Chapter 14

The Green Office: Economics and the Environment

Chapter Overview

Chapter 14 "The Green Office: Economics and the Environment" explores the multiple relations linking business, the environment, and environmental protection. The question of animal rights is also considered.

14.1 The Environment

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Consider damage done to the environment in a business context.
2. Delineate major legal responses to concerns about the environment.

Cancun

Cancun, Mexico, is paradise: warm climate, Caribbean water, white sand beaches, stunning landscapes, coral reefs, and a unique lagoon. You can sunbathe, snorkel, parasail, shoot around on jet skis, and drink Corona without getting carded.

Hordes of vacationers fill the narrow, hotel-lined peninsula—so many that the cars on the one main street snarl in traffic jams running the length of the tourist kilometers. It's a jarring contrast: on one side the placid beaches (until the jet skis get geared up), and on the other there's the single road about a hundred yards inland. Horns scream, oil-burning cars and trucks belch pollution, tourists fume. Cancun's problem is that it can't handle its own success. There's not enough room for roads behind the hotels just like there's not enough beach in front to keep the noisy jet skiers segregated from those who want to take in the sun and sea quietly.

The environment hasn't been able to bear the success either. According to a report,

The tourist industry extensively damaged the lagoon, obliterated sand dunes, led to the extinction of varying species of animals and fish, and destroyed the rainforest which surrounds Cancun. The construction of 120 hotels in 20 years has also endangered breeding areas for marine turtles, as well as causing large numbers of fish and shellfish to be depleted or disappear just offshore."Cancun Tourism," TED, Trade & Environment Database, case no. 86, accessed June 8, 2011, http://www1.american.edu/TED/cancun.htm.

For all its natural beauty, environmentally, Cancun is an ugly place. Those parts of the natural world that most tourists don't see (the lagoon, the nearby forest, the fish life near shore) have been sacrificed so a few executives in suits can make money.

From its inception, Cancun was a business. The Mexican government built an airport to fly people in, set up rules to draw investors, and made it (relatively) easy to build hotels on land that only a few coconut harvesters from the local plantation even knew about. From a business sense, it was a beautiful proposition: bring people to a place where they can be happy, provide new and more lucrative jobs for the locals, and build a mountain of profit (mainly for government insiders and friends) along the way.

Everything went according to plan. Those who visit Cancun have a wonderful time (once they finally get down the road to their hotel). College students live it up during spring break, young couples take their children to play on the beach, older couples go down and remember that they do, in fact, love each other. So fish die, and people get jobs. Forests disappear, and people's love is kindled. The important questions about business ethics and the environment are mostly located right at this balance and on these questions: how many trees may be sacrificed for human jobs? How many animal species can be traded for people to fall in love?

What Is the Environment?

Harm to the natural world is generally discussed under two terms: the environment and the ecosystem. The words' meanings overlap, but one critical aspect of the term **ecosystem**[1] is the idea of interrelation. An ecosystem is composed of living and nonliving elements that find a balance allowing for their continuation. The destruction of the rain forest around Cancun didn't just put an end to some trees; it also jeopardized a broader web of life: birds that needed limbs for their nests disappeared when the trees did. Then, with the sturdy forest gone, Hurricane Gilbert swept through and wiped out much of the lower-level vegetation. Meanwhile, out in the sea, the disappearance of some small fish meant their predators had nothing to feed on and they too evaporated. What makes an ecosystem a system is the fact that the various parts all depend on each other, and damaging one element may also damage and destroy another or many others.

In the sense that it's a combination of interdependent elements, the tourist world in Cancun is no different from the surrounding natural world. As the traffic jams along the peninsula have grown, making it difficult for people to leave and get back to their hotels, the tourists have started migrating away, looking elsewhere for their vacation reservations. Of course Cancun isn't going to disappear, but if you took that one road completely away, most everything else would go with it. So economic realities can resemble environmental ones: once a single part of a functioning system disappears, it's hard to stop the effects from falling further down the line.

1. Composed of living and nonliving elements, it's a web of balanced interactions allowing the continuation of each element.

What Kinds of Damage Can Be Done to the Environment?

Nature is one of nature's great adversaries. Hurricanes sweeping up through the Caribbean and along the Eastern Seaboard of the United States wipe out entire ecosystems. Moving inland, warm winters in northern states like Minnesota can allow some species including deer to reproduce at very high rates, meaning that the next winter, when conditions return to normal, all available food is eaten rapidly at winter's onset, and subsequent losses to starvation are massive and extend up the food chain to wolves and bears. Lengthening the timeline, age-long periods of warming and cooling cause desertification and ice ages that put ends to giant swaths of habitats and multitudes of species.

While it's true that damaging the natural world's ecosystems is one of nature's great specialties, evidence also indicates that the human contribution to environmental change has been growing quickly. It's impossible to measure everything that has been done, or compare the world today with what would have been had humans never evolved (or never created an industrialized economy), but one way to get a sense of the kind of transformations human activity may be imposing on the environment comes from extinction rates: the speed at which species are disappearing because they no longer find a habitable place to flourish. According to some studies, the current rate of extinction is around *a thousand* times higher than the one derived from examinations of the fossil record, which is to say, before the time parts of the natural world were being severely trashed by developments like those lining the coast of Cancun, Mexico.Kent Holsinger, "Patterns of Biological Extinction," lecture notes, University of Connecticut, August 31, 2009, accessed June 8, 2011, http://darwin.eeb.uconn.edu/eeb310/lecture-notes/extinctions/node1.html.

In an economics and business context, the kinds of damage our industrialized lifestyles most extensively wreak include:

- Air pollution
- Water pollution
- Soil pollution
- Contamination associated with highly toxic materials
- Resource depletion

Air pollution is the emission of harmful chemicals and particulate matter into the air. **Photochemical smog**[2]—better known simply as *smog*—is a cocktail of gases and particles reacting with sunlight to make visible and poisonous clouds. Car exhaust is a major contributor to this kind of pollution, so smog can concentrate in urban centers where traffic jams are constant. In Mexico City on bad days, the smog is so

2. Better known as smog, it's a cocktail of gases and particles released into the air that react with sunlight to make a harmful cloud.

thick it can be hard to see more than ten blocks down a straight street. Because the urban core is nestled in a mountain valley that blocks out the wind, pollutants don't blow away as they do in many places; they get entirely trapped. During the winter, a brown top forms above the skyline, blocking the view of the surrounding mountain peaks; the cloud is clearly visible from above to those arriving by plane. After landing, immediately upon exiting the airport into the streets, many visitors note their eyes tearing up and their throats drying out. In terms of direct bodily harm, Louisiana State University environmental chemist Barry Dellinger estimates that breathing the air in Mexico's capital for a day is about the equivalent of smoking two packs of cigarettes."Is Air Pollution Killing You?" *Ivanhoe Newswire*, May 2009, accessed June 8, 2011, http://www.ivanhoe.com/science/story/2009/05/572a.html. This explains why, on the worst days, birds drop out of the air dead, and one longer-term human effect is increased risk of lung cancer.

Greenhouse gasses[3], especially carbon dioxide released when oil and coal are burned, absorb and hold heat from the sun, preventing it from dissipating into space, and thereby creating a greenhouse effect, a general warming of the environment. Heat is, of course, necessary for life to exist on earth, but fears exist that the last century of industrialization has raised the levels measurably, and continuing industrial expansion will speed the process even more. Effects associated with the warming are significant and include:

- Shifts in vegetation, in what grows where
- Rising temperatures in lakes, rivers, and oceans, leading to changes in wildlife distribution
- Flooding of coastal areas, where many of our cities are located (Cancun could be entirely flooded by only a small rise in the ocean's water level.)

Another group of chemicals, chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), threaten to break down the ozone layer in the earth's stratosphere. Currently, that layer blocks harmful ultraviolet radiation from getting through to the earth's surface where it could cause skin cancer and disrupt ocean life. Effective international treaties have limited (though not eliminated) CFC emissions.

Coal-burning plants—many of which produce electricity—release sulfur compounds into the air, which later mix into water vapor and rain down as sulfuric acid, commonly known as acid rain. Lakes see their pH level changed with subsequent effects on vegetation and fish. Soil may also be poisoned.

3. Gasses that absorb and hold heat from the sun, preventing it from dissipating into space.

Air pollution is the most immediate form of environmental poison for most of us, but not the only significant one. In China, more than 25 percent of surface water is

too polluted for swimming or fishing."More than 25% of China's Surface Water Contaminated," *China Daily*, July 26, 2010, accessed June 8, 2011, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-07/26/content_11051350.htm.

Some of those lakes may have been ruined in the same way as Onondaga Lake near Syracuse, New York. Over a century ago, resorts were built and a fish hatchery flourished on one side of the long lake. The other side received waste flushed by the surrounding cities and factories. Problems began around 1900 when the fish hatchery could no longer reproduce fish. Soon after, it was necessary to ban ice harvesting from the lake. In 1940, swimming was banned because of dangerous bacteria, and in 1970, fishing had to be stopped because of mercury and PCB contamination. The lake was effectively dead. To cite one example, a single chemical company dumped eighty tons of mercury into the water during its run on the coast. Recently, the New York state health department loosened restrictions slightly, and people are advised that they may once again eat fish caught in the lake. Just as long as it's not more than one per month. Those who do eat more risk breakdown of their nervous system, collapse of their liver, and teeth falling out.The Upstate Freshwater Institute Onondaga Lake page, October 22, 2010, accessed June 8, 2011, http://www.upstatefreshwater.org/html/onondaga_lake.html; "2010–2011 Health Advisories: Chemicals in Sportfish and Game," New York State Department of Health, 2011, accessed June 8, 2011, http://static.ongov.net/WEP/wepdf/2009_AMP-FINAL/Library/11_SupportingDocs/L11.10.11_HealthAdvisory2010-2011.pdf.

Like liquid poisons, solid waste can be dangerous. Paper bags degrade fairly rapidly and cleanly, but plastic containers remain where they're left into the indefinite future. The metal of a battery tossed into a landfill will break down eventually, but not before dripping out poisons including cadmium. Cadmium weakens the bones in low doses and, if exposure is high, causes death.

At the industrial waste extreme, there are toxins so poisonous they require special packaging to prevent even minimal exposure more or less forever. The waste from nuclear power plants qualifies. So noxious are the spent fuel rods that it's a matter of national debate in America and elsewhere as to where they should be stored. When the Chernobyl nuclear plant broke open in 1986, it emitted a radioactive cloud that killed hundreds and forced the permanent evacuation of the closest town, Pripyat. Area wildlife destruction would require an entire book to document, but as a single example, the surrounding pine forest turned red and died after absorbing the radiation storm.

Finally, all the environmental damage listed so far has resulted from ruinous substance *additions* to natural ecosystems, but environmental damage also runs in

the other direction as depletion. Our cars and factories are sapping the earth of its petroleum reserves. Minerals, including copper, are being mined toward the point where it will become too expensive to continue digging the small amount that remains from the ground. The United Nations estimates that fifty thousand square miles of forest are disappearing each year, lost to logging, conversion to agriculture, fuel wood collection by rural poor, and forest fires.Rhett A. Butler, "World Deforestation Rates and Forest Cover Statistics, 2000–2005," *Mongabay.com*, November 16, 2005, accessed June 8, 2011, http://news.mongabay.com/2005/1115-forests.html. Of course, most of those tree losses can be replanted. On the other hand, species that are driven out of existence can't be brought back. As already noted, current rates of extinction are running far above "background extinction" rates, which is an approximation of how many species would disappear each year were the rules of nature left unperturbed.

Conclusion. Technically, there's no such thing as preserving the environment because left to its own devices the natural world does an excellent job of wreaking havoc on itself. Disruptions including floods, combined with wildlife battling for territory and food sources, all that continually sweeps away parts of nature and makes room for new species and ecosystems. Still, changes wrought by the natural world tend to be gradual and balanced, and the worry is that our industrialized lifestyle has become so powerful that nature, at least in certain areas, will no longer be able to compensate and restore any kind of balance. That concerns has led to both legal efforts, and ethical arguments, in favor of protecting the environment.

The Law

Legal efforts to protect the environment in the United States intensified between 1960 and 1970. The **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**[4] was established in 1970 to monitor and report on the state of the environment while establishing and enforcing specific regulations. Well known to most car buyers as the providers of the mile-per-gallon estimates displayed on the window sticker, the EPA is a large agency and employs a workforce compatible with its mission, including scientists, legal staffers, and communications experts.

Other important legal milestones in the field of environmental protection include:

- The Clean Air Act of 1963 and its many amendments regulate emissions from industrial plants and monitor air quality. One measure extends to citizens the right to sue companies for damages if they aren't complying with existing regulations: it effectively citizenizes law enforcement in this area of environmental protection.

4. Established in 1970, this agency of the US government monitors and reports on the state of the environment while establishing and enforcing specific regulations.

- The Clean Water Act, along with other, related legislation, regulates the quality of water in the geographic world (lakes and rivers), as well as the water we drink and use for industrial purposes. Chemical composition is important, and temperature also. Thermal pollution occurs when factories pour heated water back into natural waterways at a rate sufficient to affect the ecosystem.
- The Wilderness Act, along with other legislation, establishes areas of land as protected from development. Some zones, including the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in northern Minnesota, are reserved for minimal human interaction (no motors are allowed); other areas are more accessible. All wilderness and national park areas are regulated to protect natural ecosystems.
- The Endangered Species Act and related measures take steps to ensure the survival of species pressed to near extinction, especially by human intrusion. One example is the bald eagle. Subjected to hunting, loss of habitat, and poisoning by the pesticide DDT (which caused eagle eggs to crack prematurely), a once common species was reduced to only a few hundred pairs in the lower forty-eight states. Placed on the endangered species list in 1967, penalties for hunting were increased significantly. Also, DDT was banned, and subsequently the eagle made a strong comeback. It is no longer listed as endangered.
- The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 requires that an **environmental impact statement**[5] be prepared for many major projects. The word environment in this case means not only the natural world but also the human one. When a new building is erected in a busy downtown, the environmental impact statement reports on the effect the building will have on both the natural world (how much new air pollution will be released from increased traffic, how much water will be necessary for the building's plumbing, how much electricity will be used to keep the place cool in the summer) and also the civilized one (whether there's enough parking in the area for all the cars that will arrive, whether nearby highways can handle the traffic and similar). Staying with the natural factors, the statement should consider impacts—positive and negative—on the local ecosystem as well as strategies for minimizing those impacts and some consideration of alternatives to the project. The writing and evaluation of these statements can become sites of conflict between developers on one side and environmental protection organizations on the other.

Two major additional points about legal approaches to the natural world should be added. First, they can be expensive; nearly all environmental protection laws impose costs on business and, consequently, make life for everyone more costly. When developers of downtown buildings have to create a budget for their environmental impact statements, the expenses get passed on to the people who

5. A report on how a project will impact both the natural and human worlds.

buy condos in the building. There's no doubt that banning the pesticide DDT was good for the eagle, but it made farming—and therefore the food we eat—more expensive. Further, clean water and air stipulations don't only affect consumers by making products more expensive; the environmental responsibility also costs Americans jobs every time a factory gets moved to China or some other relatively low-regulation country. Of course, it's also true that, as noted earlier, around 25 percent of China's surface water is poisonous, but for laid-off workers in the States, it may be hard to worry so much about that.

Second, these American laws, regulations, and agencies don't make a bit of difference in Cancun, Mexico. Even though Cancun and America wash back and forth over each other (Cancun's hotels were constructed, chiefly, to host American visitors), the rights and responsibilities of legal dominion over the environment stop and start at places where people need to show their passports. This is representative of a larger reality: more than most issues in business ethics, arguments pitting economic and human interests against the natural world are international in nature. The greenhouse gases emitted by cars caught in Cancun traffic are no different, as far as the earth is concerned, from those gases produced along clogged Los Angeles freeways.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Ecosystems are natural webs of life in which the parts depend on each other for their continued survival.
- In a business context, the major types of pollution include air, water, soil, and contamination associated with highly toxic materials.
- Resource depletion is a type of environmental damage.
- Numerous laws regulate the condition and use of the environment in the United States.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is an example of an ecosystem?
2. Explain one way that an ecosystem can resemble an economic system.
3. What are some effects of smog?
4. What's an *environmental impact statement*?
5. Why are the business ethics of the environment more international in nature than many other subjects?

14.2 Ethical Approaches to Environmental Protection

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Outline five attitudes toward environmental protection.
2. Consider who should pay for environmental protection and cleanup.

The Range of Approaches to Cancun

Cancun is an environmental sacrifice made in exchange for tourist dollars. The unique lagoon, for example, dividing the hotel strip from the mainland was devastated by the project. To construct the roadwork leading around the hotels, the original developers raised the earth level, which blocked the ocean's high tide from washing over into the lagoon and refreshing its waters. Quickly, the living water pool supporting a complex and unique ecosystem clogged with algae and became a stinky bog. No one cared too much since that was the street side, and visitors had come for the ocean.

Still, one hotel developer decided to get involved. Ricardo Legorreta who designed the Camino Real Hotel (today named Dreams Resort) said this about his early 1970s project: "Cancun is more water than land. The Hotel Camino Real site was originally 70 percent water. It had been filled during the urbanization process. I wanted to return the site to its original status, so we built the guest room block on solid rock and the public areas on piles, and then excavated what was originally the lagoon. The difference in tide levels provides the necessary water circulation to keep the new lagoon clean."Ricardo Legorreta, Wayne Attoe, Sydney Brisker, and Hal Box, *The Architecture of Ricardo Legorreta* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 108.

Specific numbers aren't available, but plainly it costs more to dig out the ground and then build on piles than it does to just build on the ground. To save the lagoon, the owners of the Camino Real spent some money.

Was it worth it? The answer depends initially on the ethical attitude taken toward the environment generally; it depends on how much, and how, value is assigned to the natural world. Reasonable ethical cases can be made for the full range of environmental protection, from none (total exploitation of the natural world to satisfy immediate human desires) to complete protection (reserving wildlife areas for freedom from any human interference). The main positions are the following and will be elaborated individually:

- The environment shouldn't be protected.
- The environment should be protected in the name of serving human welfare.
- The environment should be protected in the name of serving future generations' welfare.
- The environment should be protected in the name of serving animal welfare.
- The environment should be protected for its own sake.

The Environment Shouldn't Be Protected

Should individuals and businesses use the natural world for our own purposes and without concern for its welfare or continuation? The "yes" answer traces back to an attitude called **free use**[6], which pictures the natural world as entirely dedicated to serving immediate human needs and desires. The air and water and all natural resources are understood as belonging to everyone in the sense that all individuals have full ownership of, and may use, all resources belonging to them as they see fit. The air blowing above your land and any water rolling through it are yours, and you may breathe them or drink them or dump into them as you like. This attitude, finally, has both historical and ethical components.

The history of free use starts with the fact that the very idea of the natural world as needing protection at all is very recent. For almost all human history, putting the words environment and protection together meant finding ways that *we* could be protected from *it* instead of protecting it from us. This is very easy to see along Europe's Mediterranean coast. As opposed to Cancun where all the buildings are pushed right up to the Caribbean and open to the water, the stone constructions of Europe's old coastal towns are huddled together and open away from the sea. Modern and recently built hotels obscure this to some extent, but anyone walking from the coast back toward the city centers sees how all the old buildings turn away from the water as though the builders feared nature, which, in fact, they did.

They were afraid because the wind and storms blowing off the sea actually threatened their existences; it capsized their boats and sent water pouring through roofs and food supplies. Going further, not only is it the case that until very recently nature threatened us much more than we threatened it, but in those cases where humans *did* succeed in doing some damage, nature bounced right back. After a tremendously successful fishing year, for example, the supply of food swimming off the coastlines of the Mediterranean was somewhat depleted, but the next season things would return to normal. It's only today, with giant motorized boats pulling huge nets behind, that we've been able to truly fish out some parts of the sea. The larger historical point is that until, say, the nineteenth century, even if every human on the planet had united in a project to ruin nature irrevocably, not much

6. From this perspective, the natural world is entirely dedicated to serving immediate human needs and desires.

would've happened. In that kind of reality, the idea of free use of our natural resources makes sense.

Today, at a time when our power over nature is significant, there are two basic arguments in favor of free use:

1. The domination and progress argument
2. The geological time argument

The **domination and progress argument**[7] begins by refusing to place any necessary and intrinsic value in the natural world: there's no autonomous worth in the water, plants, and animals surrounding us. Because they have no independent value, those who abuse and ruin nature can't be automatically accused of an ethical violation: nothing intrinsically valuable has been damaged. Just as few people object when a dandelion is pulled from a front yard, so too there's no necessary objection to the air being ruined by our cars.

Connected with this disavowal of intrinsic value in nature's elements, there's high confidence in our ability to generate technological advances that will enable human civilization to flourish on the earth no matter how contaminated and depleted. When we've drilled the last drop of the petroleum we need to heat our homes and produce electricity to power our computers, we can trust our scientists to find new energy sources to keep everything going. Possibly solar energy technologies will leap forward, or the long-sought key to nuclear fission will be found in a research lab. As for worries about the loss of wildlife and greenery, that can be rectified with genetic engineering, or by simply doing without them. Even without human interference, species are disappearing every day; going without a few more may not ultimately be important.

Further, it should be remembered that there are many natural entities we're happy to do without. No one bemoans the extinction of the virus called variola, which caused smallpox. That disease was responsible for the death of hundreds of millions of humans, and for much of history has been one of the world's most terrifying scourges. In the 1970s, the virus was certified extinct by the World Health Organization. No one misses it; not even the most devoted advocate of natural ecosystems stood up against the human abuse and final eradication of the virus. Finally, if we can destroy one part of the natural world without remorse, can't that attitude be extended? No one is promoting reckless or wanton destruction, but as far as those parts of nature required to live well, can't we just take what we need until it runs out and then move on to something else?

7. The argument that the natural world doesn't need to be protected because it's not important and because technology will resolve problems caused by nature's corruption.

To a certain extent, this approach is visible in Cancun, Mexico. The tourist strip has reached saturation, and the natural world in the area—at least those parts tourists won't pay to see—has been decimated. So what are developers doing? Moving down the coast. The new hotspot is called Playa del Carmen. Extending south from Cancun along the shoreline, developers are gobbling up land and laying out luxury hotels at a nonstop rate and with environmental effects frequently (not in every case) similar to those defining Cancun. What happens when the entire area from Cancun to Chetumal is cemented over? There's more shoreline to be found in Belize, and on Mexico's Pacific coast, and then down in Guatemala.

What happens when *all* shoreline runs out? There's a lot of it around the world, but when the end comes, it'll also probably be true that we won't need a real natural world to have a natural world, at least those parts of it that we enjoy. Already today at Typhoon Lagoon in Disney World, six-foot waves roll down for surfers. And visitors to the Grand Canyon face a curious choice: they can take the trouble to actually walk out and visit the Grand Canyon, or, more comfortably, they may opt to see it in an impressive IMAX theater presentation. There's no reason still more aspects of the natural world, like the warm breezes and evening perfection of Cancun, couldn't be reproduced in a warehouse. Of course there are people who insist that they want the real thing when it comes to nature, but there were also once people who insisted that they couldn't enjoy a newspaper or book if it wasn't printed on real paper.

Next, moving on to the other of the two arguments in favor of free use, there's the idea that we might as well use everything without anxiety because, in the end, we really can't seriously affect the natural world anyway. This sounds silly at first; it seems clear that we can and do wreak havoc: species disappear and natural ecosystems are reduced to dead zones. However, it must be noted that our human view of the world is myopic. That's not our fault, just an effect of the way we experience time. For us, a hundred years is, in fact, a long time. In terms of **geological time**[8], however, the entire experience of *all* humanity on this earth is just the wink of an eye. Geological time understands time's passing not relative to human lives but in terms of the physical history of the earth. According to that measure, the existence of the human species has been brief, and the kinds of changes we're experiencing in the natural world pale beside the swings the earth is capable of producing. We worry, for example, about global warming, meaning the earth's temperature jumping a few degrees, and while this change may be seismically important for us, it's nothing new to the earth. As Robert Laughlin, winner of the Nobel Prize in physics, points out in an article set under the provocative announcement "The Earth Doesn't Care if You Drive a Hybrid," six million years ago the Mediterranean Sea went bone dry. Eighty-five million years before that there were alligators in the Arctic, and two-hundred million years before that Europe was a desert. Comparatively, human industrialization has

8. Time understood relative to the earth's history instead of humanity's.

changed nothing.George Will, "The Earth Doesn't Care: About What Is Done to or for It," *Newsweek*, September 12, 2010, accessed June 8, 2011, http://www.newsweek.com/2010/09/12/george-will-earth-doesn-t-care-what-is-done-to-it.html?from=rss.

This geological view of time cashes out as an ethical justification for free use of the natural world for a reason nearly the opposite of the first. The argument for free use supported by convictions about domination and progress borders on arrogance: it's that the natural world is unimportant, and any problems caused by our abusing it will be resolved by intelligence and technological advance. Alternatively, and within the argument based on geological time, our lives, deeds, and abilities are so trivial that it's absurd to imagine that we could seriously change the flow of nature's development even if we tried. We could melt nuclear reactors left and right, and a hundred million years from now it wouldn't make a bit of difference. That means, finally, that the idea of preserving the environment isn't nobility: it's vanity.

The Environment Should Be Protected in the Name of Serving Human Welfare

The free-use argument in favor of total environmental exploitation posits no value in the natural world. In and of itself, it's worthless. Even if this premise is accepted, however, there may still be reason to take steps in favor of preservation and protection. It could be that the ecosystems around us should be safeguarded not for them, but for *us*. The reasoning here is that we as a society will live better and happier when lakes are suitable for swimming, when air cleans our lungs instead of gumming them up, when a drive on the freeway with the car window down doesn't leave your face feeling greasy. Human happiness, ultimately, hinges to some extent on our own natural and animal nature. We too, we must remember, are part of the ecosystem. Many of the things we do each day—walk, breathe, find shelter from the elements—are no different from the activities of creatures in the natural world. When that world is clean and functioning well, consequently, we fit into it well.

Wrapping this perspective into an ethical theory, utilitarianism—the affirmation that the ethically good is those acts increasing human happiness—functions effectively. For visitors to Cancun, it seems difficult to deny that their trip will be more enjoyable if the air they breathe is fresh and briny instead of stinky and gaseous as it was in some places when the lagoon had decayed into a pestilent swamp. Understood in this way, we could congratulate Architect Legorreta for his expensive decision to carve out a space for the tides to reenter and refresh the inland lake. It's not, the argument goes, that he should be thanked for rescuing an ecosystem, but that by rescuing the ecosystem he made human life more agreeable.

Another way to justify environmental protection in the name of human and civilized life runs through a rights-based argument. Starting from the principle of the right to pursue happiness, a case could be built that without a flourishing natural world, the pursuit will fail. If it's true that we need a livable environment, one where our health—our breathing, drinking, and eating—is guaranteed, then industrialists and resort developers who don't ensure that their waste and contamination are controlled aren't just polluting; they're violating the fundamental rights of everyone sharing the planet.

Bringing this rights-based argument to Cancun and Legorreta's dredging of the lagoon, it's possible to conclude that he absorbed a pressing responsibility to do what he did: in the name of protecting the right of others to live healthy lives, it was necessary to renew the dead water. Again, it must be emphasized that the responsibility isn't to the water or the animals thriving in its ecosystem. They're irrelevant, and there's no obligation to protect them. What matters is human existence; the obligation is to human rights and our dependence on the natural world to exercise those rights.

The Environment Should Be Protected in the Name of Serving Future Generations' Welfare

The idea that the environment should be protected so that future generations may live in it and have the choices we do today is based on a notion of **social fairness**[9]. Typically in ethics, we think of fairness in terms of individuals. When applying for a job at a Cancun hotel, fairness is the imperative that all those applying get equal consideration, are subjected to similar criteria for selection, and the selection is based on ability to perform job-related duties. When, on the other hand, the principle of fairness extends to the broad social level, what's meant is that groups taken as a whole are treated equitably.

One hypothetical way to present this notion of intergenerational fairness with respect to the environment and its protection is through the previously discussed notion of the veil of ignorance—that is, the idea that you imagine yourself as removed from today's world and then reinserted at some future point, one randomly assigned. You may come back tomorrow, next year, next decade, or a hundred years down the line. If, the reasoning goes, that's your situation, then very possibly you're going to urge contemporary societies to protect the environment so that it'll be there for you when your time comes around, whenever that might be. Stated slightly differently, it's a lot easier to wreck the environment when you don't have to think about others. Fairness, however, *obligates* us to think of others, including future others, and the veil of ignorance provides one way of considering their rights on a par with the ones we enjoy now.

9. The doctrine that societies in different places or times should be treated equitably.

What does this mean in terms of Cancun? We should enjoy paradise there, no doubt, but we should also ensure that it'll be as beautiful for our children (or any randomly selected future generation) as it is for us. In this case, the redredging of the lagoon serves that purpose. By helping maintain the status quo in terms of the natural ecosystems surrounding the hotels, it also helps to maintain the possibility of enjoying that section of the Caribbean into the indefinite future.

There's also a utilitarian argument that fits underneath and justifies the position that our environment should be protected in the name of future generations. This theory grades acts ethically in terms of their consequences for social happiness, and with those consequences *projected forward in time*. To the extent possible, the utilitarian mind-set demands that we account for the welfare of future generations when we act today. Of course the future is an unknown, and that tends to weigh decisions toward their effects on the present since those are more easily foreseen. Still, it's not difficult to persuade most people that future members of our world will be happier and their lives fuller and more rewarding if they're born onto an at least partially green earth.

The Environment Should Be Protected in the Name of Serving Animal Welfare

One of the more frequently voiced lines of reasoning in favor of ecosystem preservation starts with a fundamental shift from the previous arguments. Those arguments place all intrinsic value in *human* existence: to the extent we decide to preserve the natural world, we do so because it's good for us. Preservation satisfies our ethical duties to ourselves or to those human generations yet to come. What now changes is that the natural world's creatures get endowed with a value independent of humans, and that value endures whether or not we enjoy or need to fit into a web of healthy, clean ecosystems. Animals matter, in other words, regardless of whether they matter for us.

Ethically, the endowment of nonhuman animals with intrinsic worth is to treat them, to some extent, or in some significant way, *as* human. This treatment is a subject of tremendous controversy, one orbiting around the following two questions:

- *Are* nonhuman animals worthy of moral consideration? What do they do, what qualities do they possess that lead us to believe they should have rights and impose obligations on you and me?
- Granting that nonhuman animals do hold value in themselves and impose obligations on humans by their very existence, how far do the obligations go? If we're given a choice on a speeding highway between

> running over a squirrel and hitting a person, do we have a moral obligation to avoid the person (and run down the squirrel)? If we do, then it seems that the intrinsic worth of an animal is less than that of a human being, but how much less?

Questions about whether animals have rights and impose obligations are among the most important in the field of environmental ethics. They will be explored in their own section of discussion that follows. In this section, it will simply be accepted that nonhuman animals do, in fact, have autonomous moral standing. It immediately follows that their protection is, to some extent, a responsibility.

In terms of an ethics of duties, the obligation to protect animal life could be conceived as a form of the duty to beneficence, a duty to help those who we are able to aid, assuming the cost to ourselves is not disproportionately high. Protecting animals is something we do for the same reason we protect people in need. Alternatively, in terms of the utilitarian principle that we act to decrease suffering in the world (which is a way of increasing happiness), the argument could be mounted that animals are, in fact, capable of suffering, and therefore we should act to minimize that sensation just as we do in the human realm. Finally, rights theory—the notion that we're free and should not impinge on the freedom of others—translates into a demand that we treat the natural world with respect and with an eye to its preservation in order to guarantee that nonhuman animals may continue to pursue their own ends just as we demand that we humans be allowed to pursue ours.

With the obligation for the protection of—or at least noninterference with—nonhuman animals established, the way opens to extend the conservation to the natural world generally. Because animals depend on their habitat to express their existence, because their instincts and needs suggest that they may be free only within their natural environment, the first responsibility derived from the human obligation to animals is one to protect their wild and natural surroundings. As an important note here, that habitat—the air all animals breathe, the water where fish swim, the earth housing burrowing animals—is not protected for its own sake, only as an effect of recognizing the creatures of the natural realm as dignified and worthy of our deference.

What does this dignity conferred on animal life mean for Cancun? The dredging and revivifying of the lagoon by Legorreta fulfills an obligation under this conception of the human relation to the natural world. It's a different obligation from those developed in the previous cases, however. Before, the lagoon was cleansed in the name of improving the Cancun experience for vacationers; here, it's cleansed so that it may once again support the land and aquatic life that once called the place

home. As for whether that improves the vacation experience, there's no reason to ask; it's only necessary to know that saving animals probably requires saving their home.

The Entire Environmental Web Should Be Protected for Its Own Sake

The environment as a whole, the total ecosystem including all animal and plant life on Earth—along with the air, water, and soil supporting existence—should be protected according to a number of ethical arguments:

- The least difficult to persuasively make is the case that the obligation flows from human welfare: we're happier when our planet is healthy.
- It's more difficult, but still very possible, to make a reasonable case that the obligation to protection attaches to the autonomous value and rights of nonhuman animals. In order to protect all of them, the reasoning goes, we should preserve all elements of the natural world to the extent possible because we can't be sure which ones may, in fact, play an important role in the existence of one or another kind of creature.
- Finally, the most difficult case to make is that humans are obligated to protect the total environment—all water and air, every tree and animal—because all of it and every single part holds autonomous value. This Earth-wide value translates into an Earth-wide obligation: the planet—understood as the network of life happening above and under its surface—becomes something like a single living organism we humans must protect.

What distinguishes the third argument from the previous two is that we don't save the greater natural ecosystem in the name of something else (human welfare or habitat preservation for nonhuman animals) but for itself.

It's easy to trivialize the view that every element of the natural world demands respect and therefore some degree of protection. Do we really want to say that a child experimenting out in the driveway with worms, or pulling up plants to see the roots is failing a moral obligation to the living world? What about the coconut trees felled to make room for Cancun's hotels? Perhaps if they were unique trees, or if a certain species of bird depended on precisely those limbs and no others for its survival, but do we want to go further and say that the standard trees—a few hundred out of millions in the world—should give developers pause before the cement trucks come wheeling in? For many, it will be easier to conclude that if a good project is planned—if there's money to be earned and progress to be

made—then we can cut down a few anonymous trees that happen to be standing in the way and get on with our human living.

On the other hand, sitting on the sand in Cancun, it's difficult to avoid sensing a happening majesty: not a reason to pull out your camera and snap, but a living experience that can only be had by a natural being participating, breathing air as the wind blows across the beach, or swimming in the crisp water. There may be a kind of aesthetic imperative here, a coherent demand for respect that we feel with our own natural bodies. The argument isn't that the entire natural ecosystem should be preserved because it feels good for us to jump in the ocean water—it feels good to jump in the shower too—the idea is that through our bodies we experience a substance and value of nature that requires our deference. Called the **aesthetic argument**[10] in favor of nature's dignity, and consequently in favor of the moral obligation to protect it, there may be no proper explanation or reasoning, it may only be something that you know if you're in the right place at the right time, like Cancun in the morning.

The response to the aesthetic argument is that we can't base ethics on a feeling.

If We Decide to Protect the Environment, Who Pays?

Much of the stress applied to, and the destruction wrought on the environment around Cancun could be reversed. That costs money, though. Determining exactly how much is a task for biologists and economists to work out. The question for ethical consideration is, who should pay? These are three basic answers:

1. Those who contaminated the natural world
2. Those who enjoy the natural world
3. Those who are most able

The answer that the costs should be borne by those who damaged nature in the first place means sending the bill to developers and resort owners, to all those whose ambition to make money on tourism got roads paved, forests cleared, and foundations laid. Intuitively, placing the obligation for environmental cleanup on developers may make the most sense, and in terms of ethical theory, it fits in well with the basic duty to reparation, the responsibility to compensate others when we harm them. In this case, the harm has been done to those others who enjoy and depend on the natural world, and one immediate way to compensate them is to repair the damage. A good model for this could be Legorreta's work, the expense taken to raise a portion of a hotel and so once again allow tide water to freshen the lagoon. Similar steps could be taken to restore parts of the ruined coral reef and to replant the forest behind the hotel area.

10. As an argument in favor of protecting the natural world, the conviction that nature's majesty is an ethical imperative to protection.

The plan makes sense, but there's a glaring problem: times change. Back when Cancun was originally being laid out in the 1960s, ecological concerns were not as visible and widely recognized as they are today. That doesn't erase the fact that most hotel companies in Cancun laid waste to whatever stood in the way of their building, but it does allow them to note that they are being asked to pay today for actions that most everyone thought were just fine back when they were done. It's not clear, finally, how fair it is to ask developers to pay for a cleanup that no one envisioned would be necessary back when the construction initiated.

The proposal that those who enjoy and depend on the natural world should bear primary responsibility for protecting and renewing it also makes good sense. This reasoning is to some extent implemented in America's natural parks where fees are charged for entry. Those revenues go to support the work of the forestry service that's required to ensure that visitors to those parks—and the infrastructure they need to enjoy their time there—don't do harm to the ecosystems they're coming to see, and also to ensure that harm done by others (air pollution, for example, emitted by nearby factories) is cleansed by nature's organic processes.

On a much larger scale, a global one, this logic is also displayed in some international attempts to limit the emission of greenhouse gasses. The specific economics and policy are complicated and involve financial devices including carbon credits and similar, but at bottom what's happening is that governments are getting together and deciding that we all benefit from (or even need) reduced emissions of waste into the air. From there, attempts are made to negotiate contributions various countries can make to the reduction effort. As for the cost, most economists agree that the expense of pollution control measures will, for the most part, be passed along as hikes in the cost of consumer goods. Everyone, in other words, will pay, which matches up with the affirmation that everyone benefits.

Finally, the response that those most able to pay should bear the brunt of the cost for protecting the natural world is a political as much as an environmental posture. One possibility would be a surtax levied on wealthy members of society, with the money channeled toward environmental efforts. This strategy may find a solid footing on utilitarian grounds where acts benefitting the overall welfare remain good even if they're burdensome or unfair to specific individuals. What would be necessary is to demonstrate that the sum total of human (and, potentially, nonhuman animal) happiness would be increased by more than the accumulated displeasure of those suffering the tax increase.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The attitude that the environment shouldn't be protected has both historical and ethical roots.
- Confidence in the human ability to control the environment diminishes concerns about protecting its current state.
- The power of nature viewed over the very long term diminishes concerns about protecting its current state.
- Environmental protection in the name of serving human welfare values the natural world because it's valuable for us.
- Environmental protection in the name of serving future generations' welfare derives from a notion of social fairness.
- Environmental protection in the name of serving animal welfare connects with a notion of moral autonomy in nonhuman animals.
- Environmental protection for its own sake values the entire set of the world's ecosystems.
- If the environment is protected, the costs may be made the responsibility of various parties.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Briefly, what is the history of the free-use attitude toward the natural world?
2. How can technology make environmental protection a wasted effort?
3. How can the idea of geological time become an argument against taking expensive steps to protect the natural world?
4. What are some reasons why our ethical obligations to ourselves may lead us to protect the natural world?
5. What is the difference between protecting the natural world because we humans are valuable, and because animals are valuable?
6. What kind of experiences with nature may result in the sensation that, as an interdependent whole, the natural world holds value?
7. If the decision is made to protect nature, who are some individuals or groups that might be asked to pay the cost?

14.3 Three Models of Environmental Protection for Businesses

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Outline three business responses to environmental responsibility.

The Role of Businesses in Environmental Protection

Protecting the environment is itself a business, and many organizations, especially nonprofits, take that as their guiding purpose. The World Wildlife Fund, the Audubon Society, and National Geographic exemplify this. Their direct influence over the natural world, however, is slight when compared against all the globe's for-profit companies chugging away in the name of earning money. Whether the place is Cancun, or China, or the United States, the condition of the natural world depends significantly on what profit-making companies are doing, the way they're working, the kinds of goods they're producing, and the attitude they're taking toward the natural world. Three common attitudes are

1. accelerate and innovate,
2. monetize and count,
3. express corporate responsibility.

Business and Environmental Protection: Accelerate and Innovate

There's a subtle difference between environmental conservation and protection. Conservation means leaving things as they are. Protection opens the possibility of changing the natural world in the name of defending it. One way for a business to embrace the protection of nature is through technological advance. New discoveries, the hope is, can simultaneously allow people to live better, and live better with the natural world. Looking at a stained paradise like Cancun, the attitude isn't so much worry that we're ruining the world and won't be able to restore a healthy balance, it's more industrially optimistic: by pushing the accelerator, by innovating faster we'll resolve the very environmental problems we've created.

Examples of the **progressive approach**[11] to environmental protection—as opposed to the conservative one—include solar and wind power generation. Both are available to us only because of the explosion of technology and knowledge the industrialized, contaminating world allows. Because of them, we can today imagine

11. As an approach to environmental protection, the attitude that technological advance will resolve problems.

a world using energy at current rates without doing current levels of environmental damage. Here's a statement of that aim from a wind power company's web page: "Our goal has always been to produce a utility-scale wind turbine that does not need subsidies in order to compete in electricity markets."The Wind Turbine Company home page, accessed June 8, 2011, http://www.windturbinecompany.com.

The idea, in other words, is that electricity produced by this company's windmills will be as cheap (or cheaper) than that produced from fossil fuels, including coal. To reach that point, the development of very strong yet lightweight materials has been necessary, along with other technological advances. If they continue, it may be that American energy consumption can remain high, while pollution emitted from coal-burning electricity plants diminishes. One point, finally, that the wind turbine company web page doesn't underline quite so darkly is that they'll make a lot of money along the way if everything goes according to plan. This incentive is also typical of an accelerate-and-innovate approach: not only should industrialization go forward faster in the name of saving the environment, so too should entrepreneurialism and profit.

In broad terms, the business attitude toward employing innovation to protect the environment acknowledges that human activity on earth has done environmental damage, and that matters. The damage is undesirable and should be reversed. The way to reverse, however, isn't to go backward by doing things like reducing our energy use to previous levels. Instead, we keep doing what we're doing, just faster. The same industrialization that caused the problem will pull us out.

Business and Environmental Protections: Monetize and Count

A **cost-benefit analysis**[12] is, theoretically, a straightforward way of determining whether an action should be undertaken. The effort and expense of doing something is toted on one side, and the benefits received are summed on the other. If the benefits are greater than the costs, we go ahead; if not, we don't. Everyone performs cost-benefit analyses all the time. At dinner, children decide whether a dessert brownie is worth the cost of swallowing thirty peas. Adults decide whether the fun of a few beers tonight is worth a hangover tomorrow or, more significantly, whether getting to live in one of the larger homes farther out of town is worth an extra half-hour in the car driving to work every morning.

Setting a cost-benefit analysis between a business and the environment means adding the costs of eliminating pollution on one side and weighing it against the benefits of a cleaner world. The ethical theory underneath this balancing approach to business and nature is utilitarianism. The right act is the one most increasing

12. The summing of an action's costs and its weighing against summed benefits.

society's overall happiness (or most decreasing unhappiness), with happiness measured in this case in terms of the net benefits a society receives after the costs of an action have been deducted.

The most nettlesome problem for businesses adopting a cost-benefit approach to managing environmental protection is implementation. It's hard to know exactly what all the costs are on the business side, and what all the benefits are on nature's side. Then, even if all the costs and benefits are confidently listed, it's equally (or more) difficult to weigh them against each other. According to a report promulgated by the nonprofit Environmental Defense Fund, North Carolina's coal-fired electricity plants could install smokestack scrubbers to significantly reduce contaminating emissions. The cost would be $450 million. The benefits received as a result of the cleaner air would total $3.5 billion."The North Carolina Clean Smokestacks Plan," *Environmental Defense Fund*, March 2001, accessed June 8, 2011, http://apps.edf.org/documents/700_NCsmokestacks.PDF. This seems like a no-brainer. The problem is that when you dig a bit into the report's details, it's not entirely clear that the benefits derived from cleaner air add up to $3.5 billion. More troubling, it looks like it's hard to put any price tag at all on them. Here are a few examples:

- According to the report, "It is estimated that pollution from power plants triggers more than 200,000 asthma attacks across the state each year and more than 1,800 premature deaths." The word *estimated* is important. Further, how do you put a dollar total on an asthma attack or a death?
- According to the report, "One should be able to see out 93 miles on an average day in the Smoky Mountains, but now air pollution has reduced this to an average of 22 miles." How do you put a dollar total on a view?
- According to the report, "Air pollution contributes to significant declines in populations of dogwood, spruce, fir, beech, and other tree species." What is "significant?" What's the dollar value of a dogwood?"The North Carolina Clean Smokestacks Plan," *Environmental Defense Fund*, March 2001, accessed June 8, 2011, http://apps.edf.org/documents/700_NCsmokestacks.PDF.

The list of items goes on, but the point is clear. A cost-benefit analysis makes excellent sense in theory, but it's as difficult to execute as it is to assign numbers to human experiences. If the attempt is nonetheless made, the technical term for the assigning is **monetization**[13].

13. Assigning dollar values to human experiences.

A final set of hurtles to clear on the way to implementing a cost-benefit approach to business and the environment involves formalizing mechanisms for paying the costs. Two common mechanisms are regulation and incentives.

Regulations[14] are imposed by federal or local governments and come in various forms. Most directly, and staying with electrical plants in Carolina, the plants could be required to install smokestack scrubbers. Costs of the installation would, to some significant extent, be passed on to consumers as rate hikes, and the benefits of cleaner air would be enjoyed by all. It's worth noting here that the contamination producers in question—coal-burning electricity plants—are pretty much stuck where they are in geographic terms. You can't produce electricity in China and sell it in the States. Other kinds of businesses, however, may be able to avoid regulations by packing up and heading elsewhere. This, of course, complicates the already knotted attempt to tote up the benefits and costs of environmental protection.

A more flexible manner of regulating air and other types of pollution involves the sale of permits. There are multiple ways of mounting a permit trade, but as a general sketch, the government sets an upper limit to the amount of air pollution produced by all industry, and sells (or gives) permits to specific operating businesses. In their turn, these permits may be bought and sold. So an electric company may find that it makes economic sense to install scrubbers (limiting its pollution output) and then sell the remaining pollution amount on its license to another company that finds the cost of limiting its emissions to be very high. One advantage of this approach is that, while it does limit total contamination, it allows for the fact that it's easier for some polluters than others to cut back.

As opposed to regulations that essentially force businesses to meet social pollution goals, **incentives**[15] seek the same results cooperatively. For example, tax incentives could be offered for environmental protection efforts; money paid for the scrubbers a company places in their smokestacks may be deducted from taxes at a very high rate. Similarly, matching funds may be offered by government agencies: for every dollar the company spends, the government—which in this case means you and I and everyone who pays taxes—chips in one also.

Alternatively, government agencies including the Environmental Protection Agency may provide public recognition to anticontamination efforts undertaken by a business, and in the hands of a strong marketing department those awards may be converted into positive public relations, new consumers, and extra profits that offset the original pollution control costs.

14. Requirements for action imposed by governmental bodies.

15. Offered by government agencies and other institutions, they provide reasons for organizations to voluntarily cooperate with environmental protection efforts.

Specific awards tied to government agencies may not even be necessary; the incentive can be drawn from a broad range of sources. A good example comes from the *Washington Post*. A long and generally quite positive news story recounts Walmart's efforts to encourage suppliers in China to increase energy efficiency while decreasing their pollution output. Basically, Walmart told suppliers that they need to clean up or they'll get replaced. According to the account, not only is the effort bearing fruit, but it's working better than government regulations designed to achieve similar ends: "In many cases, Walmart is first trying to bring firms up to government standards. Suppliers may not care about government fines, but they care about orders from the buyers."Steve Mufson, "Wal-Mart Presses Vendors in China to Meet Higher Standards," *Washington Post*, February 26, 2010, accessed June 8, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/26/AR2010022603339_pf.html.

As for Walmart, their cause is served by the free publicity of the story when it's distributed to almost a million newspaper readers in the Washington, DC, area and then projected broadly on the Internet. Further down the line, the good publicity ended up getting cited here. Going back to the specific newspaper story, it finishes with a clear acknowledgment of the public relations dynamic. These are the article's last lines: "Wal-Mart sees this not just as good practice but also good marketing. 'We hope to get more customers,' said Barry Friedman, vice president for corporate affairs in Beijing. 'We're not doing it solely out of the goodness of our hearts.'"Steve Mufson, "Wal-Mart Presses Vendors in China to Meet Higher Standards," *Washington Post*, February 26, 2010, accessed June 8, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/26/AR2010022603339_pf.html.

One notable problem with the incentive approach is identical to its strength: since participation is voluntary, some heavy polluters may choose not to get involved.

As a final point about incentives, many industrial plants already receive incentives to *not* protect the environment. To the extent they're allowed to simply jet sulfur and other contamination into the air, they are, in effect, forcing society generally to pay part of their cost of production. Every time someone in Carolina falls ill with an asthma attack, the consequences are suffered by that individual while the profits from electricity sales go to the electric company. As previously discussed, these **externalities**[16]—these costs of production borne by third parties—actually encourage businesses to follow any route possible to make outsiders pay the costs of their operations. One route that's frequently possible, especially for heavy industry, involves letting others deal with their runoff and waste.

16. Business costs borne by third parties.

Business and Environmental Protections: Corporate Social Responsibility

The third posture an organization may adopt toward environmental protection falls under the heading of corporate social responsibility. The attitude here is that companies, especially large, public corporations, should humanize their existences: an attempt should be made to see the corporation, in a certain sense, as an individual person. Instead of being a mindless machine built to stamp out profits, the business is reenvisioned as a seat of economic *and* moral responsibility. Responding to ethical worries isn't someone else's concern (say, the government's, which acts by imposing regulations), instead, large companies including Walmart take a leading role in addressing ethical issues.

The *Washington Post*'s flattering presentation of Walmart in China fits well here. The story actually presents Walmart as transitioning from a vision of itself as a pure profit enterprise to one exercising corporate citizenship. Originally,

Walmart only cared about price and quality, so that encouraged suppliers to race to the bottom on environmental standards. They could lose contracts because competition was so fierce on price.

Now, however,

Walmart held a conference in Beijing for suppliers to urge them to pay attention not only to price but also to "sustainability," which has become a touchstone.Steve Mufson, "Wal-Mart Presses Vendors in China to Meet Higher Standards," *Washington Post*, February 26, 2010, accessed June 8, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/26/AR2010022603339_pf.html.

Sustainability[17] means acting to protect the environment and the people surrounding an operation so that they may continue to contribute to the profit-making enterprise. As a quick example, a logging operation that clear-cuts forests isn't sustainable: when all the trees are gone, there's no way for the company to make any more money. Similarly in human terms, companies depending on manual labor need their employees to be healthy. If a factory's air pollution makes everyone sick, no one will be able to come in to work.

17. The concept of acting to protect both the environment and people surrounding an operation, so that they may continue to contribute to the enterprise.

For Walmart in China, one step toward sustainability involved energy efficiency. A supplier installed modern shrink-wrapping machines to replace work previously done by people wielding over-the-counter hair dryers. In theoretical terms at least,

the use of less energy will help the supplier continue to produce even as worldwide petroleum supplies dwindle and energy costs increase. Steps were also taken, as the newspaper story notes, to limit water pollution: "Lutex says it treats four tons of wastewater that it used to dump into the municipal sewage line. That water was supposed to be treated by the city, but like three-quarters or more of China's wastewater, it almost certainly wasn't."Steve Mufson, "Wal-Mart Presses Vendors in China to Meet Higher Standards," *Washington Post*, February 26, 2010, accessed June 8, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/26/AR2010022603339_pf.html.

More examples of Walmart suppliers making environmentally conscious decisions dot the newspaper story, and in every case these actions may be understood as serving the long-term viability of the supplier's operations.

Stakeholder[18] theory is another way of presenting corporate social responsibility. The idea here is that corporate leaders must make decisions representing the interests not only of shareholders (the corporation's owners) but also of all those who have a stake in what the enterprise is doing: the company exists for *their* benefit too. Along these lines, Walmart encouraged farmers in China to abandon the use of toxic pesticides. The corporation contracted with farmers under the condition that they use only organic means to kill pests and then allowed their products to be sold with a label noting their Walmart-confirmed clean production. The real lives of locals who eat that food and live on the now less-contaminated land are markedly improved. As another farming-related example of dedication to the well-being of the Chinese making up their manufacturing base, Walmart sought "to help hundreds of small farmers build rudimentary greenhouses, made of wood and plastic sheeting, in which they grow oranges in midwinter to sell to Walmart's direct farm program. Zhang Fengquan is one of those farmers; he gathers more than three tons of nectarines from more than 400 trees in his greenhouse. Asked what he did during the winter before the greenhouse was built, he said he worked as a seasonal laborer. Or played the popular Chinese board game mah-jongg."Steve Mufson, "Wal-Mart Presses Vendors in China to Meet Higher Standards," *Washington Post*, February 26, 2010, accessed June 8, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/26/AR2010022603339_pf.html.

In both cases, Walmart is not simply abandoning its workers (or its suppliers' workers) once they punch out. As stakeholders in the company, Walmart executives feel a responsibility to defend employees' well-being just as they feel a responsibility to bring good products to market in the name of profit.

18. All those who have a stake in an organization's decisions.

The fact that Walmart's recent actions in China can be presented as examples of a corporation expressing a sense of responsibility for the people and their natural world that goes beyond immediate profit doesn't mean that profit disappears from the equation. Shareholders are stakeholders too. And while corporate attitudes of social responsibility may well result in an increasingly protected environment, and while that protection may actually help the bottom line in some cases, there's no guarantee that the basic economic tension between making money and environmental welfare will be resolved.

Conclusion. Businesses can react to a world of environmental concern by trusting in technological innovation, by trusting in governmental regulation, and by trusting in a concept of corporate responsibility. It is currently uncertain which, if any, of these postures will most effectively respond to society's environmental preoccupations.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- One business response to concerns about the environment is to participate in the process of technological innovation to produce cleaner, more efficient ways of living.
- One business response to concerns about the environment is to participate in, and act on cost-benefit studies of environmental protection.
- One business response to concerns about the environment is to express corporate responsibility: to make the business a seat of economic *and* ethical decisions.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What's the difference between environmental protection and environmental conservation?
2. How has industrialization caused environmental problems? How can it resolve those problems?
3. What is a *cost-benefit analysis*?
4. With respect to the environment, how can a cost-benefit analysis be used to answer questions about business and environmental protection?
5. What is practical problem with the execution of a cost-benefit analysis strategy for responding to environmental problems?
6. What's the difference between a corporation guided by profit and one guided by a sense of social responsibility?
7. Why might a stakeholder theory of corporate decision making be good for the environment?

14.4 Animal Rights

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Elaborate arguments in favor of and against the proposition that animals have ethical rights.
2. Distinguish questions about animal rights from ones about animal suffering.

Do Animals Have Rights?

Were this a textbook in environmental ethics, two further questions would be added to this subsection's title: which rights, which animals? It's clear that chimps and dolphins are different from worms and, even lower, single-cell organisms. The former give coherent evidence of having some level of conscious understanding of their worlds; the latter seem to be little more than reactionary vessels: they get a stimulus, they react, and that's it. Questions about where the line should be drawn between these two extremes, and by what criteria, fit within a more specialized study of the environment. In business ethics, attention fixes on the larger question of whether animals can be understood as possessing ethical rights as we customarily understand the term.

There are two principal arguments in favor of understanding at least higher-order nonhuman animals as endowed with rights:

1. The cognitive awareness and interest argument
2. The suffering argument

And there are three arguments against:

1. The lack of expression argument
2. The absence of duties argument
3. The anthropomorphism suspicion argument

The **cognitive awareness and interest argument** in favor of concluding that animals do have ethical rights begins by accumulating evidence that nonhuman animals are aware of what's going on around them and do in fact have an interest in how things go. As for showing that animals are aware and interested, in higher

species evidence comes from what animals do. Most dogs learn in some sense the rules of the house; they squeal when kicked and (after a few occurrences) tend to avoid doing whatever it was that got them the boot. Analogously, anyone who's visited Sea World has seen dolphins respond to orders, and seemingly understand that responding well is in their interest because they get a fish to eat afterward.

If these deductions of animal awareness and interest are on target, the way opens to granting the animals an autonomous moral value and standing. Maybe their ethical value should be inferior to humans who demonstrate sophisticated understanding of their environment, themselves, and their interests, but any understanding at all does bring animals into the realm of ethics because determinations about whose interests should be served in any particular situation are what ethical discussions concern. The reason we have ethics is to help those who have specific interests have them satisfied in ways that don't interfere with others and their attempts to satisfy their distinct interests. So if we're going to have ethical principles at all, then they should apply to dogs and dolphins because they're involved in the messy conflicts about who gets what in the world.

Putting the same argument slightly differently, when the owner of a company decides how much of the year-end profits should go to employees as bonuses, that's ethics because the interests of the owner and the employees are being weighed. So too when decisions are made at Sea World about how often and how intensely animals should be put to work in entertainment programs: the interests of profits (and human welfare) are being weighed against the interests of individual dolphins. As soon as that happens, the dolphins are granted an ethical standing.

The **suffering argument** in favor of concluding that animals do have ethical rights fits neatly inside utilitarian theory. Within this ethical universe, the reason we have ethical rules is to maximize happiness and minimize suffering. So the first step to take here is to determine whether dogs and similar animals do, in fact, suffer. Of course no dog complains with words, but no baby does either, and no one doubts that babies suffer when, for example, they're hungry (and whining). When dogs would be expected to suffer, when they get slapped in the snout, they too exhibit clear signs of distress. Further, biological studies have shown that pain-associated elements of some animal nervous systems resemble the human version. Of course dogs may not suffer on the *emotional* level (if you separate a male and female pair, there may not be any heartbreak), and it's true that absolute proof remains elusive, but for many observers there's good evidence that some animals do, in fact, feel pain. If, then, it's accepted that animals suffer, they ought to be included in our utilitarian considerations by definition because the theory directs us to act in ways that maximize happiness and minimize suffering. It should be noted that the theory can be adjusted to include only human happiness and suffering, but there's no necessary reason for that, and as long as there's not, the establishment of animal

suffering is enough to make a reasonable case that they are entities within the ethical world, and ones that require respect.

On the other side, the arguments *against* granting animals a moral standing in the world begin with the **lack of expression** argument. Animals, the reasoning goes, may display behaviors indicating an awareness of the world and the ability to suffer, but that's not enough to merit autonomous moral standing. To truly have rights, they must be *claimed*. An explicit and demonstrated awareness must exist of what ethics are, and why rules for action are attached to them. Without that, what separates animals from a sunflower? Like dogs, sunflowers react to their environment; they bend and twist to face the sun. Further, like dogs, sunflowers betray signs of suffering: when they don't get enough water they shrivel. Granting, finally, animals rights based on their displaying some reactions to their world isn't enough to earn a moral identity. Or if it is, then we end up in a silly situation where we have to grant sunflowers moral autonomy. Finally, because animals can't truly explain morality and demand rights, they have none.

Another way to deny animal rights runs through the **absence of duties argument**. Since animals don't have duties, they *can't* have rights. All ethics, the argument goes, is a two-way street. To have rights you must also have responsibilities; to claim protection against injury from others, you must also display consideration before injuring others. The first question to ask, consequently, in trying to determine whether animals should have rights is whether they have or could have responsibilities. For the most part, the answer seems to lean toward no. Were a bear to escape its enclosure in the zoo and attack a harmless child, few would blame the bear in any moral sense; almost no one would believe the animal was guilty of anything other than following its instincts. People don't expect wild animals to distinguish between their own interest and instinct on one side, and doing what's right on the other. We don't even expect that they *can* do that, and if they can't, then they can't participate in an ethical world any more than trees and other natural creatures that go through every day pursuing their own survival and little more.

The last argument against granting moral autonomy or value to animals is a **suspicion of anthropomorphism**. **Anthropomorphism**[19] is the attribution of human qualities to nonhuman things. When we look at dogs and cats at home, or chimpanzees on TV, it's difficult to miss the human resemblance, the blinking, alert eyes, the legs stretching after a nap, the howls when you accidentally step on a tail, the hunger for food, the thirst and need to drink. In all these ways, common animals are very similar to humans. Given these indisputable similarities, it's easy to imagine that others must exist also. If animals look like we do (eyes, mouth, and nose), and if they eat and drink as we do, it's natural to assume they feel as we do: they suffer sadness and boredom; they need affection and are happy being cuddled.

19. The attribution of human qualities to nonhuman things.

And from there it's natural to imagine that they think as we do, too. Not on the same level of sophistication, but, yes, they feel loyalty and experience similar inclinations. All this is false reasoning, however. Just because something *looks* human on the outside doesn't mean it experiences some kind of human sentiments on the inside. Dolls, for example, look human but feel nothing.

Transferring this possibility of drawing false conclusions from superficial resemblances over to the question about animal rights, the suspicion is that people are getting fooled. Animals may react in ways that look like pain to us but aren't pain to them. Animals may appear to need affection and construct relationships tinted with loyalty and some rudimentary morality, but all that may be just us imposing our reality where it doesn't actually exist. If that's what's happening, then animals shouldn't have rights because all the qualities those rights are based on—having interests, feeling pain and affection—are invented for them by us.

Corresponding with this argument, it's hard not to notice how quickly we rush to the defense of animals that look cute and vaguely human, but few seem very enthusiastic about helping moles and catfish.

Dividing Questions about Animal Rights from Ones about Animal Suffering

The debate about whether animals should be understood as possessing rights within the ethical universe is distinct from the one about whether they should be subjected to suffering. *If* animals do have rights, then it quickly follows that their suffering should be objectionable. Even if animals aren't granted any kind of autonomous ethical existence, however, there remains a debate about the extent to which their suffering should be considered acceptable.

Assuming some nonhuman animals do, in fact, suffer, there are two major business-related areas where the suffering is especially notable:

- Research
- Consumer goods

The case of research—especially medical and drug development—provides some obvious justification for making animals suffer. One example involves a jaw implant brought to market by the firm Vitek. After implantation in human patients, the device fragmented, causing extensive and painful problems. Later studies indicated that had the implant been tested in animals first, the defect would've been discovered and the human costs and pain avoided.Lauren Myers, "Animal Testing

Necessary in Medical Research," *Daily Wildcat*, November 6, 2007, accessed June 8, 2011, http://wildcat.arizona.edu/2.2255/animal-testing-necessary-in-medical-research-1.169288. From here, it's easy to form an argument that if significant human suffering can be avoided by imposing on animals, then the route should be followed. Certainly many would be persuaded if it could be proven that the net animal suffering would be inferior to that caused in humans. (As an amplifying note, some make the case that testing on humans can be justified using the same reasoning: if imposing significant suffering on a few subjects will later help many cure a serious disease, then the action should be taken.)

The case of animal testing in the name of perfecting consumer goods is less easily defended. A *New York Times* story chronicles a dispute between the Perdue chicken company and a group of animal rights activists. The activists got enough money together to purchase a newspaper ad decrying poultry farm conditions. It portrayed chickens as crowded together so tightly that they end up fiercely attacking and eating each other. Even when not fighting, they wallow in disease and convulse in mass hysteria.Barnaby Feder, "Pressuring Perdue," *New York Times*, November 26, 1989, accessed June 8, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/26/magazine/pressuring- perdue.html. Though Perdue denied the ad's claims, many believe that animals of all kinds are subjected to extreme pain in the name of producing everything from cosmetics, to dinner, to Spanish bullfights. When animals are made to suffer for human comfort or pleasure—whether the result is nice makeup, or a tasty veal dish, or an enthralling bullfight—two arguments quickly arise against subjecting animals to the painful treatment. The utilitarian principle that pain in the world should be minimized may be applied. Also, a duty to refrain from cruelty may be cited and found persuasive.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Cognitive awareness and directed interest by animals may be sufficient to grant them autonomous ethical rights.
- Accepting that animals suffer may be sufficient to grant them autonomous ethical rights.
- The fact that animals do not explicitly claim ethical rights may be sufficient to deny them those rights.
- The fact that animals don't have duties may be sufficient to deny them ethical rights.
- Anthropomorphism may lead to erroneously seeing animals as possessing autonomous ethical value.
- The question about whether animal treatment causing suffering is ethically acceptable may be managed independently of the question about whether animals possess rights.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the basic steps of the cognitive awareness and interest argument?
2. What are the basic steps of the suffering argument?
3. What are the basic steps of the lack of expression argument?
4. What are the basic steps of the absence of duties argument?
5. What are the basic steps of the anthropomorphism suspicion argument?
6. In ethical terms, how is animal suffering for research reasons distinct from the suffering of a Spanish bullfight?

14.5 Case Studies

Yahoo! Answers: Why Should We Save the Planet?

Source: Photo courtesy of Kim Woodbridge, http://www.flickr.com/photos/kwbridge/2541993688.

Some people argue that there's no ethical requirement to protect the environment because the natural world has no intrinsic value. Against that ethical posture, here are four broad justifications for environmental protection. Each begins with a distinct and fundamental evaluation:

1. The environment should be protected in the name of serving human welfare, which is intrinsically valuable.
2. The environment should be protected in the name of serving future generations because they're valuable and merit intergenerational fairness.
3. The environment should be protected to serve animal welfare because there's an independent value in the existence and lives of animals.
4. The entire environmental web should be protected for its own sake because the planet's collection of ecosystems is intrinsically valuable.

On a Yahoo! forum page, a student named redbeard_90 posts the question "why should we save the planet?" and partially explains this way: "With all the constant talk of 'saving the planet' and stopping global warming, should we actually try to stop it? Perhaps in a way, this is humans transforming the planet to better suit us?""Why Should We Save the Planet?," *Yahoo! Answers*, accessed June 8, 2011, http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080610193018AA7IQt2.

QUESTIONS

1. It sounds like redbeard_90 might think that humans doing damage to the environment is OK because it's just a symptom of "humans transforming the planet to better suit us."

    - Where is redbeard_90 placing value?
    - What might redbeard_90's attitude be toward the *free use* conception of the human relation with the environment?
    - What is the *domination and progress argument* against worrying about saving the planet? How could that argument fit together with what redbeard_90 wrote?

2. The response by a woman named Super Nova includes this reasoning: "We should try to save the planet because there would be less people with health problems. Did you know that there are more people with respiratory problems because of all the air pollution contributing to it? Also, we should think about future generations on Earth and how it would affect our future. Also, global warming is affecting our essential natural resources like food and lakes are drying up and it is causing more droughts in the world."

    The overall tone of her answer is strong with conviction.

    - It sounds like Super Nova wants to save the planet. What values sit underneath her desire? Why does she think environmental protection is important?
    - Does it sound like she believes nature in itself has value? Why or why not?

3. The poster named Luke writes an animated response, including these sentences:

    The first thing we need to do is help make some changes in our national mind set from one that lets us believe that our earth can recover from anything, to one that lets us believe that our earth could use a little help.

Developing cleaner ways to produce electricity is not going to hurt a thing; if it does nothing but make the air we breathe cleaner it works for me.

Developing alternative fuels to power our transportation needs, again won't hurt a thing, reduce the demand for oil you reduce the price we pay for it, I think everyone can say "that works for me" to this.

I'm a global warming advocate but, not because of some unfounded fear of Doomsday but (as you may have guessed by now) because it won't hurt a thing to help our earth recover from years of industrial plunder.

- Some people are worried about human welfare, some people care a lot about the welfare of the planet, some people mix a little of both. Where would you say Luke comes down? Justify by specific reference to his words.
- Some people who are concerned about the earth's welfare are most interested in helping nonhuman animals; others are more interested in the natural world in its totality. Where would you say Luke comes down here? Why?
- Environmental *conservation* efforts can be conservative in the sense that they try to undo damage to the earth by limiting industrialization. The idea of environmental protection leaves open the possibility of using industrial advances—the same forces that have been contaminating the earth—to help resolve the problem. Does Luke sound more like a conservationist or a protector? Explain.

4. The poster named scottsdalehigh64 is the most intense. He's also fairly experienced: assuming his username is true and he graduated high school in 1964, he's about retirement age now. He writes, "There is an alternate question: Why do we think we have a right to be so destructive to other life forms on the planet? Perhaps the best answer is that we want to leave a good place to live for the species that are left when we go extinct."

   Unlike most of the other posters, he doesn't include any personal note or "best wishes" type line in his response. He's focused and intense.

- How much value does scottsdalehigh64 place in human existence?
- Where does he place value? What does scottsdalehigh64 think is worth aiding and protecting?
- Just from his words, how do you imagine scottsdalehigh64 would define "a good place to live?"

5. Scottsdalehigh64 doesn't seem to like those who are "destructive to other life forms on the planet."

   - Could an argument be built that, in preparing for our own eventual extinction, we should make sure that we eliminate *all* life-forms that are destructive to other life forms? What would that elimination mean? What would need to be done? How could it be justified?
   - In a newspaper column, the philosopher Jeff McMahan appears to tentatively endorse scottsdalehigh64's vision. He proposes that we "arrange the gradual extinction of carnivorous species, replacing them with new herbivorous ones."Jeff McMahan, "The Meat Eaters," *New York Times*, September 19, 2010, accessed June 8, 2011, http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/09/19/the-meat-eaters. If, in fact, we decided to wipe out meat-eating animals and leave the world to plants and plant eaters, would we be valuing most highly ourselves? Nonhuman animals? The entire natural world? Something else? Explain your response.

6. An excited poster, KiRa01, announces, "Just live like theres no tomorrow!!!!"

   With respect to the environment, justify his attitude in ethical terms.

Going Green

Source: Photo courtesy of Elliott Brown, http://www.flickr.com/photos/ell-r-brown/4601959323.

Fifty years ago airports were designed to reward fliers with architecture as striking as the new experience of flight was rare and exciting. From those early days, only a few airports remain unspoiled by renovation and expansion. The Long Beach Airport south of Los Angeles is a survivor. The low lines of midcentury modern architecture captivate today's visitors just as they did the first ones. The restaurant overlooking the tarmac remains as elegant and perfectly simple as always. Walking the concourse, it's easy to imagine men in ties and women and children in their Sunday clothes waiting for a plane while uniformed porters manage their suitcases.

Flying is different today—no longer exciting and rare, it's just frustrating and crowded. Recognizing that reality, when the large European nations combined to form an airplane manufacturer, they didn't choose a distinguished and elevated name for their enterprise, they just called it Airbus: a company that makes buses that happen to go up and down.

Airplanes are tremendously polluting. In the United States, large passenger flights account for about 3 percent of released greenhouse gasses. That doesn't sound like much, but when you compare the number of flights with car trips, it's clear that each airplane is billowing massive carbon dioxide. And the problem is only getting worse, at least on the tourism front. Over the course of the next decade, global tourism will double to about 1.6 billion people annually.

Tourists aren't the only fliers. Planes are also taken by people heading to other cities to talk about tourism. One of them, Achim Steiner, is the executive director of the United Nations Environment Program. At a recent conference in Spain, he said, "Tourism is an extraordinary growth industry, it's the responsibility of operators—from hoteliers to travel companies—as well as governments to ensure that sites are sustainable."James Kanter, "How Do You Measure Green Tourism?," *New York Times*, October 6, 2008, accessed June 8, 2011, http://green.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/10/06/is-there-any-such-thing-as-green-tourism.

Sustainability has at least two sides. On one side, there's the economic reality: revenue provided by visitors pays for needed services. An example comes from the Masai Mara park reserve in Kenya. In villages surrounding the park, schools were forced to close when political unrest scared away the tourists and their money. On the other side, sustainability also means environmental protection. According to Steiner, there's the possibility that "Masai Mara could be overused to the point where it loses its value."

QUESTIONS

1. According to Steiner, "Hoteliers, travel companies, and governments are responsible" for ensuring the sustainability of sites including Masai Mara. In most discussions about *paying* the costs of a clean environment, three groups are signaled:

    - Those who contaminate the natural world
    - Those who enjoy the natural world
    - Those who are most able to pay

    How do each of these three fit into Steiner's vision?

2. Airplane exhaust contributes significantly to the damage currently being done to the environment. Steiner rode an airplane to a city to talk about that damage.

    - What is a cost-benefit analysis?
    - How could a cost-benefit analysis be used to show that his boarding the plane and going was actually an environmentally respectable act?

3. Fifty years ago, airplanes contributed almost no pollution to the environment because so few could afford to fly. One way to limit the amount of pollution into the air is through incentives. In the airplane case, a large tax could be attached to an airline ticket, thus providing an incentive to tourists to stay home or use alternate sources of transportation. Of course, for the very wealthy, the tax will be more absorbable and, presumably, airplane travel would tend toward its origins: flying would be something the rich do.

    How could a utilitarian analysis be used to justify the action of, in essence, reserving plane flying for the rich in the name of helping the environment?

4. The airport at Long Beach is a low-ranking historical treasure. Tourists will never flock to see it, but it does incarnate and vivify a time in the recent past. The airport at Long Beach is also a

business. That may lead its directors to initiate remodeling and expansion plans that will destroy the airport's original essence.

- Is preserving the natural world like the preservation of a historical architectural treasure? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Using standard arguments against the business responsibility to preserve the natural world (free use, domination and progress, geological time), make the case that progress should be allowed to destroy the Long Beach Airport's historical authenticity if that course of action is profitable.
- Using standard arguments in favor of the business responsibility to preserve the natural world (preservation for human welfare, for future generations, for the sake of the thing itself), make the case that the Long Beach Airport should be preserved.
- If the airport is preserved, who should pay? Why?

5. In ethical terms, make the case that it's more important to preserve the Masai Mara park reserve in Kenya than the Long Beach Airport.

IBM and IBM

Source: Photo courtesy of p_a_h, http://www.flickr.com/photos/pahudson/2212158878.

Bernadette Patrick moved away from her home in Endicott, New York, saying this about the town: "It was very neighborly and well kept, with lots of kids and families. Then all of a sudden it seemed like they put a skull and crossbones on all the doors. It was like a scene from a science fiction movie."Janet Gramza, "Life in the Plume: IBM's Pollution Haunts a Village," *Post-Standard*, January 11, 2009, accessed June 8, 2011, http://www.syracuse.com/specialreports/index.ssf/2009/01/life_in_the_plume_ibms_polluti.html.

The science fiction part is the large, white metal boxes attached to Endicott homes. With tubes burrowing down in the earth and shooting up high into the air, they're wired to pump air from below and jet it above. The idea is to disperse toxic vapors rising up through the ground. The vapor's source is industrial solvents poured down drains and dripped out of leaky pipes at the local IBM factory over the course of its seventy-five-year history.

Those seventy-five years have otherwise been good ones. IBM money and jobs drove the small town forward. As Wanda Hudak put it, "The IBM plant paid for a lot of college educations and cottages at Perch Pond."Janet Gramza, "Life in the Plume: IBM's Pollution Haunts a Village," *Post-Standard*, January 11, 2009, accessed June 8, 2011, http://www.syracuse.com/specialreports/index.ssf/2009/01/life_in_the_plume_ibms_polluti.html. The good feelings ended when a

company IBM hired started showing up at people's homes to test the air and offer to install the mechanical ventilation systems.

QUESTIONS

1. IBM is paying millions for cleanup efforts. They're installing air cleaners on homes and pumping contaminated groundwater to the surface for safe disposal. An IBM spokesman said this about the toxic pollution, "None of it was done intentionally, but we still are sticking around to take care of it. We feel obligated legally, ethically. We are not going anywhere."Janet Gramza, "Life in the Plume: IBM's Pollution Haunts a Village," *Post-Standard*, January 11, 2009, accessed June 8, 2011, http://www.syracuse.com/specialreports/index.ssf/2009/01/life_in_the_plume_ibms_polluti.html.
    - Make the ethical case that those who contaminated the environment—IBM—should pay all the cleanup costs.
    - Make the case that those who benefit from a clean environment—the locals who work at the company and those who don't—should pay for the cleanup.
2. When the extent of the environmental pollution became clear, it was also evident that the cleanup would be tremendously expensive. In general terms, how could a cost-benefit analysis be mounted to decide between going forward with the environmental cleanup or closing the factory, shuttering the town, and moving on?
3. One critical element of the notion of corporate social responsibility is the idea of sustainability.
    - In both environmental and economic senses, what is sustainability?
    - What would be sustained by a cleanup in this case? How?
4. One critical element of the notion of corporate social responsibility is the idea of stakeholder theory.
    - Who are the obvious stakeholders in this case?
    - Thinking about the situation from the directorship of IBM, what are the company's responsibilities to each of the stakeholders?
5. The IBM of Endicott, New York, is an IBM of the past, one focused on factories and making business machines like typewriters and

photocopiers. The IBM of today leaves most hard manufacturing to foreign firms in low-cost countries. What IBM now wants to do now, according to their advertising, is "build a smarter planet." That means solving problems like this one reported by CNN:

Stockholm bogs down in rush-hour traffic. A series of bridges connecting Sweden's capital creates bottlenecks that cause gridlock and air pollution, waste millions of gallons of fuel, hamper public transportation, and endanger pedestrians.Jeffrey M. O'Brien, "IBM's Grand Plan to Save the Planet," *CNN Money*, April 21, 2009, accessed June 8, 2011, http://money.cnn.com/2009/04/20/technology/obrien_ibm.fortune/index.htm.

The solution? Swede governmental officers decided on a congestion fee, on charging vehicles money for entering the city at peak traffic times. The aim was to seriously reduce the number of cars downtown at rush hours. That's easier said than done, however. Stopping people at toll booths would just make the problem worse: it would add yet another air-polluting stop to the traffic through town. So IBM was hired to produce camera technology allowing license plate numbers to be recorded and recognized automatically. Then monthly bills were generated and mailed out to the car owners. As CNN reported, these were the results:

Traffic fell 35 percent almost immediately and stayed down 22 percent—and not just at peak times or solely downtown. Emissions also dropped by 14 percent. The streets became more pedestrian friendly, and the buses began finishing their routes so quickly that the city had to rewrite the schedules. The fee schedule makes it obvious when traffic will be the worst, so drivers who trek in during peak hours know they'll pay more for what will probably be a maddening experience. As a result, people seem to be cutting out unnecessary trips: bundling afterschool pickups, say, with visits to the grocery store. In short, Swedes are driving smarter.Jeffrey M. O'Brien, "IBM's Grand Plan to Save the Planet," *CNN Money*, April 21, 2009, accessed June 8, 2011, http://money.cnn.com/2009/04/20/technology/obrien_ibm.fortune/index.htm

When IBM protects the environment by cleaning up Endicott, they're losing money; when IBM protects the environment by selling smart systems to the Swedes, they're profiting.

- Make the case that, ethically, IBM's actions in Endicott are nobler than the actions in Sweden.
- Make the case that, ethically, IBM's actions in Sweden are nobler than the actions in Endicott.

6. In the world of business ethics and the environment, one of the more spirited debates is this: should we slow down technology and industrialization to use less and pollute less, or speed up industrialization and technology in the hope that we'll discover solutions to the environmental problems caused by industrialization and technology?

   - How does the case of IBM incarnate that debate?
   - Does the decision about where you come down depend on where you place value (human welfare versus environmental welfare)? Explain.

7. With respect to the environment and money, there are two formulas for thinking about IBM's project in Sweden:

   a. The aim was to clean up the environment, and money happened to be made along the way.
   b. The aim was to make money, and cleaning up the environment happened to be a good strategy for profit.

   In terms of basic values and ethics, outline the difference between these two visions.

8. Thinking about ethics and IBM in Endicott and in Sweden, what's more important: the intentions of a company when it acts, or the consequences of the actions? Explain.

Windmills and Condors

Source: Photo courtesy of Tom Caswell, http://www.flickr.com/photos/caswell_tom/2426923924.

The wind farms of Northern California produce clean electricity. Every lightbulb illuminated by the giant turbines represents less destruction of the earth by mining and drilling operations, and less contamination of the air by coal- and oil-fired power plants. It also represents fewer California Condors.

The spinning blades of the windmills erected in spots including the Altamont Pass are proving deadly for the rare birds, which are a kind of vulture. Here's a reaction by the environmental writer and activist Jim Wiegand: "For all the 'green energy' believers out there, this is a video you have to see. Each year across America thousands of eagles, hawks, owls, falcons, vultures and condors perish at green energy wind farms. This video will open your eyes and your mind when you see how easily a soaring vulture is smashed by the innocent looking blades of a prop wind turbine."C. Taibibi, "California Condors, Wind Farms on Collision Course," *Examiner.com*, August 30, 2009, accessed June 8, 2011, http://www.examiner.com/wildlife-conservation-in-national/california-condors-wind-farms-on-collision-course.

Fatal Accident with Vulture on a Windmill

(click to see video)

The video shows a large and calm vulture cycling slowly around a modern wind turbine and then getting struck by one of the spinning blades. The bird drops out of the air. Left on the ground beside the towering contraption, it drags and struggles to flap its broken wing.

QUESTIONS

1. Unlike single-cell creatures, vultures seem to have awareness and interest in their environment. They notice distressed animals, circle patiently, and in the end descend to eat the carcass.

    - How can this behavior be translated into an argument that animals have ethical rights?
    - How can the claim that aware and interested vultures have independent ethical rights be mustered into an argument against installing wind turbines in areas that threaten vultures, no matter how much clean electrical energy they may generate?

2. If you have a chance to see the video and watch the fallen bird struggling and dying on the ground, do the images change your feelings about the importance of protecting this creature?

    - Assume the bird writhing on the ground is, in fact, suffering in a way not completely unlike human suffering. How can this behavior be translated into an argument that animals have ethical rights?
    - Make the case that the video doesn't allow the conclusion that birds suffer.

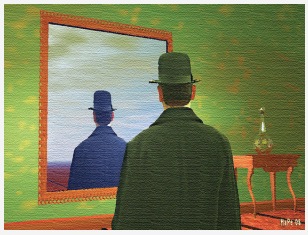
3. Assume that, for whatever reason, you're convinced that those condors being cut down by California wind turbines have ethical rights comparable with the ones we deposit in human animals. Can you nonetheless outline an argument in favor of continued windmill use because of the clean energy it provides?

    - Make your case by appeal to a utilitarian argument.
    - Make your case by appeal to a cost-benefit analysis.
    - Make your case by appealing to the idea that the environment should be protected in its entirety because, as an interlocked set of ecosystems, it holds autonomous value.

4. If you can make the case that some nonhuman animals that have autonomous ethical rights should be allowed to meet their end in the name of clean energy, could you make the same argument for human animals? Imagine, for example, that actually constructing these wind

turbines leads to high worker fatalities, say, 10 times higher than any other kind of work. Could those deaths be justified ethically in the name of clean energy? Why or why not?

The PETA Homepage



Source: Photo courtesy of HaPe_Gera, http://www.flickr.com/photos/hape_gera/2929195528/.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals is possibly the most active animal-rights organization in the United States. On the day this case study was written, the organization's home page featured pictures of a sad-eyed Dalmatian, a noble elephant, and a cuddly rabbit. There was also a tease to a story set underneath a picture of smiling, former President Clinton. It read, "What's the secret behind this former president's newly trim waistline, enhanced energy, and improved cardiovascular health? A vegan diet! Read more."Peta.org, "Try Bill Clinton's New Diet!," accessed June 8, 2011, https://secure.peta.org/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=3315.

QUESTIONS

1. A vegan diet excludes all products derived from animals and promotes plant-based eating. In this PETA ad, what values probably underlie the strategy (is the appeal to protect animals made in the name of human welfare, animal welfare, or general environmental welfare)? Justify.
2. What is anthropomorphism? How could the phenomenon of anthropomorphism lead someone to posit autonomous ethical dignity, and rights, in nonhuman animals that really shouldn't be considered worth protecting any more than trees?
3. From the description provided of the PETA home page, how could it be described as inviting anthropomorphism?

4. Were you in charge at PETA, an organization fighting for animal rights that depends on donations, would you use the phenomenon of anthropomorphism to boost your organization's revenue?

    - What is an argument in favor of the strategy?
    - What is an argument against the strategy?