for even these strongest of swimmers, who came up gasping. Only the little muskrat was left, the weakest diver of all. He volunteered to go while the others looked on doubtfully. His small legs flailed as he worked his way downward. He was gone a very long time. They waited and waited, fearing the worst for their relative. A stream of bubbles rose and the small limp body of muskrat floated upward. But the others noticed that his paw was tightly clenched, and when they pried it open, there was a small handful of mud. Turtle said, “Here, spread this mud on my back and I will hold it.”

Skywoman did as Turtle asked and then began to sing her gratitude and then to dance. As her feet caressed the Earth, the land grew and grew from the dab of mud on Turtle’s back. From the branch in her hand, she seeded the earth with green. And so, the Earth was made. Not by one alone, but from the alchemy of two essential elements of gratitude and reciprocity. Together they formed what we know today as Turtle Island. In the beginning of the world, the other species were our life raft. Now, in the spirit of reciprocity, we must be theirs.

The Earth was new then, when it welcomed the first human. It is old now, and some suspect that we have worn out our welcome. The stories of reciprocity have grown dim in the memory. How can we translate from the stories at the world’s beginning to this hour so much closer to its end? Potawatomi philosopher Dr. Kyle White has written that “the intent of indigenous governance is to make the values and relationships in our creation stories manifest.” Can we understand the Skywoman story not as some artifact from the past, but as instructions for the future? In return for this gift of the world on Turtle’s back, what will I give in return?

**THE EARTH CALLS US TO GRATITUDE**

For much of humans’ time on the planet, before the great delusion, we lived in cultures that understood the covenant of reciprocity—that for the Earth to stay in balance, for the gifts to continue to flow, we must give back in equal measure for what we are given. Our first responsibility, the most potent offering we possess, is gratitude.

Now, gratitude may seem like weak tea given the desperate challenges that lie before us, but it is powerful medicine, much more than a simple thank you. Giving thanks implies recognition not only of the gift, but of the giver. When I eat an apple, my gratitude is directed to that wide-armed tree whose tart offspring are now in my mouth, whose life has become my own. Gratitude is founded on the deep knowing that our very existence relies on the gifts of other beings. The evolutionary advantage for cultures of gratitude is compelling. This human emotion has adaptive value because it engenders practical outcomes for sustainability. The practice of gratitude can, in a very real
way, lead to the practice of self-restraint, of taking only what you need. Naming and appreciation of the gifts that surround us creates a sense of satisfaction, a feeling of “enoughness” that is an antidote to the societal messages that drill into our spirits, telling us we must have more. Practicing contentment is a radical act in a consumption-driven society.

Giving thanks implies recognition not only of the gift, but of the giver.

Indigenous story traditions are full of cautionary tales about the failure of gratitude. When people forget to honor the gift, the consequences are always material as well as spiritual. The spring dries up, the corn doesn’t grow, the animals do not return, and the legions of offended plants and animals and rivers rise up against the ones who neglected gratitude. The Western storytelling tradition is strangely silent on this matter, and so we find ourselves in an era when we are rightly afraid of the climate we have created.

We human people have protocols for gratitude; we apply them formally to one another. We say thank you. We understand that receiving a gift incurs a responsibility to give a gift in return. Gratitude is our first, but not our only gift. We are storytellers, music makers, devisers of ingenious machines, healers, scientists, and lovers of an Earth who asks that we give our gifts on behalf of life. The next step in our cultural evolution, if we are to persist as a species on this beautiful planet, is to expand our protocols for gratitude to the living Earth. Gratitude is most powerful as a response to the Earth because it provides an opening to reciprocity, to the act of giving back, to living in a way that the Earth will be grateful for us.

THE EARTH ASKS THAT WE PAY ATTENTION

What does the Earth ask of us? In response to this question, I’ve heard from some that the Earth asks us nothing—that there is no possible voice in a collection of ecological processes. But I think that just means we’re not listening. How does she ask? She asks by modeling generosity in times of plenty, by reminding us of limits in times of scarcity. She asks us to learn through the consequences of our failures and through the examples of our non-human teachers, helping us imagine how we might live. But we have to listen.

Every one of us is endowed with the singular gift of paying attention—that remarkable focused convergence of our senses, our intellect, and our feeling. It’s so appropriate that we call it paying attention, for it is perhaps a near-universal form of currency—it is exchangeable, it is valuable, and it incurs an expense on the part of the payer, for attention, we all know too well, is a limited resource.

What should be our response to the generosity of the more-than-human world? In a world that gives us maple syrup, spotted salamanders, and sand hill cranes, shouldn’t we at least pay attention? Paying attention is an ongoing act of reciprocity, the gift that keeps on giving, in which attention generates wonder, which generates more attention—and more joy. Paying attention to the more-than-human world doesn’t lead only to amazement; it leads also to acknowledgment of pain. Open and attentive, we see and feel equally the beauty and the wounds, the old growth and the clear-cut, the mountain and the mine. Paying attention to suffering sharpens our ability to respond. To be responsible.

This, too, is a gift, for when we fall in love with the living world, we cannot be bystanders to its destruction. Attention becomes intention, which coalesces itself to action.

Deep attention calls us inevitably into deep relationship, as information and energy are exchanged between the observer and the observed, and neither partner in the exchange can be anonymous. They are known; they have names. There was a time, not so long ago, when to be human meant knowing the names of the beings with whom we cohabited the world. Knowing a name is the way we humans build relationship. It is a sign of respect to call a being by its name, and a sign of disrespect to ignore it.

Ethnobiologists tell us that our great-grandparents spoke fluent natural history. They knew the names and personalities of dozens of birds and hundreds of plants. Today the average American schoolchild can recognize more than a hundred corporate logos. They can give a name to about ten plants, and these include such categories as “Christmas Tree” and “Grass.” We have lost an entire vocabulary, of speech, of experience, and of relationship. Our fundamental currency of relationship, our highly evolved capacity for paying attention to those species who sustain us, has been
subverted in a kind of intellectual hijacking. How can we care for them, monitor their well-being, and fight for their existence if we don’t even know their names?

We have enabled a state of nameless anonymity, bringing human people to a condition of isolation and disconnection, that philosophers have called “species loneliness.” Species loneliness—this deep, unnamed sadness—is the cost of estrangement from the rest of creation, from the loss of relationship. Our Potawatomi stories tell that a long time ago, when Turtle Island was young, the people and all the plants and animals spoke the same language and conversed freely with one another. But no more. As our dominance has grown, we have become more isolated, more lonely on the planet, and we can no longer call our neighbors by name. If we are to manifest the values of the Skywoman story, we have to once again call each other by name.

Knowing the beings with whom we share the world is also the pathway to recognition of the world as gift. The world seems less like a shopping bag of commodities and more like a gift when you know the one who gives you the aspirin for your headache. Her name is Willow; she lives up by the pond. She’s a neighbor to Maple, who offers you the gift of syrup on Sunday morning pancakes. Paying attention is a pathway to gratitude.

The Cherokee poet Marilou Awiakta has been listening. In her poem, “When the Earth Becomes an ‘It,’” she reports that Earth asks that we call her by name.

When the people call the Earth “Mother,”
They take with love
And with love give back
So that all may live.

When the people call Earth “it,”
They use her
Consume her strength. Then the people die.

Already the sun is hot
Out of season.
Our Mother’s breast
Is going dry.
She is taking all green
Into her heart
And will not turn back
Until we call her
By her name.

And in the absence of names, it all comes down to pronouns. Grammar is the way we chart relationships in language, and, as it happens, relationships with the living world. In English grammar, a being is either a person or a thing. We refer to our family and our fellow humans with the grammar of gendered personhood: we say “he” or “she.” To refer to a human being as “it” is deeply disrespectful; it robs one of personhood and kinship and reduces one to a thing. Yet in English, we are given no other way to refer to non-human beings. Understanding other beings as objects, as mere “its,” opens the door to exploitation. Linguistics code for our relationships with the world, delineating the boundaries for our circle of respect and compassion. When Maple is an “it,” we can take up the chainsaw. When Maple is a “her,” we have to think twice.

However, in our Potawatomi language and indeed many other indigenous languages, there is no “it” for birds or berries. The language does not divide the world into him and her, but into animate and inanimate. And the grammar of animacy is applied to all that lives: sturgeon, mayflies, blueberries, boulders, and rivers. We refer to other members of the living world with the same language that we use for our family. Because it is our family.

If we are to survive here—and if our neighbors are to survive, too—we need to learn to speak the grammar of animacy.

THE EARTH CALLS US TO RECOGNIZE THE PERSONHOOD OF ALL BEINGS

The Skywoman story is grounded in the fundamental ethical tenet that the other beings with whom we share the planet—the ones who sustain us—are persons, too: non-human persons with their own ways of being, their own intentions, their own contributions to the world, their own rights to live. Science and spirituality both demonstrate the fundamental nature of our relatedness with all life forms: we are more the same than we are different. We are governed by the same ecological and evolutionary rules.

Reciprocity is rooted in the understanding that we are not alone—that the Earth is populated by non-human persons. How different our world would be if we extended the same respect and compassion and
agency to other species as we do to human people. We tolerate governance that grants legal personhood and free speech to corporations, but that denies that respect to voiceless salamanders and sugar maples.

Reserving personhood for a single species, in language and in ways of living, perpetuates the fallacy of human exceptionalism, that we are fundamentally different and somehow better, more deserving of the wealth and services of the Earth than other species. Recognition of the personhood of other beings asks that we relinquish our perceived role as masters of the universe and celebrate our essential role as an equal member in the democracy of all species.

Paying attention to other beings—recognizing their incredible gifts of photosynthesis, nitrogen fixation, migration, metamorphosis, and communication across miles—is humbling and leads inescapably to the understanding that we are surrounded by intelligences other than our own: beings who evolved here long before we did, and who have adapted innovative, remarkable ways of being that we might emulate, through intellectual biomimicry, for sustainability. We are surrounded by teachers and mentors who come dressed in foliage, fur, and feathers. There is comfort in their presence and guidance in their lessons.

Granting personhood to all beings can be an economic and political construct, as well as an ethical stance. Recognition of personhood for all beings opens the door to ecological justice. Our laws today are all about governing our rights to the land. The shift we need is to include the rights of the land: the rights to be whole and healthy; the right to exist. We can follow the lead of indigenous nations around the world: the Maori, who granted personhood to a river; the Ecuadorian constitution, which enshrines the rights of nature herself in the law of the land; and the Bolivians, who brought to the United Nations the Declaration on the Rights of Mother Nature.

THE EARTH ASKS US TO CHANGE

The Earth asks us to change as everything changes and evolves, like the flesh-tearing Allosaurus who became a warbler singing from the treetops when the time for flesh-tearing was over. For if we don’t change, we will, like all that does not change, perish.

The Earth herself is changing, by our hands. The responses from our government leaders to the “clear and present danger” of climate disruption have been wholly inadequate in scale, in urgency, and in imagination. The limited strategies advanced by politicians, economists, scientists, and engineers have a common theme. Most take the approach that to “solve the climate problem,” we must in some way change the environment. They propose wave turbines, ocean fertilization, seawalls, photoelectric paint, plants genetically modified to withstand a traumatic drought, and heaven forbid one more new kind of light bulb. We will no doubt need all the good new ideas we can get. But while we race around asking how we might change technology or tax structures, the change that might save us goes unspoken: what we need to change is ourselves. The danger is that we have been captured by a worldview that no longer serves our world, if it ever did—a worldview whose manifestation is destroying our beloved homelands, our fellow species, and ourselves. But all we can talk about is changing light bulbs.

I don’t think that it is more technology we need, or more money or more data. We need a change in heart, a change in ethics, away from an anthropocentric worldview that considers the Earth our exploitable property to a biocentric, life-centered worldview in which an ethic of respect and reciprocity can grow.

The philosopher Joanna Macy has called this “The Great Turning”—the essential adventure of our time, shifting from the age of industrial growth to the age of life-sustaining civilization. Her work and the work of countless others describe the accelerating momentum of the transition already in progress, in acts large and small, as humans reclaim an ancient way of knowing in which human life is aligned with ecological process-
We are living in a transient period of profoundly painful error and correction on our way to a humbler consideration of ourselves. Anthropocene—the Era of Man. The proposed designation would recognize that humans, not “natural” forces, are the dominant force on the planet today—the major influence on the atmosphere, biogeochemical cycles, and even the evolutionary destinies of species. It is, of course, undeniable that the human species has caused great disruption—indeed, of geologic proportion. But to declare the Age of the Anthropocene smacks of the terrible arrogance that got us into this predicament, which is embodied in Stewart Brand’s famous quote, “We are as gods and might as well get good at it.” It is a fatal error to think that we are in charge; the instructive myths of most every culture hold that lesson. If we don’t remember that, I’m sure that the viruses will be happy to remind us.

I don’t believe that we are entering the Anthropocene, but that we are living in a transient period of profoundly painful error and correction on our way to a humbler consideration of ourselves. In the geologic scope of things, the Industrial Revolution that fueled the expansion of the exploitative, mechanistic worldview was only an eye blink ago. For eons before that, there was a long time on this planet when humans lived well, in relative homeostasis with biotic processes, embodying a worldview of reciprocity that was simultaneously material and spiritual. There was a time when we considered ourselves the “younger brothers of creation,” not the masters of the universe. Our current adversarial relationship with the rest of the living world is not necessarily all that we are as a species. We are a species that can learn from the global mistakes we are making. We have stories to help us remember a different past and imaginations to help us find the new path. We are a species who can change.

What does the Earth ask of us? To meet our responsibilities and to give our gifts. Naming responsibility is often understood as accepting a burden, but in the teachings of my ancestors, responsibilities and gifts are understood as two sides of the same coin. The possession of a gift is coupled with a duty to use it for the benefit of all. A thrush is given the gift of song, and so has a responsibility to greet the day with music, which is in turn received as a gift to us as we watch the sky grow pink with dawn. Salmon have the gift of travel, so they accept the duty of carrying food upriver. The stars were given the gift of sparkle, coupled with the responsibility of guiding us at night. So when we ask ourselves, what is our responsibility to the Earth, we are also asking “What is our gift?”

As human people, most recently evolved here, we lack the gifts of our companion species: of nitrogen fixation, pollination, and three-thousand-mile migrations under magnetic guidance. We can’t even photosynthesize. But we carry gifts of our own that the Earth urgently needs.

Reciprocity—returning the gift—is not just good manners; it is how the biophysical world works. Balance in ecological systems arises from negative feedback loops, from cycles of giving and taking: living and dying, production and consumption, biogeochemical cycles, water to cloud and back to water again. Reciprocity among parts of the living Earth produces equilibrium in which life as we know it can flourish. Positive feedback loops—in which interactions spur one another away from balance—produce radical change, often to a point of no return. We must understand that we, like every other successful organism, must play by the rules that govern ecosystem function. The laws of thermodynamics have not been suspended on our behalf. Unlimited growth is not possible. In a finite world you cannot relentlessly take without replenishment.

How can we reciprocate the gifts of the Earth? In gratitude, in ceremony, through acts of practical reverence and land stewardship, in fierce defense of the beings and places we love, in art, in science, in song, in gardens, in children, in ballots, in stories of renewal, in creative resistance, in how we spend our money and our precious lives, by refusing to be complicit with the
forces of ecological destruction. In healing.

Ecological restoration is an act of reciprocity, and the Earth asks us to turn our gifts to healing the damage we have done. The Earth-shaping prowess that we thoughtlessly use to sicken the land can be used to heal it. It is not just the land that is broken, but our relationship with land. We can be partners in renewal; we can be medicine for the Earth.

If our leaders don’t lead then we have to. If all our leaders ask is that we are quietly complicit with destruction, we say we are a better species than that. All over Turtle Island people are rising up to reclaim their roles as caregivers for the Earth, to be more than consumers, to be givers.

We humans carry gifts of our own; we are scientists and storytellers. We are change-makers; we are Earth-shapers riding on the back of the turtle. We can remember the covenant of reciprocity, seeking what Onondaga Clan Mother Audrey Shenandoah called “Justice not only for ourselves, but justice for all of Creation.”

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What does it mean to be in relationship? One comes across this phrase, “being in relationship,” quite frequently in environmental—and other—discussions. The phrase sounds catchy. And it seems important. But, what worldview or big idea does it express? Does it simply refer to the how and why of our connection with our mothers, relatives, friends, and neighbors? What does this term truly communicate when it comes to understanding connections with, and protection of, Nature?

Google defines the term “relationship” as follows:
• “The way in which two or more concepts, objects, or people are connected, or the state of being connected”
• “The way in which two or more people or organizations regard and behave toward each other”

According to Google then, being in relationship refers to how something or someone is connected with the “other,” whether this “other” be conceptual (ideas), animate (animal or plant), or inanimate (iPhone). This connection can be a physical link or a more conceptual link, such as through emotions (love) or social ritual (sitting around the Thanksgiving table). Relationship also speaks to a specific type of conceptual connection—a connection made through the actual process of how one understands and behaves toward the other.

This elementary definition provides some insight, but is simultaneously vague. It leaves wide open what it means to be connected and how these many ways of being connected could take shape—between two iPhones, between two individuals, or between a person and a concept. Connections among individuals could encompass many qualities of association, from love and wonder to hatred and harm. Also, particularly important and notably absent from Google’s definition is the reference to connections with non-human others and the places that they and we inhabit. These others and these places aren’t mere concepts or objects with which we arbitrarily connect. All the places in which we find ourselves, along with the living and non-living entities within these places, are connected—as we all travel through space (planet Earth) and time (evolution of Earth). By definition, then, we are in relationship with much more than Google indicates.

The famous debate during the 1980s between psychologists Carol Gilligan and Lawrence Kohlberg, highlighted by Gilligan’s book In a Different Voice, reveals more subtle and complicated understandings of the notion of relationship. The importance of this debate is that it brought the concept of relationality to the fore as a key element in the development of our ethical maturity—our development of criteria used to judge and interact with others. Kohlberg understood our moral compass to be based in impartial formal rationality. He posited that our ethical development is marked by a series of pre-programmed developmental stages, and the time we reach ethical maturity is marked by our ability to apply abstract rules and principles to our moral challenges. According to this
theory, our highest level of ethical reasoning must transcend and disregard immediate and particular experiences and circumstances. The immediacy of our experiences with others in time and place do not matter for morality. Relationality, for Kohlberg, was merely incidental in the developmental process of becoming ourselves.

Gilligan rejected Kohlberg’s systematization of our ethical behavior, arguing that his theory valued detachment and separation, ideas commonly associated with the dominant masculine order. She saw his theory as a tool for avoiding the messy contextual realities of day-to-day life, stemming from the infinite variety of situations where no two ethical dilemmas are alike.

In contrast to Kohlberg, Gilligan argued that our moral development has very little to do with the unfolding of set, logically progressive steps that follow the same course for all. Instead, she insisted that particular, contextual relationality is the key to moral development. Gilligan’s approach recognized that each dilemma has its own spatial, historical, and situational context. Our identities, including our moral selves, develop through the daily interactions we have with others. Gilligan emphasized that we develop our ethical maturity through closeness and attachments to others. This perspective regards self-identity not as a self that is reducible to merely subjective self-interest, and not as an identity that accepts the perfunctory reproduction of external social laws.

Kohlberg’s theory gives us rules that are not malleable, unable to respond to the subtleties of particular contexts. On the other hand, the ethical maturity Gilligan speaks of requires something else of us. It stresses that we tap into another kind of knowing, packed into our evolutionary toolbox, namely our heartfelt feelings. Emotion, rather than reason, facilitates closeness, attachment, intimacy with the other.

Other academics also note that care, concern, and compassion are in conflict with the modern theory of rational instrumentalism—focused on using hard science as the way of knowing the world. According to the German philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer, intimate connections might best be understood as a way of honoring the particularity of the other. For Gadamer, this is understood as a “feeling for life” that embraces emotional connection with the other. Modernist discourse however, which favors rational, analytical language, is unable to articulate these powerful feelings for the non-human world, including our desire to protect Nature. These feelings are instead pulled apart, analyzed, and shunted by such discourse.

Geographer Barry Lopez recognizes that being vulnerable to place is a process of opening yourself up to intimacy with the other by leaving your rational senses behind and tapping into emotional states of being. The nascent field of conservation psychology offers compelling research supporting Lopez’s approach. Conservation psychologists Susan Clayton and Gene Meyers offer insight into a new discipline that seeks to understand how humans relate to, and care for, Nature. They reiterate the importance of the Humean approach: that emotion drives actual moral behavior and that rational thought is secondary. Understanding others, both human and non-human, is therefore not the domain of rationality alone. Deeper understanding requires a feeling for the other.

As we embrace our emotional faculties in getting to know ourselves and the other, there is another component essential to relationality—and that is place. Whether outside in Nature or within built structures, places are not to be understood as merely empty containers in which the world proceeds. We must increasingly recognize that place is an essential ingredient in the development of ourselves and our relationships. Geographer Nigel Thrift maintains that place facilitates certain interactions versus others in large part because they cue certain memories and behavior and not others. Here the self is understood as emerging through our relational interplay with both the other and our surroundings. We are who and what we interact with. And vice versa. This results in a continual evolution of who we are as we travel through space and time. Place itself is produced through these continual interactions—between things encountering each other in the circulation of events. Thus, through these recurring exchanges, place is process as well.
What does all this reveal to us about being in relationship? It tells us that we are made of place and of others, including non-human others. It tells us that the ethical self is relational and requires a continual development of a deep understanding of others. And genuine understanding requires an individual to cultivate sensitivity to particular situations, to know his or her place and to have a deep sense of the places of others. It tells us that our heartfelt feelings are an essential part of coming to know all these others in the world we share. Thus, being in relationship could be understood as the process of all such physical and conceptual (emotional) interchanges with others in context. That is, relationship is an intricate, metaphorical dance, between the “I” and everything else.

This revelation is also significant because it has implications for those of us who are passionate for the wildness in nature. Protecting and cultivating this wildness is an ongoing process that requires us to cultivate our relationships. The quality of our relationships with others and our places will determine how successful we will be in protecting the wildness we value. How do we promote the kinds of relationships that foster our love for Nature? Here both our emotional and rational faculties can work in tandem. We must begin to imagine places that allow us to experience intimate connections with others, where our emotions lead us to develop sensitivities for expressing wonder and respect for these others. Then we must design, craft, and build these imaginative places.

“Being in relationship” with Nature is also a political matter. How we think and feel about our environment, including the more-than-human-others, will influence the actions we take as a society. For example, what kind of planning strategies will we enact if our policies are not enmeshed in core ideas that reflect our intimate connections with and our passions for the more-than-human other? Without incorporating these core ideas our policies will only continue articulating the messages of an outdated modernist agenda, focused primarily on economic return. Hence, our ideas about how we relate to others when it comes to our personal and political decision-making processes lead us either toward a path of disrespect and selfishness or a path of wonder and intimacy. Our ideas direct our actions. The exploration of our ideas, therefore, really does matter!

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NOTES

"Place itself is produced through... continual interactions... place is process..."
THE ETHICS OF WATER GOVERNANCE
By Luzma Fabiola Nava

The adoption of ethical water behavior favors long-term water governance structures for maintaining quality of life and environmental sustainability in the face of an ongoing crisis situation for water conservation and environmental degradation. “I use the term water ethics to denote the underlying principles influencing our own water behavior and our reaction to other people’s behaviors” (p. 1), states David Groenfeldt in his valuable, well-informed work on the natural resource upon which all life depends.


Groenfeldt, founder and director of the Water-Culture Institute in Santa Fe, New Mexico, lives just a stone’s throw away from the Santa Fe River and the Rio Grande in the United States and has spent three decades specializing in sustainable water resources management issues. He weaves that extensive knowledge into Water Ethics: A Values Approach to Solving the Water Crisis, but the backbone of the book is his discussion of the ethical dimension of any water policy. Groenfeldt provides a clear understanding of values and principles at all levels in water decision-making processes. He gives information needed to build a strong awareness of and conscience for responsible water usage behavior in both the public and private sectors. He lays the foundation for developing objective and discerning ethical guidelines. It is Groenfeldt’s significant conviction that values guide behavior and decision-making processes.

But what does he call the principles prevailing in water issues? For Groenfeldt ethics alludes to a coherent system of values (p. 177): “an environmental ethic is built upon a set of values about how we ought to relate to nature in small, practical ways as well as big conceptual ways” (p. 3). Based on his broad experience examining the relationships between humans and their environment, Groenfeldt reminds us: “We can have beliefs about water that is sacred, or healing, or beautiful, or even dangerous, but those qualities are not ethics; rather, they are the basis for values which become organized into ethics” (p. 4). Moreover, “by becoming more aware of the ethical dynamics, our collective ethics around water will change for the better” (p. 6).

ASSESSING AN ETHICAL APPROACH TO WATER GOVERNANCE

Unfortunately, water management and governance are not always seen as requiring explicit attention to values and ethics. Groenfeldt’s erudite book can change that. He writes with fluency, humanity, and an engaged, contemporary understanding of how complex the topic of water can be. It’s a book that flows with the history of water use and control that has shaped our judgment.

Groenfeldt affirms that indigenous peoples’ standpoints on water ethics are important and that we can learn from them. “The indigenous communities are linked to their local waters in a symbiotic relationship; indigenous culture and spirituality depend upon the health of the water and watershed, while the environmental health of the water depends on the spiritual practices of the indigenous communities” (p. 138). Therefore, controversies or conflicts over water
A governance structure based on a water ethic is needed to conduct a systematic management of all competing water users and political interests. Agricultural water use implies not only food security but also the need to adapt to water scarcity. “In many parts of the world,” Groenfeldt notes, “food is just as scarce as water, and the production and distribution of food pose huge logistical and developmental challenges” (p. 13). Water shortages often do not reflect inherent natural scarcity but rather poor water resources, management, and governance. Water governance emphasizes “how people make decisions about shared resources” (p. 106). This means, within an institutional and organizational framework, all stakeholders and political interests come into play in the decision-making processes to foster the sustainability of water resources. As a result, the framework of water governance connotes an ethical dimension.

Groenfeldt stresses the ways in which social values help to explain existing water policies: “Looking at water governance goals through the lens of ethics offers a way of understanding and explaining why things are the way they are—why a particular sort of governance regime, or particular management actions—have come about” (p. 108). For example, he discusses how ethical behavior in the use and management of water has emerged from the activities of local communities working to protect the Appalachian Mountain streams from the industrial processes of mountaintop removal coal mining (p. 109).

The outstanding but fragile domains of water governance are evoked throughout the book with great eloquence. Groenfeldt describes the domains of irrigation, urban water supply, and water basins within water governance, and he shows the inextricable connection between goals and process. “In each of these domains the process of governance is as important as the end result” (p. 132). Respectively, the goals are: “crop production, public health, and sustainable water ecosystems” (p. 112). In a water governance context, the author shows how “participation of irrigation users in managing the water and infrastructure of their system is important for social as well as economic reasons. Users’ management involvement can also play a role in urban water supply, but the bigger issue is the accountability and responsiveness of utility managers to social justice and to the environment” (p. 132).

SOLVING THE WATER CRISIS ETHICALLY

Reading Water Ethics, I felt concerned about the ethical responsibility we have, when making decisions about water resources, to act so that our needs are satisfied and to ensure that environmental needs are accomplished while maintaining sustainable economic growth. “Through working on the basis of ethical principles,” Groenfeldt writes, “we can forge enough solutions enough of the time that the water crisis we see today can recede like a mirage into the future, inspiring us to move forward” (p. 182). This book provides a helpful measure of such inspiration.

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NATURE AND JUSTICE IN THE URBAN LANDSCAPE
By Buddy Huffaker

Jens Jensen’s life (1860-1951) was the iconic American story. Emigrating from a foreign country seeking opportunity and social mobility, he began by sweeping the streets of a major metropolis only to rise through the ranks to shape some of the city’s most significant parks and later to work with titans of industry. Through it all, Jensen remained committed to his core value: that connecting people to nature was critical to both the health of the individual and society as a whole.

The Living Green follows a straightforward chronology of Jensen’s life with historic photos and footage providing context for life in Chicago from the late 1800s through the 1930s. Those familiar with the Chicago region will likely be amazed at how influential Jensen and his contemporaries from this time period were in shaping the area’s landscape and aesthetic. The film also presents how Chicago’s history of corrupt politics impacted Jensen’s career.

The film highlights Jensen’s critique of Fredrick Law Olmstead and Daniel Burnham’s plan for Chicago’s World’s Fair: Columbian Exposition in 1893 and his relationships with other notable thinkers and doers such as Jane Adams, Henry Cowles, Frank Lloyd Wright, and generally the “prairie school” of designers.

It demonstrates what a hotbed of social and ecological thinking Chicago was at the turn of the century. If these names are not familiar to you, watching the film to get quick introductions to them is worth the time alone. If the film had delved into some of the convergences and contrasts among these relationships a bit more, it could have added extra creative tension for the story line.

Aside from its historical interest, the film provides a helpful resource for our thinking about contemporary issues, as well. Take the current conversation and ethical debate about wealth disparity, for example. The Living Green gives wealth inequality a valuable historical context through the stark imagery showing child labor abuses and scenes of children and families playing in city streets literally adjacent to dead livestock. It further advances the ethical dilemmas of inequality by using Jensen’s own life and career to examine the conflicting obligations to one’s own personal mission with the obligation to make a living and provide for a family. Victimized by the political corruption in Chicago, Jensen began his career, out of necessity, by designing personal estates for elite Americans like the Ford family.

This is particularly ironic as the film communicates just how much Jensen and many of his peers were committed to developing an “American” aesthetic that intentionally—and often explicitly—referenced nature as opposed to the formal castles and gardens of the European tradition. Parks and gardens such as Central Park (Olmstead) and Columbus Park (Jensen)
exemplify this movement’s effort to empower the design of public spaces that gesture towards equity and opportunity for all citizens, not just some citizens.

It is powerful and poignant to remember the fact that many of Jensen’s signature parks currently sit amongst some of the most diverse and economically depressed neighborhoods in Chicago. This is a connection that the film could have explored more fully. It is my understanding that Jensen’s parks continue to serve as outdoor respite and for many urban residents provide some of the most “wild” places they will ever visit. Some of the parks even have active community gardening programs, both on site and through use of vacant lots to help residents in the area grow vegetables and further “beautify” what were previously unsightly and sometimes even unsafe areas. I think that *The Living Green* would be even more powerful if it revealed these connections more explicitly and if we had heard more from current residents and park users, in addition to the primarily academic and mostly white faces and voices in the film. This would have driven home just how relevant Jensen’s emphasis on equitable access to nature continues to be.

*The Living Green* shows Jensen among some of the biggest names of our country’s effort to shape a “democratic,” or naturalistic, aesthetic, and at the end connects this to the modern “sustainability” movement. The film helps reinforce that “sustainability” did not grow out of the recent green building movement, the emergence of conservation biology in the 1980s and 1990s, or even the environmental movement of the 1970s. These values go back much further—indeed, they predate Jensen and his contemporaries. But Jensen was one of the pioneers in connecting these values with an urbanizing population, finding ways that simultaneously protected natural areas, like the Indiana Dunes, while interpreting and bringing these values into the city through parks and gardens.

Those with a connection to Chicago will get a great history lesson and new insights into important places throughout the region. For viewers without a geographical connection, *The Living Green* offers a broader perspective on the conservation movement and reminds us that these ideas and ideals are not only still alive today, but need even more vitality if we hope to inform and inspire a healthier relationship between humans and nature.

Buddy Huffaker is President and Executive Director of the Aldo Leopold Foundation and was the Executive Producer of the film “Green Fire: Aldo Leopold and a Land Ethic for Our Time.”
CHN BOOKSHELF
A regular feature calling attention to important books and articles that CHN staff, board, and collaborating scholars are reading and recommend. Quot libros, quam breve tempus.


G. E. Kaebnick, Humans in Nature: The World as We Find It and the World as We Create It. (Oxford University Press, 2014).


City Creatures
Animal Encounters in Chicago’s Urban Wilderness

The City is More Than Human

City Creatures is a collection of stories about the animate urban wild, bringing together artists, poets, and essayists from the Chicago region.

Watch for the book in 2014 (University of Chicago Press), and explore the intersection of human and nonhuman lives at the City Creatures blog: HumansandNature.org/blog

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