# Companionship with the World: Roots and Branches of a Confucian Ecology

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In his essay "Wild Wool," first published in the *Overland Monthly* in 1875 and later in his volume *Steep Trails*, John Muir, American naturalist and father of the conservation movement, set out the perimeters of what today would be described as an ecological or environmentalist view of the world and the place of humankind within it:

> No dogma taught by the present civilization seems to form so insuperable an obstacle in the way of a right understanding of the relations which culture sustains to wildness as that which regards the world as made especially for the uses of man. Every animal, plant, and crystal controverts it in the plainest terms. Yet it is taught from century to century as something ever new and precious, and in the resulting darkness the enormous conceit is allowed to go unchallenged.
>
> I have never yet happened upon a trace of evidence that seemed to show that any one animal was ever made for another as much as it was made for itself. Not that Nature manifests any such thing as selfish isolation. In the making of every animal the presence of every other animal has been recognized. Indeed, every atom in creation may be said to be acquainted with and married to every other.[1]

Muir, in many respects, was one of the first American authors to draw our attention to the need to view life on this planet as a complex and interrelated whole, not the privilege of one species to dominate and exploit. The essay quoted here, "Wild Wool," is a

significant statement of what might be called the American transcendentalist point of view about wilderness,[2] what today would come close to a position of deep ecology.

The argument of the essay is that wild wool, that is, wool from undomesticated sheep, is of better quality than that from any domesticated animal. This suggests to Muir that an animal left to its own purposes is better than one that has been brought under the control of humankind to serve the needs and ends of the human population. The passage quoted reinforces this same point. The world of nature stands as its own creation with its own value, not as something that has been created for the express purpose of serving humankind. What Muir suggests is radical change in the orientation of humankind to themselves and their place in the scheme of things by altering the view of nature as an extension of humankind's own world.

The geocentric model that sees the earth at the center of the universe may have been replaced by the discovery that the sun actually was at the center of the solar system, but even with a heliocentric world anthropocentrism has continued to dominate much of humankind's reflection about their place in the order of things and in particular their place in relation to other living things on the earth. For Muir it is the anthropocentrism that must be struck down. In its place, Muir argues, there must emerge a new view of the world that recognizes the dignity of each living thing with a new ethic that respects the life of each living thing.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century such a position as Muir advocated was at best shared by only a small community of like-minded people. The point of view did not, however, disappear. Others have also followed in the wake of John Muir. In a now classic statement of the early conservation movement, *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold states:

> Conservation is getting nowhere because it is incompatible with our Abrahamic concept of land. We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we begin to use it with love and respect. . . . That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics.[3]



Leopold, like Muir, focuses upon the need to understand humankind as a part of the ecological systems of the world, not a separate and *sui generis* category with unique privileges over animals and the earth itself. His suggestion of moving from land as a commodity to land as a shared community is the basis for the development of an environmental ethic, an attitude he characterizes as showing the earth love and respect. He argues against a background of use, misuse, and abuse of the environment, an attitude he sees directly tied to the principle of dominion over the earth stemming from the Judeo-Christian religious traditions.

Leopold suggests that any change in environmental ethic will be inexorably connected to one's philosophical and religious view and laments the failure of religion and philosophy generally to discuss environmental issues:

> No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions. The proof that conservation has not yet touched these foundations of conduct lies in the fact that philosophy and religion have not yet heard of it. In our attempts to make conservation easy, we have made it trivial.[4]

Leopold, like Muir before him, expresses a frustration in his encounter with a worldview so anthropocentric that it has blinded itself to the organic wholeness of life and exercised an "ethic" of dominion that only sought to exploit and justify such exploitation for the benefit of humankind. As Muir and Leopold correctly deduced, such anthropocentrism was deeply rooted in religious and philosophical concerns, perhaps more unconscious than conscious, but difficult to change and transform when there appeared to be an authority behind such points of view that suggested "rights" assigned to one species from a still higher source.

Leopold was writing in the late 1940s, in a period in which there was little articulation of an environmentalist point of view. The ecological crisis that looms large before us today was little known or understood in Leopold's day except as a minority point of view. Today, as we are well aware, Leopold's observation that neither philosophy nor religion has heard of conservation is no longer the case. Environmental philosophy has developed as a form of

discourse within the field of philosophy. In turn, ecology has developed as an interdisciplinary approach for work within the sciences and social sciences. In addition, religion has begun to take seriously the challenge to the lack of attention that seems to have characterized much of the historical development of religious traditions to matters of the environment.

There is now a religious response to the ecological crisis and a role for the environment within the context of theological discourse. It may still be the case that specific traditions are predisposed toward a certain attitude about the environment and the place of humankind within it. Some traditions simply seem more favorably inclined than others to questions of the complex interconnectedness of life-forms on planet earth, but even within those traditions where humankind is viewed as *sui generis* and thus distinct and separate from the organic world, there still appears to be a minority voice calling for a revisiting of the theological questions that establish such distinctiveness for the human species.

Only a change in the deepest layer of religious and philosophical concern within the individual can change the way in which the individual reacts to and relates with the larger organic context of the world. This change can now be seen in the increasing role given to environmental philosophy as well as in the serious responses of religious traditions to the impending ecological crisis. The good news is that the environment is now being taken seriously; the bad news is that such serious concern for the environment is against a backdrop of the continued history of use, misuse, and abuse. The only question is whether any concern at this point is already too late and always too little in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. The good news of interest and concern is where our hope lies for our own species as well as the planet as a whole.

## Asian Religious Traditions and the Environment

Environmental philosophy has come of age, as has an interest in environmental issues related to the academic study of religion. I want to focus particular attention upon the treatment of Eastern religion and philosophy in discussions of the environment as well as the question of the contribution such traditions might make to



the larger understanding of the history of environmental consciousness. Of major significance to the understanding of Eastern religious and philosophical traditions is the recent work by J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames, *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought*. Let me begin with the agenda set out by Callicott and Ames:

> The complex of problems constituting the "environmental crisis" (in chronological order of their popular notice) include environmental pollution, the aesthetic degradation of nature, human overpopulation, resource depletion, ecological destruction, and, now emerging as the most pressing and desperate of problems, abrupt massive species extinction. These problems are largely Western in provenance, albeit global in scope. . . . And they all appear to be symptoms of a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of nature and of a tendency to exclude nature from moral concern or consideration.[5]

Callicott and Ames provide a contemporary and comparative philosophical perspective echoing the sentiments of Muir and Leopold, articulating the necessity of conscious inclusion of nature in moral discourse whether it be philosophical or religious. For Callicott and Ames the objective is to introduce Eastern philosophical and religious traditions into the discussion of environmental issues to broaden the perspectives represented. Certainly within our own society it has become more and more difficult to represent an American perspective on environmental issues by including only Western philosophical and religious perspectives. We live in a rapidly demographically changing society and any representation of our society as a whole is in need of sources of information for worldviews not readily understood and poorly accessed. Simply to represent an American perspective or Western perspective, we must be inclusive in the sources that are brought to bear upon the topic. It is no longer adequate to represent only a Judeo-Christian view, or even Abrahamic view, when discussing the West.

Callicott and Ames have also undertaken their project in part as a corrective to those who are too ready to adopt that which appears different. Much of environmental literature, highly critical of Western philosophical and religious traditions as a cause of the present environmental crisis, has chosen to search for different

paradigms as an intellectual support for environmental attitudes. The need to enrich the discussion of environmental concerns cannot be met by the adoption of any one view but by the clarification of as many views as possible. Callicott and Ames do not intend the adoption of Eastern paradigms but rather the benefit that a different perspective can bring to the discussion of the issue. In this respect they state:

> To try to see the world through an alternative frame of mind, however, can be very revealing of one's own. One clear way that the East can help the West to understand and value nature is, therefore, by revealing certain premises and assumptions—concerning the nature of nature and who we human beings are in relation to it, as well as the kind of knowledge of it that we seek to obtain—which lie so deep within or which so pervade the Western world view that they may not come to light any other way.[6]

The resonance with Eastern paradigms felt by many contemporary voices and authors for the environment is in part explained by Callicott and Ames as a response to the shifting of Western worldviews in the twentieth century, particularly with the transformation of scientific paradigms imperative, and the seeming ability of Eastern traditions to express new paradigms.

> The emerging Western world view is nondualistic, nonreductive, integrative, systemic, holistic, and relational rather than substantive, and organic rather than mechanical. . . . Eastern modes of thought, in short, may resonate with and thus complement and enrich the concepts of nature and values in nature recently emergent in the historical dialectic of Western ideas.[7]

To date, most of the literature that has addressed Eastern philosophical and religious paradigms and their relation to environmental issues has looked to Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism with varying levels of sophistication as well as varying levels of success. It is a sad fact that the examination of the history of ideas worldwide for a broad understanding of what humanity has said about nature and the relation between nature and humankind has been remarkably limited both in terms of the few traditions covered as well as the at times apologetic nature of the studies themselves. One such tradition



as yet little studied is Confucianism. A dominant tradition of China, Korea, and Japan for the past several thousand years, only a very small amount of work has even entertained the study of Confucianism as an untapped resource in an attempt to rethink the relationship between humankind and the earth as well as develop new models for the understanding of the interaction between the earth and its organic systems.

## "The Continuity of Being" and Confucian Ecology

Prior to the present group of essays, several scholars of Confucianism have addressed the issue of a Confucian ecology. These include Tu Weiming, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and Okada Takehiko. All three scholars have focused their attention upon the later Confucian tradition, what is called Neo-Confucianism, rather than the early tradition of Classical Confucianism. The Classical Confucian tradition, though establishing an ethical basis for the interconnectedness of all living things, focuses almost all of its attention upon the relation of the individual to himself and to other human beings.[8] It is in the Neo-Confucian materials that we find the articulation of the relation between the individual and the cosmos. Tu Weiming, picking up the theme of interconnectedness between self and universe, has addressed the possibility of a Confucian ecology in his article "The Continuity of Being: Chinese visions of Nature."[9] Tu sees a Confucian universe as one of organic process, a spontaneously self-generating life force. This life force possesses continuity, wholeness, and dynamism.[10]

The critical issue for Confucians, according to Tu, is the degree to which humankind is a part of, rather than separate from, the life process. Tu sees Chinese thought as grounded in a harmony incorporating all things and interrelating humankind and everything else in the universe. In turn, it is the moral responsibility that is bestowed upon humankind as the highest embodiment of the moral content of the universe that draws the unique Confucian position on the relation of humankind and the universe. This moral nature becomes for Tu the defining character of what he calls "moral ecology."[11] Such a moral ecology suggests the interaction, for the Confucian, between the world and humankind based upon human-

kind's integral role in the universe. Humankind is seen as the embodiment of the highest moral reflection of the universe itself, or at least as an indication of what moral reflection is possible, though not necessarily daily manifest in human conduct. As Tu says: "It is true that we are consanguineous with nature. But as humans we must make ourselves worthy of such a relationship."[12] If the potential for moral cultivation is realized within the individual, then a moral ecology becomes a reality.

Mary Evelyn Tucker has also brought attention to the possible ecological dimensions of Neo-Confucianism. Tucker emphasizes both the natural cosmology and ethics of self-cultivation, or spiritual-cultivation, lying at the base of the Confucian vision of the universe. In an article entitled "The Relevance of Chinese Neo-Confucianism for the Reverence of Nature,"[13] Tucker argues that organic holism and dynamic vitalism characteristic of the Neo-Confucian vision of the universe is what creates a universe envisioned as unified, interconnected, and interpenetrating.[14]

Tucker also sees self-cultivation, or spiritual-cultivation, as a component of the ecological dimension of the tradition. She argues that self-cultivation focuses upon the development of the moral character of the individual, which in turn is what relates the individual to Heaven and Earth, or the universe—what is called in Confucian terminology the forming of one body with Heaven and Earth. Thus the act of self-cultivation becomes for the Confucian a way whereby the vision of forming one body with all things is realized. Using Tu's terminology, Tucker refers to this process as one of moving from an anthropocentric vision to an anthropocosmic worldview.[15]

In his essay "The Value of the Human in Classical Confucian Thought,"[16] Tu Weiming expresses the movement from anthropocentric to anthropocosmic in the following way:

> Confucian humanism is fundamentally different from anthropocentrism because it professes the unity of man and Heaven rather than the imposition of the human will upon nature. In fact the anthropocentric assumption that man is put on earth to pursue knowledge and, as knowledge expands, so does man's domain over earth is quite different from the Confucian perception of the pursuit of knowledge as an integral part of one's self-cultivation.[17]



Self-cultivation is directly connected to the larger ecological dimension of the Confucian tradition. Nowhere is this more plainly stated than in Tu's observation:

> The human transformation of nature, therefore, means as much an integrative effort to learn to live harmoniously in one's natural environment as a modest attempt to use the environment to sustain basic livelihood. The idea of exploiting nature is rejected because it is incompatible with the Confucian concern for moral self-development.[18]

Both Tucker and Tu suggest a metaphysical underpinning to Neo-Confucianism that can speak directly to issues of ecological concern. The principle of forming one body with all things is a statement that has direct ramifications for the understanding of the ecological dimensions of the Confucian tradition. Both have also argued that self-cultivation is not an activity removed from consideration in our attempt to understand the ecological foundations of the tradition. By defining humans as less anthropocentric than anthropocosmic, the development of humaneness as a characteristic of what is most human relates humans not just to other humans but to all other living things as well.

## Okada Takehiko and Confucian Ecology

Okada Takehiko, a major contemporary Confucian scholar, has also addressed Confucian attitudes toward nature. My interviews with him, which appear in my book *The Confucian Way of Contemplation: Okada Takehiko and the Tradition of Quiet-Sitting*[19] and which are on-going in a joint project with Mary Evelyn Tucker compiling further dialogue with Okada, have touched upon environmental concerns. His responses have been based in large part upon his vast knowledge of the Confucian tradition as a whole, rather than on a previously articulated environmental concern or position by the tradition.

When dealing with the Confucian tradition, not unlike other historical traditions, one can point to a potential the Confucian tradition possesses for being a resource for environmental thinking but not to clear statements or a clear position articulating an

environmental awareness as we might define it. Since ecology and environmental philosophy as technical fields and forms of discourse are largely after the fact in terms of the history of the Confucian tradition, one can only postulate what impact the historical tradition may have chosen to have in the continuing discourse of environmental concerns.

Other historical traditions have become "modern," of course, and their theological discourse is now routinely inclusive of environmental problems. With the Confucian tradition, as we set out to define a Confucian agenda for the twenty-first century, its future is being defined in terms of a small number of people. The tradition lacks its historical contexts in a contemporary environment. It is a tradition without institutions at this stage of its history. If the agenda for the twenty-first century of Confucianism is to be created, then we must look to those who espouse a contemporary Confucian perspective for response and articulation of a Confucian form of environmental philosophy—those such as Okada.

To Okada the ecological crisis of the world is a pressing concern, and he sees the Confucian tradition as a potential resource to address the crisis. The present problem is deeply rooted, from his perspective, in the technological society we have created. Such a society is the product of the growth of the scientific worldview and its application into the development of technology. For Okada it is imperative that a new form of thinking, one that places humankind in community with the natural world, begin to take place within the science community.

Okada begins his discussion of ecology by describing the development of science and the potential threat developments of applied science might pose for life on this planet. He suggests that the science community, from his perspective, needs to develop a profound respect for life. The attitude of respect for life that he finds a necessary component of science is the groundwork for a Confucian position on environmental issues. He observes:

> I have a concern about the way in which science has developed. Its development has reached a point where it threatens the very existence of human life. . . . If we are going to make science totally responsive to the needs of the human community, we must let everyone—scientists and non-scientists alike—learn the importance



> of human life. In speaking of the importance of human life, it is essential to realize the importance of one's own life as well as the lives of others. We live in the same world together and mutual respect for life is a prerequisite. From my point of view Confucianism provides a suitable basis for this perspective. At the center of this perspective lies the Confucian idea of being in community (forming one body) with others. In short, one can live only by living in the company of others. In order to do this it is essential to follow the rules of society. The basis of Confucian ethics is to have consideration for the other person's heart. If we extend this concept, we can include all of nature.[20]

One can see the focus that is placed upon human life. In turn, having articulated human life as the centerpiece of the Confucian worldview, Okada places human life within the context of the life of all things. This is the concept of forming one body with all things. I asked Okada whether he considered that we have ethical obligations to all forms of life. His answer is not only a statement about the status of animals but is in turn a statement with clear implications for a Confucian ecology:

> Taylor: I wonder about the degree to which a Confucian can speculate on the importance of not just human life, but of *all* life. In brief, do we have ethical responsibilities to *all* forms of life, not just human life?
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> Okada: Yes I think we do, and such an ideal should be extended to all forms of life, animals and plants alike. The Confucian concept of being in community (forming one body) with other human beings can be extended to the community of life itself. . . . All humankind has a mind that cannot bear to see the suffering of others and this is something that should be applied to all life.
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> Taylor: From a Confucian perspective, humankind has the possibility of moral self-reflection and moral self-consciousness. The distinguishing mark of the human from the animal is moral self-consciousness and moral decision-making. Based upon the degree to which the human being is a moral decision-making individual, does the person have a moral responsibility for the safekeeping or stewardship of other forms of life?

> Okada: Because the Confucian ideal of forming one community (forming one body) with other human beings should be extended to other forms of life, we do therefore have a moral responsibility for other forms of life. That all humankind has a heart of commiseration that cannot bear to see the suffering of others, such an idea should be applied to animals as well.[21]

Tu Weiming, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and Okada Takehiko have all focused upon and highlighted similar elements in the construction of a Confucian ecology. Such an ecology consists of a cosmology recognizing, in Tu's words, a "continuity of being." It is a universe with a unitary structure, that which forms a single body. For Okada it is expressed in the sayings of two prominent Neo-Confucians during the Sung dynasty: the saying of Ch'eng Hao (1032–1085), "The humane person forms one body with all things comprehensively";[22] and that of Ch'eng I (1033–1107), "The humane person regards Heaven and earth and all things as one body."[23] It is holistic, dynamic, and vitalistic, in Tucker's terms. The universe is ethically charged and humankind is given a priority in ethical consciousness and therefore potentially assigned a role of not only learning and self-cultivation but stewardship of all living things as well. One forms a single body with Heaven and Earth and all living things, as the Sung philosopher Chang Tsai (1020–1073) suggested in his writing, the *Western Inscription*:

> Heaven is my father and earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I finds an intimate place in their midst.
>
> Therefore that which extends throughout the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature.
>
> All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions.[24]

As an ethical maxim, as central to the contemporary Confucian philosopher Okada as it was to the early Confucian Mencius, one cannot bear to witness the suffering of another.[25] This ethical stance has profound ramifications for the way a Confucian thinks about the individual, other persons, and the world as an organic unity fecund with life. Confucianism, particularly Neo-Confucianism, is thus a resource for ecological thinking, what Tu Weiming has described as moral ecology.

## Confucian Ecology: A Methodological Inquiry

We have ample evidence that Confucianism can serve as a resource for environmental philosophy, but before employing these materials from historical sources to address issues affecting the late twentieth century, a certain caution must be exercised in thinking through the relation between historical context and contemporary crisis. Considering Neo-Confucianism as a potential resource for environmental philosophy raises certain methodological considerations. One must be concerned that the history of ideas is more than just history, that is, that ideas born out of historical context have a relevancy to a contemporary problem.

One can agree with Holmes Rolston, an important voice in the literature of environmental ethics, for using caution in the application of historical ideas to a contemporary problem. Rolston, in his article "Can the East Help the West to Value Nature?"[26] is certainly correct in calling our attention to the difference between the primarily religious intent of Eastern views and the ecological crisis whose roots lie principally in Western philosophical, scientific, and religious traditions. His concern is whether these two different elements can be brought together for any meaningful discourse. As he states, "We must inquire more particularly whether what the East believed before science helps the West to value nature after science."[27]

In addition to his concern about the ability to construct meaningful discourse across historical religious and contemporary scientific lines, Rolston expresses concern that "ideas" do not generate action. The question he is posing is whether historical religious ideas from another cultural context can be brought to bear upon a contemporary Western problem with any positive outcome in the resolution of the present environmental situation. For Rolston there must be more than simply a description of a religious worldview with possible correlations to a scientific worldview. To validate the capability of "valuing nature," there must be a prescription for action. The historical resource must demonstrate a prescription for action emanating from its ideas, that action which will then have a direct effect upon the present situation in which humankind finds itself.

Thus far the work we have summarized has primarily focused upon the "ideas" of a Confucian ecology, that is the metaphysics

that lie at the base of the worldview. To all intents and purposes, these are primarily historical ideas, which functioned differently in the past. The tradition from which these ideas were developed is now in different historical circumstances. This clearly does not suggest the end of the tradition and most would argue that there has been a rekindling of interest. But it calls into question the ability of the tradition to act upon its ideas at present in a way sufficient to warrant a call to Confucian action. This is because Confucianism no longer has a broad contextual infrastructure to provide cultural leadership. While it may be useful as a historical source, and thus a resource, it is largely incapable of drawing attention to a cultural context. This is the reason that Okada, in discussing the future of Confucianism, referred to the need to move beyond the name Confucianism. From his point of view, as long as the teaching of respect for life is retained, then the Confucian agenda can proceed, even in a post-Confucian world.[28]

One might argue that these ideas, whether Confucian or post-Confucian, have implicit within them the act of valuing nature because an integrated and holistic universe will produce a better ecology than a description of a universe that is not holistic and integrated. Callicott and Ames grapple with this problem, suggesting that people's ecology is either affected by how they think about themselves in relation to the world, or there are glaring inconsistencies in the relationship.[29] Callicott and Ames side with the former position, suggesting that while there may be some inconsistencies, evidence supports a position that sees some correlation between what people think and how they act.

Rolston continues to argue, however, that no one particular philosophical construction of the world is necessarily better than another as a foundation for ecology, if there is no accompanying prescription for action. One can have a worldview of noble thoughts about the world and the place of humankind within it, but if there is no call to act on the basis of that worldview, then the ideas themselves may be of little value.

What intrigues me most about Rolston's argument is the question of the relevance of a particular worldview to changing not only the way in which one *thinks* about nature but, most importantly, the way one *acts* in relation to nature. The example he uses illustrates his concern. The question is one of valuing animals. Does it make a difference in the valuing of animals that one would accept a worldview predicated upon a belief in *karma* and rebirth where all forms of life would be drawn together by relating them to each other in mutual dependence across lifetimes on an ascending scale of evolutionary life-forms?

In other words, is the belief in *karma* and rebirth more predisposed to accept the value of animal life than a belief that rejects *karma* and rebirth, accepting instead naturalistic evolution? Is there anything within a naturalistic model which at the outset rejects the value of life or of particular species? As Rolston asks, isn't it possible to value the multiplicity of life-forms precisely because they are so different from each other, rather than emphasizing their mutual dependence? In turn, a valuing of the ecological world may stem as much from an appreciation of the diversity of life as from the unity of life.

What we need to see, following Rolston's concern, is more than a description of a philosophical worldview and the suggestion that a particular worldview is conducive to the development of an ecology. We must be able to draw a connection between description and the act of valuing. If this connection is not immediate as demonstrated by acts of valuing, then the ability of a given worldview to serve as a philosophical paradigm for an ecology is at best problematic. Or, put another way, the descriptive capacity of a worldview may be only as good as its ability to demonstrate a commitment to prescriptive action.

In his discussion of bipolar complementarity as a Chinese philosophical construct and its relation to the understanding of nature, Rolston asks how the *description* of the commonality of complementarity between Chinese philosophy and science becomes a *prescription* for human conduct in the valuing of nature.[30] Rolston implies that in the models he has posed of Eastern religious discourse and contemporary science, there might be ideas that appear to resemble one another, but there is no movement from the ideas to actual practice. That is, at the practical level one may discuss the "great ideas" and their potential for commonality, but they are just ideas, nothing more. Because they are just ideas and because their correlation to the Western setting is at best problematic, there is, according to Rolston, little that such Eastern ideas can do in helping the West value nature. Rolston seems uninterested

in the possibility, as suggested by Callicott and Ames, that the value of Eastern ideas is to act as a sounding board for self-reflection, not as a panacea for adoption.[31]

Valuing nature is more than establishing a set of propositions about the nature of reality and the nature of nature. The valuing of nature is a form of action. Rolston and I agree on this point. Where Rolston goes wrong in his critique of attempts to correlate Eastern historical religious ideas with contemporary scientific discourse is the limitations he has placed upon his set of "Eastern ideas." So-called Eastern ideas of the kind described are not just ideas. They are not in this sense pure philosophy. They are primarily, if not exclusively, religious in intent and are not isolated from practice. Description and prescription flow from the same mold.

For Rolston "Eastern ideas" can be described in the abstract because Western philosophy has so frequently focused primarily upon the act of thinking or thinking about the act but not the act itself. Because of his involvement in the Western model, he questions the movement from description to prescription, failing to recognize that in the examples he employs there is a continuum between description and prescription. Religion is both thought and practice or action. It is both "thought about" and "movement towards" an ultimate end.[32] Philosophy may well be thought alone, and therefore description, but religion is both description and prescription. Through illustrating the religious character of the tradition, we are demonstrating both description and prescription. A religious tradition's capacity for providing description of an ecological worldview is at the same time going to be descriptive of actions involved in the valuing of nature. And what of Confucianism? I am not going to discuss its capacity for the religious in this context,[33] but it is useful to demonstrate its articulation of the prescriptive act of valuing nature.

## The Confucian Prescription for Environmental Action

Can Confucianism say of itself that it has articulated prescriptions for action built upon the descriptions of a universe regarded as a single body, the single unifying metaphysical structure found at the root of possible ecological concerns within the tradition? The answer for those of us who study the tradition is obvious. There are a series of examples, common literary references as we teach and conduct research in the tradition, that reference ecological concerns. What may be distinctive is the consideration of these references as examples of environmental impact or a potential resource for environmental consideration.

Chang Tsai's *Western Inscription*[34] is well known, but how many of us see in this writing a potential reference for environmental thought and action? The *Western Inscription* is not simply a description of the interrelatedness of all things; it is a call to act in a manner that recognizes such interrelatedness. Through the identification of the commonality of material force and the nature of all things as a description of the nature of the universe, there is a call to treat all people as brothers and sisters and a call to see all things as companions, a prescription to act upon the basis of the knowledge of the nature of things. Using Chang Tsai's *Western Inscription* as probably the most well known of such calls to action, one might well conclude that "companionship with all things" could be posed as the Confucian prescription for ethical action and the root definition of a Confucian ecology.

We have other well-known examples from the literature, such as Chou Tun-i (1017–1073) not cutting the grass in front of his window, stating that he and the grass share a common nature.[35] It is the recognition that the feeling of the grass and his own feelings are the same that restrains him from cutting the grass. By extension, the feeling of the trees and the animals are also the same. From a religious perception of the nature of the world as a unified body comes the explicit prescription for action that suggests a caring and respect, not just for other persons, but for all living things.

Wang Yang-ming (1472–1529) expresses in equally well-known passages the same form of moral action derived from the image of all things united as a single body throughout the universe:

> Therefore when he sees a child about to fall into a well, he cannot help a feeling of alarm and commiseration. This shows that his humanity forms one body with the child. It may be objected that the child belongs to the same species. Again, when he observes the pitiful cries and frightened appearance of birds and animals about to be slaughtered, he cannot help feeling an "inability to bear" their

suffering. This shows that his humanity forms one body with birds and animals. It may be objected that birds and animals are sentient beings as he is. But when he sees plants broken and destroyed, he cannot help. . .feeling. . .pity. This shows that his humanity forms one body with plants.[36]

What Wang has conveyed in this passage expresses concrete and specific feelings for the full range of living things. Wang has suggested ways in which humankind might act in relation to living things through the expression of commiseration for their plight. The connection of such feelings to the philosophical observation that all things form a single body is made even more explicit in the following passage:

> Everything from ruler, minister, husband, wife, and friends to mountains, rivers, spiritual beings, birds, animals, and plants should be truly loved in order to realize my humanity that forms one body with them, and then my clear character will be completely manifested, and I will really form one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things.[37]

And during the Tokugawa period in Japan, Kaibara Ekken (1630–1714) is also well known for a number of statements moving from description to prescription of a moral consciousness that ultimately found kinship with all forms of life. Kaibara bases himself philosophically upon the unified nature of the universe through the commonality of material force and relies upon the image of the universe as a single body derived from Chang Tsai. As Tucker has demonstrated, the abiding image for Kaibara remains that of Heaven and Earth as father and mother. As humans we are the sons and daughters of Heaven and Earth; as such we share in the nature of Heaven and Earth. This nature is humaneness itself.

For Kaibara, humans have a unique position in the hierarchy of creation and as a result of this position also have certain specific responsibilities. On this unique position, Kaibara says:

> The sages taught in the *Book of History* that heaven and earth are the parents of all things and that human beings are the spirit of the universe. This means that heaven and earth, being the source which gives birth to all things, are the great parents. Since humans receive the purest material force of heaven and earth from birth, they surpass all other things and their mind-and-heart shines forth clearly. . . .
>
> Heaven and earth give birth to and nourish all things, but the deep compassion with which they treat humans is different from [the way they nourish] birds and beasts, trees and plants. Therefore, among all things only humans are the children of the universe. Thus humans have heaven as their father and earth as their mother and receive their great kindness. Because of this, always to serve heaven and earth is the Human Way.[38]

Based upon this perception of the unity of all things and the special position of humans as the sons and daughters of Heaven and Earth, Kaibara stresses the sense of gratitude to Heaven and Earth as a central component of self-cultivation. One manifestation of this gratitude and indebtedness is a sensitivity to all life. Kaibara says:

> The root of the practice of humaneness is, first, loving parents and brothers and sisters. . . . Next, we should love relatives, retainers, and friends, and all other people. Then we should love and not wantonly kill birds, beasts, insects, and fish. Finally, we should love and not recklessly cut down grass and trees. This is the order of showing compassion toward people and living things. . . .
>
> . . .Thus even birds and animals, grasses and trees, are all made by nature—if we damage them recklessly, we should realize that it is a lack of filiality toward nature.[39]

With this statement Kaibara sets out an agenda for a Confucian ecology. It is similar to the other statements we have seen. There is a clear focus upon the common and shared nature of all things. All things are companions—they form a single body of the universe. In turn, however, humankind bears a special position in the order of all things. Because of this special position, they have special responsibilities and duties. Such duties suggest the focus of self-cultivation upon the fulfillment of humaneness, and humaneness is to be shown toward an ever-widening circle of living things.

From the beginning of the Confucian tradition, the priority of the tradition has remained human relations. It is no accident that the special moral relations articulated throughout the tradition, the Five Relations, do not mention animals, plants, or nature. In this

respect Confucianism is no different from any of the major literary religious traditions of the world. Such traditions are first focused upon humankind. They are, after all, human religions. Having focused upon humankind, the question becomes how a religious tradition chooses to situate humankind in the cosmos and articulate humankind's interconnectedness with all things. Only from the later question will the basis emerge for measuring a tradition's capacity for entertaining an ecological foundation.

Confucianism is a human-centered tradition and is focused upon a special status given to humankind. Yet, in terms of its ability to demonstrate its focus upon viewing humankind as interconnected to the cosmos, it has been characterized as more anthropocosmic then anthropocentric. Human learning, human self-cultivation, and human relations form the foundation, but as humanity is realized, the humaneness which is at its center is found to be the center of the universe itself. Thus to become humane is to move beyond humankind and here is where its ecological roots lie. It is important not to move beyond humanity before humanity has been fully addressed, but the extension of humanity embraces all life. Ultimately, humaneness within the Confucian tradition is ecology because it is, in the words of Chang Tsai, companionship with the world.[40]

## Notes

1. John Muir, *Steep Trails: California, Utah, Nevada, Washington, Oregon, The Grand Canyon* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), 18–19.

2. See Michael P. Cohen, *The Pathless Way: John Muir and American Wilderness* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 178, for a discussion of the importance of the essay "Wild Wool" and its connection to American transcendentalism.

3. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (London: Oxford University Press, ca. 1949, 1974), viii.

4. Ibid., 209–10.

5. *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 3.

6. Ibid., 16.

7. Ibid., 17

8. For a discussion of the Classical Confucian attitudes toward nature as seen in their stance on animals, see R. L. Taylor, "Of Animals and Men: The Confucian Perspective," in *Animal Sacrifices: Religious Perspectives on the Use of Animals in Science*, ed. Tom Regan (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 237–64.

9. Tu Wei-ming, "The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature," in Tu Wei-ming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 35–50. This article is reprinted in the present volume; page references are to the original edition.

10. Ibid., 38.

11. Ibid., 43.

12. Ibid., 47.

13. Mary Evelyn Tucker, "The Relevance of Chinese Neo-Confucianism for the Reverence of Nature," *Environmental History Review* 15, no. 2 (summer 1991):55–67.

14. Ibid., 62.

15. Ibid., 65.

16. Tu Wei-ming, "The Value of the Human in Classical Confucian Thought," in Tu Wei-ming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 67–80.

17. Ibid., 75.

18. Ibid.

19. Rodney L. Taylor, *The Confucian Way of Contemplation: Okada Takehiko and the Tradition of Quiet-Sitting* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988).

20. Ibid., 199, with modifications.

21. Ibid., 201, with modifications.

22. *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, comp. Wm. Theodore de Bary, Wing-tsit Chan, and Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 559.

23. Ibid., 530.

24. Ibid., 524.

25. *Mencius*, 2A.6.

26. Holmes Rolston, III, "Can the East Help the West to Value Nature?" *Philosophy East and West* 37, no. 2 (April 1987):172–90.

27. Ibid., 174.

28. Taylor, *The Confucian Way of Contemplation*, 212.

29. Callicott and Ames, *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought*, 285.

30. Rolston, "Can the East Help the West to Value Nature?" 177.

31. Callicott and Ames, *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought*, 16.

32. For a general discussion of the definition of religion as it is applied to Confucianism, see R. L. Taylor, *The Religious Dimensions of Confucianism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990). The definition applied to the Confucian tradition is based upon the work of Frederick Streng and Joachim Wach. See Frederick Streng, *Understanding Religious Life*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1985), and Joachim Wach, *The Comparative Study of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

33. I have written about this problem in a number of different contexts over the past twenty-five years. For my most recent attempt see R. L. Taylor, "The Religious Character of the Confucian Tradition," *Philosophy East and West* 48, no. 1 (January 1998):80–107, and R. L. Taylor, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Chinese Confucianism* (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, forthcoming).

34. de Bary, Chan, and Watson, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 524.

35. *Reflections on Things at Hand: The Neo-Confucian Anthology Compiled by Chu Hsi and Lü Tsu-ch'ien*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 302–3.

36. Wang Yang-ming, *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 272.

37. Ibid., 273.

38. Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Moral and Spiritual Cultivation in Japanese Neo-Confucianism: The Life and Thought of Kaibara Ekken, 1630–1714* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 136.

39. Ibid., 186.

40. de Bary, Chan, and Watson, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 524.