ETHICAL BASIS FOR REFLECTION: Healing Our Wounded Estuary

Katherine Rakowski

In 2010, members of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) came together to assess and respond to the current ecological predicament. Their exchange led to the 2011 publication of *Healing a Broken World*, a document which serves as a model for ethical reflection and guidelines for Jesuits in all of their endeavors throughout the world. Though intended for Jesuits, this document also has meaning for theologians, philosophers, students, and lay people. *Healing a Broken World* looks at "the relationship of reconciliation with creation, with faith, justice, inter-religious and cultural dialogue" and proposes a set of "practical recommendations" (2011:3). It stresses the importance of interactions, communication, and collaboration by all members of the world community, because the ecological problems we are facing are of global proportions with global ramifications. While these statements are severe and true, there is much that can be done at the local level, on the small scale, and perhaps this is the way to ensure sweeping, lasting change, by starting right here, at home, in the Milwaukee Estuary.

One may begin to look at the Milwaukee Estuary as a wounded ecosystem--a wounded estuary. It is a life system that needs a helping hand and a healing heart from all those within the system to remediate the degradation and revitalize the community. Remediation can occur in its purest form by starting at the root of the problem and moving forward. This calls for a paradigmatic/gestalt shift in the human interaction with all other beings and the natural world. It necessitates an awakening of consciousness that realizes the relationships, interconnection, interdependence, and utter dependence of humans on all entities within the life system. This means valuing the environment as both intrinsically (valuable in itself for itself) and instrumentally (valuable for human use).
Philosophical Basis

Nature holds instrumental value. Instrumental value is defined as the means to an end, as serving a purpose that is not limited to human use of nature. Species interact in matters of symbioses, each member placing instrumental on the neighbor. Plants need soil in order to grow and they need healthy soil in order to thrive. Animals need plants to feed upon, provide nourishment, and offer habitat. Human animals need other animals and plants in order to eat, provide clothes, create shelters, fashion tools; in essence, the elements (Earth, air, water, plants, animals) are needed for existence in the physical reality. However, it is not a hierarchy in which one species or kingdom rises above another in sustenance and flourishing. Instead, the pattern of reality creates a cyclical, spiral web-form in which the soil depends on human use and vice versa. Symbioses exist among all levels of life.

Nonetheless, the environmental must not be seen as holding simply instrumental value for human beings; nature has intrinsic value. Each species is worthwhile in and of itself simply because it exists. The individual is valued, the species is valued, the ecosystem consisting of individuals and species are valued for themselves; the Biosphere is valued in itself and as the compilation of valued communities. From the micro to macro levels, beings are inherently valuable simply because they exist. These entities maintain the right to exist and deserve to be acknowledged by humans as integral components of the Earth community. The fundamentals of intrinsic value necessitate a transformation from anthropocentrism to an ecological-centered understanding.

When thinking of the entirety of the Milwaukee Estuary, one must consider the combination and collaboration of all entities within the Estuary and larger Great Lakes system.
The interactions and combinations of all parts of the system come together to form a "life system," a grouping and cohort of the many cooperators that work together (whether consciously or not) to allow for the existence of life. This means the preservation and continuation of life on all levels. This requires looking at the environment at the systemic or ecosystemic level. A holistic approach that encompasses the myriad players in the Milwaukee Estuary is necessary to understand its full impacts and possibilities. Ecosystems have interests, and every entity that adds to the whole, and the entire ecosystem itself maintain interests in surviving and flourishing.

Some ecologists and philosophical thinkers offer approaches for thinking about the natural environment. One such individual, a role model, hails from Wisconsin. Aldo Leopold provides a holistic, integrated approach to interacting with the environment. Leopold's understanding serves as guidance for environmental interaction. Leopold attests:

> The key-log which must be moved to release the evolutionary process for an ethic is simply this: quit thinking about decent land-use as solely an economic problem. Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tend to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community; it is wrong if it tends to do otherwise (Anderson, 2010).

Thus, it is necessary to think of an ecosystem as a whole in need of protection, admiration, and preservation. Additionally, Leopold claims, "we abuse the land because we see it as a commodity belonging to us…when we see the land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect" (Cafaro, 2005:95). Based on the current mistreatment and degradation of the natural world, we are not viewing the planet, the Earth, as an integral part of existence on which we all depend.

When examining ecological science and reflecting upon writings by Leopold and other philosophers, one sees the resilience of nature, the possibility and power to change in each one of the individuals in society and of society as a whole to change, to progress for the betterment of
the situations of all and for the importance of each individual. It is not possible to separate the individual from the whole, as all are entirely and completely interrelated and interconnected. The individual affects the whole and vice versa.

Humans must recognize that the use of the environment is necessary, and this use requires some areas be preserved and the Earth-sources used be conserved. However, preservation and conservation cannot be understood nor enacted through an anthropocentric lens, instead the conservation and preservation needs to be understood through a life-centered lens, recognizing the importance of all life to continue, not specifically and only humans. Within this comes the recognition that humans have the largest impact on the environment of all fellow beings. An enormous responsibility rests on the shoulders of human folk.

One can look to the ideas of Gifford Pinchot as a means to design the conservation system to uphold. Pinchot advocated conservation via for the responsible use of resources¹, including all byproducts and the prevention of waste. He reminds us that "once used or wasted, [Earth-sources] can never be replaced. If waste like this were not chiefly thoughtless, it might well be characterized as deliberate destruction of the nation’s future" (Pinchot, 1901:186). Unfortunately, actors may knowingly degrade and pollute Earth, often times underestimating the gravity of the reality of abuse and misuse. Some people associate economic difficulties with "environmentally-friendly" methods, but the reality of living unsustainably is no longer economically or socially viable. Environmental consciousness is awakening more each day.

Pinchot also attests to the importance of diversifying systems to allow for lower intensities if failure is felt in one sector. Within this, it is necessary to balance the systems by their environmental limits. Additionally, an egalitarian approach to the use and distribution of Earth-sources ought to grow. At the turn of the last century, Pinchot noted "the natural resources

¹ Pinchot identified the goods of Earth in a purely economic sense as "resources."
must be developed and preserved for the benefit of many, and not merely for the profit of a few" (Pinchot, 1901:188). However, the environment must be viewed as more than simply "resources." We must never forget the intrinsic values of beings and systems. Pinchot’s fundamentals of conservationism call for deliberate, intelligent planning for now and the future. He spoke to the "destruction of forage plants accompanying the loss of surface soil through erosion, forest reduction, and deterioration of the water supply" (Pinchot, 1901:186). Today we are dealing with the ramifications of the extended misuse of the Milwaukee Estuary, problems which could be remediated through intentional intelligent planning.

Some environmentalists call for putting the awe and reverence back in to the natural world. From this awe and reverence, this admiration, comes a profound respect and unique view of the environment. People who revere Earth maintain a deep respect for Earth, and people who respect the Earth care for the Earth, saying no to pollution and its degradation. The awesomeness of Earth reminds us that we are small parts of a larger whole. Human wants and needs are not the only issues of importance. Reclaiming the awe reminds us of the human place as part of the cosmic scheme of reality.

Current environmental and ecological issues are vastly different from past predicaments in scale and frequency. However, humans can look to John Muir’s ideologies and examples for inspiration and foundations. Muir may be disappointed at past "preservation" tactics in the Milwaukee Estuary, as they do not uphold the tradition of leaving nature as it emerged through the evolutionary process. Nonetheless, the basis of Muir’s preservation follows the assumption that nature is intrinsically valuable. Nature also holds instrumental value, but more than the instrumental value of simply achieving humans' economic ends. Nature maintains psychological and spiritual value for humans (Muir, 1901). Muir’s view of the natural environment is
panentheistic--God is recognizable and experienced within all natural aspects of the world but is also more than the world. For Muir, walking in the woods amongst the trees, bird, bees, and gentle breeze is like an afternoon stroll with God, connecting and exchanging energy between all beings.

Religious and Spiritual Traditions

Environmentalists are not the only people who hold reverence for the world. The Abrahamic religions embrace the sacramental character of the world as God's creation which conveys God's presence and suggests God's character. For Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, God is the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent Creator of the world. God values the world and all of its components in themselves, for themselves and also for their relation to one another (Schaefer 2005). Nature mediates God. Nature manifests God. Nature is filled with the presence of God. Nature suggests God's power, wisdom, and goodness (Schaefer 2009). The belief that God created the world instills a sacramental quality inherent in all existence.

St. Francis is a prime example of a Christian approach to nature and the natural world. He celebrated the goodness of God’s creation and recognized that the diversity of life pleases God and that this diversity is representative of the benevolence of God. Other theologians attest to the goodness of creation and the need to value water intrinsically and instrumentally (Schaefer 2005).

Water is vital in the Christian theological tradition. It is the force used to cleanse and purify in the process of rebirth and initiation in the faith. Today, baptism is the symbol of rebirth in faith. In the Catholic Christian tradition, one places water upon entering a chapel or church for cleansing of mind, body, spirit. The placement of this holy water upon the body signifies an act of purification and rejuvenation in faith and purity. Water may be blessed and used to purify
people or places, aiding spiritual cleansing. Water itself is holy and pure. Clean water is a clear or blue color illustrating the purity of existence. With the sweet, fresh waters here in the good land, we ought cleanse our actions in the Milwaukee Estuary.

The traditions of the Abrahamic religions point to ways in which to live harmoniously with all beings encompassed within the natural environment. Thinking about the human place with Earth and the Milwaukee Estuary in particular has required increased awareness and comprehension. The theology of today is informed by science and helps us understand the role humans have played in the degradation of the Earth and the role humans ought to play in remediating the contaminated of the Milwaukee Estuary.

One may also look to the Native American peoples for an understanding of human roles. Traditionally, the Native American communities have a deep sense of connection with and an understanding of the human place within Earth. They understand the human relatedness to and relationships with other species they share a place. Humans are a part of a larger whole and have a niche to hold in relation to all other members of the Earth community. One sees in some Native American ideologies the idea of becoming a part of the life system like the Milwaukee Estuary and integrating oneself in the flourishing and degradation of the community. As one spends more time in a place, one begins to occupy a niche in the system as a contributor to the environment. This results from thoughtful, conscious, and intelligent interaction with the members of the community.

Within the numerous cultures of native peoples, several uniting factors begin to demonstrate the similarities of the ethical basis of the native people of the Americas. These factors include the understanding of the world, existence, reality, and the universe. One can look
at the essence of spiritual teachings of Native American cultures to uncover the archetypes of the Native spiritual tradition.

Native peoples see themselves as one with nature. The worldview takes a holistic approach in that humans are simply a part of the larger whole, and the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The whole has value in itself, not simply as the accumulation of the multiple parts. With this idea follows the idea of the interconnectivity of all existence. The interrelations of life generate the theme of balance--harmony. This idea is that of equilibrium on all aspects of life, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and amongst all beings. In the chapter titled "Sacred Universe," Hughes outlines native people’s attitudes toward the environment as springing from a spiritual connection to all parts of nature (1983). The spiritual aspect of life was not separated from the other aspects of existence; rather, spirituality played an important role in daily life. Furthermore, nature follows the laws of physics in terms of a balancing act; for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction, demonstrating the reciprocity of life.

Earth is home. It is the only place humans know during terrestrial existence. In many native cultures, Earth imagery is of a mother or grandmother. Earth is the "bearer of all fruits" and the giver of all life. Because of her, all life has the potential to live and flourish (Young, 2002:341), providing food, water, shelter, comfort, and protection for all beings. Ultimately, everything shares the same life; everything is connected to each other and to Earth. Humans must not see themselves as "the master of life, but one of its many manifestations" (Hughes, 1983:17). From this contact, respect and love were born.

The belonging to place is vital in native cultures. This stems from the holistic approach to the environment and life. First, native peoples realize the role humans have to play in the planetary story of existence. It is not a role of conquest and destruction, but, instead, a role of
harmony, peace, coexistence and interdependence. Additionally, physical locations hold significant spiritual and historical value to the native people. The mountains, rivers, and canyons are sacred.

A universal feeling seen in books of spirituality, theology, philosophical thought, and teachings is the necessity to take an inner quest to the ultimate reality. The transformation and love for God needs to be an authentic journey within oneself to seek the light, the truth, and the way. In Arabic, *shari'ah* means "the road to water" (Hussain, 2006). This journey can be compared to lifeways of similar peoples such as the *halacha*, "meaning the path one ways" for Jewish peoples, and "the Red Road" of First Nations peoples in reference to the spiritual path "one should follow to live respectfully with creation" (Hussain, 2006). Each meaning signifies the guidance by which one should live to honor the principles of the teachings.

Earth requires a human transformation in life approaches and current ideologies and views of life. It is not acceptable to continue trends of degradation and obliteration. The times and ecological crises require viewing nature and all ecological members from the heart. This means looking at the world with compassion and love, understanding that members of the community are more than individual beings; they are part of a complete and unique whole. One ought to look to and encompass all religious, spiritual, and ethical traditions as motivations for believers all to care about and for creation.

The Moral Virtues

Upon review of the ethics associated with the environment and environmental interaction, one notices certain virtues as existing in both secular and religious texts. People maintain virtues and encompass them in their understandings of the world around them. The virtues create guidelines or a "roadmap" for how to live one’s life in harmony with each other, with their

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2 In some traditions this ultimate reality God, nirvana, etc.
surroundings, and with all beings within the environment. If we follow the virtues as suggested by moral teachings (within religious as well as secular traditions), humans ought to peacefully coexist as "virtuous cooperators" (Schaefer 2003), working cooperatively within life systems to create a harmonious whole.

Wisconsin maintains a unique ethic and interaction with the natural world. There is a historic tradition of appreciation and love for the environment, beginning with the Native American peoples who first called this good land, home. With the arrival of the Europeans, we see the importance of remembering the natural world through Increase Lapham’s extensive catalogue of native plant, animals, and insect species and Native American peoples’ traditions and sacred spaces (Gurda, 2013) and prolific writings during the early mid-1800s. John Muir lived his teen years in Wisconsin, aiding in his understanding of Nature. Aldo Leopold demonstrated the essentiality of holism in regards to the natural world. Gaylord Nelson necessitated the recognition, appreciation, and celebration of Earth through Earth Day. There is a tradition of environmentalism and virtuous cooperation with the natural world in Wisconsin. Wisconsinites today ought to look to the principles of past Wisconsinites in order to evolve ecological understanding and interaction. One recognizes their virtues of wisdom, justice, moderation, simplicity, courage, humility, pride of place, and reciprocity.

The Virtue of Prudence—Practical Wisdom

Wisdom is the habitual application of practical reasoning. In regards to the Milwaukee Estuary AOC, we need to act with wisdom in remediating the degradations that have occurred. This implies intelligent decision-making. Wisdom calls for a solution by means of practical application of well-informed and planned ideas within Milwaukee. One must consider what will happen if no action occurs and analyze the timeliness and impediments to the remediation
efforts. Humans ought to practice prudence, the practical wisdom. This requires listening to the warnings of invasive species and advice from others and considering these views before jumping to rash decisions. In ecological terms, this requires listening to the needs and warnings of the Earth family (plants, animals, elements, Earth). Often times the minute warnings may seem trivial, but they may be "the canary in the coal mine." This also requires listening to the warnings from Mother Earth herself (the composition of all of the systems), which may now be present in the temperature increases and ever-increasingly chaotic weather patterns. This necessitates taking time to listen to the subtle signs constantly around us and to act upon these signs in a timely manner. In the Milwaukee Estuary, the Remedial Action Plan exemplifies prudent basis for decision-making.

The Virtue of Justice

Justice ought to be sought for all beings in the Milwaukee Estuary. This applies to people of low socio-economic status, plants, animals, and others who are most adversely affected (human and non-human) whose voices are not heard, including future generations of Milwaukeeans. People, animals, plants, and the entire ecosystem need clean air, land, and water. Social and environmental justice is necessary for the flourishing of all beings. Homage must be made for the past while appropriately planning for the future. Increased, deliberate attention ought to be paid to those whose voices have gone unheard for far too long. One ought to embrace teachings such as the preferential option for the poor and to recognize the direct link that exists between the welfare of humans and the state of the environment as Pope Benedict XVI encouraged on the 2010 World Day of Peace (2009).

The Virtue of Moderation
When thinking of conservation, it is essential to exhibit principles of moderation. Self-control is essential in the relationships within the Milwaukee Estuary. Moderation assumes eliminating excess, increasing frugality, and avoiding extremes. There are plethora ways of living moderately (for example, reducing driving time and spending less time in the shower) that require personal and societal restraint. Moderate living is often overlooked in today’s world which is fueled by individualism and consumerism. When realizing the finite realities of the Milwaukee Estuary, the consumption of all material goods ought to be based on prudent thinking about what is needed to sustain one's life not what is wanted.

The Virtue of Simplicity

Closely connected with the virtue of moderation is the virtue of simplicity which is also of the utmost importance. Simplicity is often associated with truth; the simplest answer is most frequently the correct answer in Nature. Henry David Thoreau exemplified the virtues essential for an environmental virtue ethics. Thoreauvian environmental virtues include "temperance, integrity, sensibility to beauty, and perhaps, most important, simplicity" (Cafaro, 2005:33). Here, simplicity means a limited use of external goods as "it plays a role in stabilizing and focusing our lives, and allows the development of a rich character manifesting diverse virtues…allowing us to understand of our actions and act with integrity" (Cafaro, 2005:33). We ought to live in a direct, uncomplicated relationship with Earth and all beings. Humans need to use about the powers of observation and appreciation appropriately, coming to appreciate the beautiful, simple relationships of life. One must learn to look at the finest details of life and use the powers of perception and observation for the benefit of all members of the community. Observation, appreciation, perception, and direct relationships create a basis on which one can understand interconnections and act appropriately. One must live simply in order to simply live.
The Virtue of Fortitude--Courage

Humans need to be courageous as they take responsibility for their actions. Pope John Paul II taught that a "human vocation to participate responsibly with God’s creative action in the world" (Pope John Paul II, 1989). This means standing up for what is right regardless of hindrances and limitations. One needs great strength to uphold what is right and dignified. Demonstrating and cultivating courage is not meant to be an easy task, but it will contribute to a clean, healthy ecosystem for all. Through a steadfast goal and persistence, a new reality in the AOC is possible. All actors and stakeholders in the Milwaukee Estuary need to be willing to try new things, implementing new ideas and increasing the Milwaukee forum for innovation.

The Virtue of Humility

Humility ought to be cultivated by realizing humans are not masters and dominators of the environment; instead, humans ought to realize a new form of self-awareness in which we realize our place in the grander scheme of the ecosystem. Humility is the process to "overcome self-importance" (Hill, 2005:54), a means by which humans can become more intimately connected to the other beings and processes in the larger whole. Humility means a greater self-acceptance and coming to terms with degradation as the result of irresponsible human activity and planning of past and present. The interests of all members ought to be represented, not the just the select interests of a few organizations.

The Virtue of Generosity

Generosity by sharing and exchanging with others is an essential aspect of every community. Even if there does not seem to be anything one is able to gain via remediation efforts, it remains crucial to give more than one takes. Humans ought to give to Earth without expecting anything in return. We also ought to express generosity with ourselves, not
conforming and limiting our minds or character to past paradigm, instead allowing for opportunities to grow our minds and transform to new realities. Life is a give and take, and one cannot expect to take without returning energy, benefits, and love to the life system. Generosity is vital to remediation efforts. We can see the generosity of concerned citizens such as Pieter Godfrey gift of land to the Rotary Centennial Arboretum.

The Virtue of Pride of Place

Pride of place in one's environment is critical and requires honoring one's place in the Milwaukee Estuary. Pride is an appropriate sense of attachment of oneself and those with whom one associates--family, friends, the Milwaukee Estuary, and Earth. The cultivation of pride brings a sense of belonging and recognition of place to the natural world. Pride means honoring the beauty and the system. Pride also means knowing one’s place in the world and respecting that place. All beings are citizens of Earth, and we belong to none other than Earth. The time has come to acknowledge, rejoice, and take pride in the fact that we are all here, now on Earth.

The Virtue of Reciprocity

Reciprocity requires humans do to others as we would have them do to us. This philosophy is in the minds of both religious and secular peoples. The notion emphasizes the reciprocity of existence and reminds people of the ideas of karma – what you send out into the world is what one will receive from others. Humans are a part of Earth. Our actions in relation to Earth will cycle back to us. Seeking to ensure the good of others is central to benevolence (Frasz, 2005). These ideas are not limited to humankind in the present and future; they include all beings and Earth itself.

Ethical Conclusions
Environmental action requires the incorporation of the ideals of philosophers, theologians, environmentalists, native peoples, and virtues into the consciousness of society and making these principles essential to human existence. A vital aspect of this paradigmatic shift comes through continued interaction and experience with the natural world and those beings comprising the natural world (plants and animals alike) that leads to an appreciation of wild places, and a reverence for the natural world. This is not a passive task; it calls for active involvement and conscious planning. Human flourishing depends on the flourishing of all beings, the land, water, and air.

Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* is an ecological cry for help and a call to action. She recognized the importance of human health considerations, the moral considerability of nonhuman beings, and the value of preserving wild nature (Cafaro, 2005). Carson’s fundamental philosophy is one to consider and uphold when considering the viability and authenticity of remediation efforts in the Milwaukee EstuaryAOC. Future generations of plant, wildlife, and human populations depend on the cooperation of all beings in a relation of openness, honesty, reciprocity, and respect. This means culminating a consciousness of coexistence, understanding, and peace. Through experience of distinct peoples, one establishes a relationship and closeness. This idea is not limited to human beings; it applies to all beings. If humans cooperate with other creatures of Earth, a new community will emerge, creating an increasingly stimulated environment. Communion and cooperation facilitates progress at the creative, artistic, intellectual, spiritual levels and promises the flourishing of all beings.

**Call to Action**
Water is the primordial element. Because of water, all else is possible. Humans are comprised of at least eighty percent water, making humans essentially water in the physical form. In order to maintain human health, access to the cleanest, clearest water must be assured. Yet humans are not the only beings dependent on water; all living beings need water to survive and flourish. For all to survive and flourish, an Earth-centered understanding of existence is needed to replace the prevailing anthropocentric mindset. Dialogue and togetherness ought to unfold. Individuals such as Aldo Leopold, John Muir, Rachel Carson, and the collaborators of *Healing a Broken World* exemplify thinking about the human-environment inner-connection and interactions that should be taken for the survival and flourishing of Earth. Human flourishing depends on the survival and flourishing of all other species, the land, the waters, the air, and other elements in interconnections of reciprocity. This fundamental ought to serve as the keystone in remediating the Milwaukee Estuary Area of Concern. The time is now to take action and work for a better, brighter, cleaner, greener tomorrow for all members of the Estuary community!