A Visit to the Living Earth Café

Erik Assadourian

Editor's Note: *Worldwatch Research Associate Erik Assadourian has been developing a code of ethics grounded in the reality that we are utterly dependent on a fragile Earth system for our ability to survive and thrive, and that our choices must reflect this fact. This essay begins a series that will explore this philosophy and its components in the coming months.*

Imagine this. You walk into the Living Earth Café, a new coffeehouse that just opened in your city. The décor is simple, and in places clashes with itself. A funky old couch dominates a corner, a few well-worn arm chairs sit to one side, occupied by two patrons engaged in a passionate debate. A mix of eclectic tables and chairs is spread around the space. At the front of the store, a prominent sign explains that all furniture is used, acquired locally from Freecycle, Craig's List, or secondhand stores. The same sign announces that all electricity comes from renewable sources and that about half the hot water is generated from rooftop solar hot water collectors.

Over by the windows you see dozens of herbs and vegetable plants sprouting from the sills. In the corner, there's a strange box labeled "vermicomposter" and another sign stating that "1% of our organic waste is recycled here by our worms, the other 99% in composters at our local urban garden, which produces 100% of our herbal teas and a portion of our food."

You get in line to order a cup of the locally grown herbal tea. In front of you a customer orders a latte to go and is shocked to hear there are no to-go cups. "You can either enjoy your coffee here, sir, or you can borrow one of our travel mugs," explains the barista. "There's a $4 deposit, which you'll get back if you return it." A bit surprisingly, the guy agrees and borrows one of the mugs and goes on his way.

It's your turn. Typically ordering tea at a café is a humdrum experience, with three or four options, each costing as much as a dozen bags at the grocery store. But there is a long list of tea choices here—served loose-leaf, not in a bleached paper bag—and in several innovative combinations. "I'll take the mint lavender," you say.

"Would you like that sweet? We can add stevia leaves, a natural herbal sweetener with no calories."

"Sure, I'll try that."

You fork over three bucks (you can't help but notice the café still charges what the market will bear), and take your little tea pot and mug to your table. While drinking your tea, you read a little brochure about the café. On one side is a menu and upcoming events. The café offers a set menu, but looking around at what the other diners are having, the food looks quite healthy, tasty, and not served in obesity-promoting portions. The week's menu offers simple, staple meals from around the world: dhal and brown basmati rice on Mondays, spelt pasta with tomatoes and basil on Tuesdays, green tofu curry and sticky brown rice on Wednesday, and so on. It looks totally vegetarian, possibly even vegan, and minimally processed. The upcoming events described are diverse, too—local organizations' meetings, lectures, book groups, musical performances, even classes on how to vermicompost and grow food in containers and urban garden plots.

On the back of the menu is a broader description of the café, which turns out to be a project of the Living Earth Ethics Foundation (LEEF), a nonprofit organization whose mission is "to promote a code of ethics that will sustain life on a living Earth." All profits from this chain of cafés and LEEF's other mission-driven businesses support the foundation's social service providers: urban gardens that offer skills training and access to healthy food for low-income urban residents; free clinics that are as focused on promoting a healthy lifestyle as treating the many chronic diseases that are side-effects of the consumer culture; homeless shelters that emphasize both empowerment and a new model of success (rather than success through increased material consumption); and several Living Earth Charter Schools where, unlike typical schools, the curriculum centers on building an awareness of the natural limits of a finite planet, developing a deep understanding of the close links between the consumer economy and current exploitation of people and the environment, and instilling a consciousness of our ethical responsibility to the Earth and all beings that are part of it, all while providing the highest level of academic training possible.

Finally, below the description is a box titled, "Love Living Earth Café? Become an investor." It explains that "the capital to run this café comes directly from the customers, who receive interest on their investments in Living Earth Dollars redeemable for goods at the café. These investments are equivalent to one- to five-year certificates of deposit and are currently providing a 5 to 7 percent annual return. For more details, chat with the manager or visit www.livingearthcafe.org."

Sound too good to be true? So far it is, but much of the

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model described here has been implemented in one form or another, and creating a more comprehensive model is possible. There are already restaurants in Thailand that educate customers about HIV, safe sex, and family planning while directing the profits to an NGO focused on addressing these issues in rural populations. There is a bakery in New York City helping to provide skills training to the chronically underemployed while using its profits to support several additional social enterprises and services, such as affordable housing. And these are just some of the smaller, more recently established social enterprises. There are several well-known social enterprises that have over a billion dollars in annual revenue and more than a hundred years of experience, namely, the Salvation Army and the YMCA. Of course, these organizations' agendas are not environmental in nature, but nothing is stopping the environmental community from comprehensively utilizing the proven tool of social enterprise.

All that's required is to build not-for-profit businesses and channel surplus earnings into broader efforts than just "harm reduction" advocacy. Currently most environmental advocacy is focused on reducing the worst effects of consumerism, rather than on providing an alternative socio-economic model. For example, the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act both set maximum limits on the pollution that can be emitted into the air and water. Current climate change legislative efforts are focused on trying to curb greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent overall—a lofty reduction but one that still won't get us to where we need to be, especially in a world where population and desire for the consumer lifestyle continue to grow.

Of course, our political system, which is based on compromise and the interplay between competing interests, shapes this harm reduction agenda, but the question needs to be asked: why aren't environmental organizations playing hardball like corporations do? Corporations deploy lobbyists and "astroturf organizations" (grassroots organizations engineered by corporations that pretend to represent the public interest) to influence governments around the world, undermining those organizations that actually represent the public interest. Why aren't environmental groups penetrating businesses' realm—not just by pressuring them directly to change, as organizations like Rainforest Action Network do, but by setting up social enterprises that indirectly force corporations to redesign how they do business? NGOs could set up wind farms, cafés, ecologically designed funeral homes, eco-banks, or any number of sustainable business that directly threaten corporate chains.

For example, if designed right (i.e., made popular), an environmental franchise like the Living Earth Café would be able to pressure Starbucks and other cafés to redesign their model to accommodate the evolving taste of the green consumer. Consciousness would grow to the point where Starbucks could no longer get away with touting their eco-friendliness by serving coffee in a 10-percent-recycled paper cup, but might feel pressured into getting rid of to-go cups altogether.

As importantly, the funds generated by these non-profit environmentalist businesses could be channeled directly into the organizations' advocacy and education work and into social service providers that, in the long term, could help to weaken consumerism's hold on humanity and create new environmentalists. In other words, just as a Catholic school or a Catholic-based homeless shelter helps to expose people to the Christian God and Jesus, environmentalist schools and shelters could do the same for the Earth. As well, these service providers could help prepare people for the real possibility of a widespread ecological and economic collapse. How many people living in consumer societies know how to grow food? Or make a simple solar cooker and use it to purify water? Or build a composting toilet? We assume that fresh water will flow into our homes (and sewage out of them) long into the future, but there are absolutely no guarantees of either. With the rapid degeneration of the global environment, the environmental community will need to expand its role beyond harm reduction advocacy if we expect human civilization to have even a small chance of thriving beyond the 21st century.

To launch this type of comprehensive environmental movement, we need a philosophy more complete than the average environmental organization currently provides. In the coming months I will describe a vision of the next evolution of environmentalism, including 10 ethical principles that could help orient this shift. Environmentalism does not need to die, as was recently argued, nor does it have to remain a marginalized special interest. Instead it can become a much broader movement, absorbing many of the related social-justice issues into a more unified system—one that, at its core, has a simple ethical code to guide both individual behavior and the movement. And that can mobilize an ever-expanding network of social services, social enterprises, and development efforts, systematically replacing the self-destructive, corporate-driven consumer economy with an ecological social-entrepreneurial system that can be sustained for millennia.

Next: The 10 Living Earth Ethical Principles

The Living Earth Ethical Principles

Erik Assadourian

Editor's Note: *In the last issue, Research Associate Erik Assadourian described a new kind of environmental movement—one based in building nonprofit social enterprises and social service providers that teach recipients a new way to relate to the Earth and, from this, a new system of ecological ethics that will help us to live more sustainably. Here he continues with an overview of the system's 10 ethical principles, which will be described in more detail in future issues.*

Every day there is more news about floods, fires, hurricanes, acidifying oceans, bleaching coral reefs, drowning polar bears. Scientists and journalists increasingly point to climate change as the root cause. But what's at the root of climate change?

In a word: consumerism. This dominant socioeconomic and cultural system encourages us to define our success, our very happiness, through how much we consume, how much we travel, how rich our diet, how big our house, how fancy our car, and on and on. On a finite planet (particularly with a population of 6.7 billion humans), this system is an impossibility, though one that is hard to resist. Yet deep down, many now grasp that the consumer system is fatally flawed, making people fat and sick, shortening lives, increasing stress and social isolation, and wreaking havoc on the global and local environments.

What we need is a new socioeconomic/cultural system, namely an ecological-ethical-social-entrepreneurial system, where people work decent hours, for decent pay, in jobs that are designed to do good, not exploit people or the planet (like most jobs do today). I described what this system could look like in the last issue. But how do we get there? To start with, we will need an ethical code that can mobilize people to work toward this cultural reboot.

At the heart of this ethical code will be a new understanding of our relationship with the Earth. Right now, most of us treat the Earth like a reservoir of resources, there for us to tap in building our homes, cars, cities, and civilization. But we must recognize that the Earth is a complex living system that we are a small part of and completely dependent on. If we're not careful we will shift this system dramatically—quite possibly to a new "set point" that is unfriendly to millions of species, including our own.

In shorter form, we must get people to understand that the Earth is a fragile living system, and that we're dependent on it for our ability to survive and thrive.

The next step is making it clear that it is our responsibility—not to mention in our self-interest—to heal this system (as we have destabilized it significantly) before it shifts to a new set point. How do we do this? Essentially, we need to demonstrate that we can live our lives in ways that are restorative not destructive, and moreover, that this can provide a more ethical and more meaningful way to orient our lives than the consumer dream. Every action becomes an opportunity to heal the Earth, from our work and political activity, to our diet and consumption choices, to our reproductive choices, and even how we celebrate life rituals. I suggest that 10 ecological ethical principles can guide the many facets of our lives. They are stated below in brief, due to space constraints, but over the coming year I will expand on them. Constructive feedback will help to strengthen the principles and I welcome it at any time (please contact me at eassadourian@worldwatch.org).

Just Livelihood. We must choose a livelihood that neither exploits people—in any of their many roles: worker, consumer, community member—nor the Earth, and ideally, a livelihood that actively heals the Earth and nurtures human society.

Right Diet. We must eat a healthy diet of the right amount of calories, of foods that are produced fairly and do not cause systematic suffering to ourselves, to others, to farmed animals or other living creatures, or to the Earth itself.

Active Political Engagement. We should be fully engaged citizens, advocating for changes in the political systems over which we have influence, so that exploitation of the Earth and those without power will cease and so that fair and sustainable political systems will take root.

Life of Service. We are all part of a greater system, and the whole will only be healthy if its constituent parts are. Thus we should help those who are in need, especially in ways that provide a useful understanding of the world and our role in it—namely that we are dependent on and part of the Earth, and that only through sustaining this beautiful, fragile system will we lead meaningful and good lives.

Mindful Consumption. We must consume consciously and with restraint, in ways that nurture the Earth. When this is not possible and we truly cannot go without consuming a harmful product, we must choose to consume goods and services that hurt the Earth and humanity as little as possible.

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A Family for All Families. Until the human population returns to a number that the Earth can healthily maintain, all couples should moderate their reproductive fruitfulness. For those wanting larger families, they should consider adopting as many children as they have the longing and means to raise. All families should focus on teaching their children to tread as lightly on the Earth as possible.

Renewing Life Rituals. Life-affirming rituals should be celebrated in ways that do not cause significant harm to the Earth or to people—and when possible, should actively serve as a restorative ecological and social force.

Spreading Community. To succeed we must educate others and encourage them to adopt this way of being in the world. As membership grows, outreach efforts should be established around the world, whether through social enterprises, meeting houses, social service providers, sustainable residential communities, or other means. These efforts will help keep members engaged and energized, facilitate their efforts to do good works, and teach others to live by this philosophy.

Prepare for a Changing World. Because of the rapid decline of the ecological systems on which human society depends, the probability is high that serious political and economic disruptions will occur. We should prepare for this contingency, especially by cultivating one or more basic skills, such as food production, construction and repair, basic medicine, basic sanitation, and so on. Having these skills and teaching them to others will be vital in maintaining and rebuilding human civilization in the event that a major economic or ecological collapse occurs.

Shifting Perspective. A satisfying life comes not through affluence, but through leading a meaningful life, being healthy, being economically secure, and sharing one's life with a supportive community. Far from helping in the pursuit of these goods, the consumer culture often hinders their attainment as well as leading to the exploitation of both the Earth and its people. Letting go of the consumer value system and shifting our focus to these more essential elements of human life will improve our own wellbeing, as well as that of the broader society and the Earth itself.

The Living Earth Ethical Principles: Right Diet and Renewing Life Rituals

Erik Assadourian

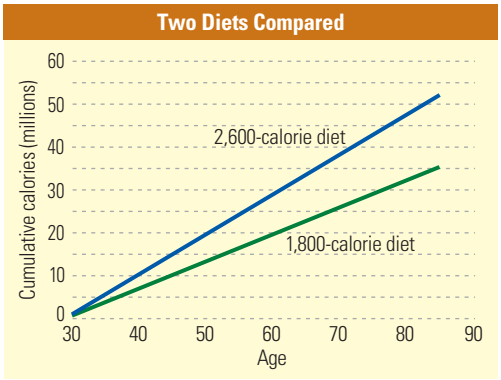
The third in a series of essays on a system of ecological ethics for living sustainably. This and the remaining essays will discuss the 10 Living Earth Ethical Principles in detail. For references and additional information, go to www.worldwatch.org/ww/ethics/.

Right Diet. *Eat a healthy diet of the right amount of calories, of foods that are produced fairly and do not cause systematic suffering to ourselves, to others, to farmed animals or other living creatures, or to the Earth itself.*

Choosing the right diet will help to improve the health of individuals, human society, and the Earth. The obesity epidemic and related diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and many cancers; a significant portion of climate change; the eutrophication of rivers and oceans; the concentration of the food industry among a small cadre of exploitative corporations, in turn leading to the abuse of workers and farm animals—these are all connected by one thing: our consumer diet. We need to move to a diet that is in balance with the Earth, rather than one that is self-destructive. To do this, we need to follow some simple advice.

First: eat the right amount of calories. Obesity is fundamentally caused by consuming more calories than you expend. Reducing total calorie intake can improve your quality of life and extend your lifespan. Moreover, a nutritious, lower-calorie diet will reduce your ecological impact *even if you live more years.*

The figure below shows two men's annual calorie intake from age 30 to 85. At age 30, one continues eating the U.S. standard recommended 2,600-calorie-per-day diet. The other switches to a healthier 1,800-calorie-per-day diet. (This assumes a relatively sedentary lifestyle for both; a particularly active person would want to adjust upwards.) The thinner man can live to be 81 years old on the calories consumed by the larger one by age 65. Moreover, by following this diet the thinner man's odds of heart disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, and other overnutrition-related diseases will all go down significantly.



Second, to make this lower-calorie diet work, the food has to be healthy. This means cutting out the processed foods and refined sugars and grains of the typical consumer's diet, and instead leaning toward a mostly vegetarian diet filled with fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and (if interested) the occasional animal product. The benefits of switching to a more natural diet aren't just health-related; processed foods are more energy-intensive and rely heavily on disposable packaging.

If animal products are part of your diet, be sure to consume these sparingly, as the ecological resources needed to produce these are much greater than plants. (One example: eating 320 calories of stir-fried vegetables and rice—about half a kilogram of food—produces just 0.2 kilograms of carbon dioxide. Getting the same calories from a 0.2-kilogram (6-ounce) steak produces 4.4 kilograms of CO_2, over 20 times more.) Also, when choosing animal products, try to ensure that your milk, butter, eggs, and meat don't come from factory farms, which are polluting, typically exploit the workers and animals, and degrade the nutritional value of these foods. And when possible purchase all of your foods from local farmers or organic fair-trade sources.

While making these changes won't come without a determined effort (especially in the toxic food environment of the United States), they will improve your health, reduce your impact on the Earth, and help shift food production toward sustainability by strengthening organic enterprises, reducing the ecological impact of agriculture, helping to provide workers fair wages, and reducing corporate control of food resources while returning it to local farmers and responsible businesses.

Renewing Life Rituals. *Life-affirming rituals should be celebrated in ways that do not cause significant harm to the Earth or to people—and when possible, should actively serve as a restorative ecological and social force.*

Throughout history, people have used rituals to mark the transition from one stage of life to another; birth, initiation into adulthood, marriage, and death are the most widely celebrated rituals. Increasingly a common theme joins these rituals, regardless of setting, religion, or culture: massive consumption, which inflicts great costs on the families and communities involved and on the Earth as well. In the United States, for instance, an aver-

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age wedding costs US$28,000 and a funeral $10,000. They also cause a huge amount of ecological damage: the barrages of toys given at birthdays are often toxic, made using fossil fuel inputs, and shipped thousands of kilometers using more fossil fuels. The typical U.S. wedding not only costs about seven months' worth of average household income, but generates thousands of tons of carbon dioxide emissions (as people travel long distances to attend the wedding), tons of waste from the mining of gold for rings, and paper waste from invitations and gift wrapping.

But rituals can be reclaimed so that they are not a stressful burden but an opportunity to connect more closely to family, friends, and the Earth. Let me use a personal example. I just got married. Instead of having one wedding, my wife and I chose to hold three small parties—one where we live and two where our two families are from. This way, only we and a few others had to travel long distances. Since the parties were smaller we could invite more guests and spend more time with each of them. We also were able to draw on social capital instead of financial capital, for example by using families' homes for the parties and friends' labor instead of hired help, which in turn reinforced our relationships. Moreover, we had simple vegetarian fare at the parties, used e-mail and a wedding website instead of paper invitations, and exchanged rings that I inherited from my family. The whole wedding cost a small fraction of the average—both for us and for our guests (as few needed hotel rooms or flights).

Other rituals can be redesigned as well. Encouraging fewer and/or used gifts (or charitable donations) for birthdays, showers, graduations, and holidays is one important opportunity, as is changing how one addresses a death in the family. More than any other ritual, perhaps, funerals have great potential to become life-affirming and life-giving events. The first step is to plan ahead so as not to be exploited in your time of mourning by funeral home salesmen prodding you to embalm your loved ones with toxic chemicals and stuff them in fancy wooden and metal caskets. Instead, research green funeral homes and options early and put all the details in a will (and encourage other family members to do the same). There are several natural cemeteries that bury bodies in shrouds or simple wooden coffins and use native trees and shrubs instead of stones for grave markers, creating forest parklands in the process.

Ultimately, the goal is to create renewing rituals, bringing families, friends, and communities together to celebrate or to mourn, not in a way that drains precious resources but, when possible, actively builds relationships and heals the Earth.

The Living Earth Ethical Principles: Just Livelihood and Mindful Consumption

Erik Assadourian

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Just Livelihood. *We must choose a livelihood that neither exploits people—in any of their many roles: worker, consumer, community member—nor the Earth, and ideally, a livelihood that actively heals the Earth and nurtures human society.*

Many of us are committed to doing good with our lives and yet our jobs often work at cross-purposes to our volunteer work, our consumption choices, our political views. And now with unemployment increasing and the media scaring us with questions like "Could this be the next Great Depression?," few people are willing to even consider changing jobs, even when their work is unengaging, uninteresting, or—worse—actively exploiting communities, consumers, or the planet.

How do we change that? The best way is to choose a job that epitomizes your values. Instead of marketing junk food, create marketing campaigns for healthy foods. Instead of injecting foreheads with Botox, focus your medical skills on helping people to live healthily and heal life-threatening diseases. For entrepreneurs, convert your small business so it becomes a symbol of your beliefs. Advertise the fact that your store runs on renewable energy, sells fair-trade products, pays a livable wage—the benefit will come not just to your conscience but to your bottom line as customer loyalty and worker pride grow.

Of course, even at the best businesses, there will still be room for improvement, so one should still work within one's organization to challenge it to do more. That could mean efforts as simple as helping to "green" office operations, pushing for more eco-friendly fair-trade products to be stocked, or spreading an environmental ethic to colleagues.

What about the majority of workers who don't work for responsive companies or can't easily change jobs? Before answering this, one point to remember is that the more simply one lives, the fewer hours one will need to work, since personal spending will be lower. Moreover, this will free time for leisure and lower one's ecological footprint (since one cannot afford to consume as much when working fewer hours).

Suppose you have to work full time to survive, perhaps even more than one job; what do you do when working for an exploitive company and no other option seems to exist? If possible, push for change from within, directly or through a union. If that fails, try to facilitate change from without. For example, one could assist shareholders with filing a resolution, serving as a source of information. Or, if the company is not just acting immorally but illegally, whistleblowing is an important option. Organizations available to help whistleblowers include, for government employees, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (www.peer.org), which provides guidance and legal support and also offers a guide, *The Art of Anonymous Activism*, that teaches employees how to safely blow the whistle.

But activism of this sort can mean risks, and few are willing to put their security on the line. So for them, there is foot dragging, an effective tactic to *imperceptibly* slow down work, whether by moving just a bit more slowly, filing papers incorrectly, or entering data with a small error (just a few examples). If done right, managers won't detect it's intentional (or you!) and the company's productivity will decline. Indeed, in 2002, disengaged workers cost U.S. organizations US$250 billion, according to a Gallup poll. The Kabachnick Group estimates that up to 65 percent of U.S. employees are already disengaged, or, in other words, "have already quit but forgot to tell their bosses." When "slowing down the machine" is one's only option, it might just help to buy time for a new sustainable economy to emerge and replace the existing exploitative economy.

Mindful Consumption. *We must consume consciously and with restraint, in ways that nurture the Earth. When this is not possible and we truly cannot go without consuming a harmful product, we must choose to consume goods and services that hurt the Earth and humanity as little as possible.*

"Live simply so that others might simply live." "The Earth has enough for everyone's needs, not everyone's greed." These quotations from Mahatma Gandhi demonstrate just how wise Gandhi was. They summarize important lessons on how to consume in a world that is overtaxed by human consumption patterns, and where 2 billion people are barely surviving because of the inequitable distribution of resources. But how to live out this wisdom?

We must find a way to consume as little of the world's resources as possible in our pursuit of a high quality of life. Yet how do we judge what is a sustainable high quality of life versus

Joan A. Wolbier

the pursuit of unnecessary, unsustainable wants? The ecological philosopher Arne Naess once said, "Live at a level we wish others to attain." Do we really expect that the Earth can provide everyone with a car? A wide-screen TV? A dog? A second home? If you answered no to any of these, you should ask yourself, can you in good conscience own one? And if not, then comes the challenge of extricating oneself from this "essential" product.

There are many opportunities to make changes with minimal effects on one's current lifestyle. One can purchase clothing, appliances, furniture, and other needs from secondhand stores or networks like Freecycle (www.freecycle.org). By getting a "new" shirt from Goodwill you'll be supporting a social enterprise while preventing creation of a new piece of clothing, most likely made in a sweatshop of unsustainable materials and toxic dyes. When buying second-hand is not an option and you must buy new (e.g., soap), try to buy a sustainable version. Most products today have an ecologically friendly variant.

Over time, you can find ways to change your lifestyle so certain goods become unnecessary. Take the car, for example. By living two blocks from my workplace and four blocks from a grocery store, I have dispensed with a car for the past seven years. The flip side is that I can only afford a small place to live, but that means less cleaning, less stuff to buy, and less money spent on heating and lighting. And if you truly can't give up your car (for example, because your office is in a town without good public transit), then walk or cycle whenever you can. Why drive to the gym, then run on a machine for 40 minutes? Simply biking or running a few kilometers to the grocery store and back would have achieved the same thing, while saving time, money, and fossil fuels.

More "radical" changes might even do more: inviting our aging parents to live with us might sound like a chore (and at times it certainly will be), but merging households can lower everyone's ecological footprint and provide a free source of childcare (on top of the more important benefit of tying a family together more closely).

One more tool to help in this process: turn off the TV. Advertising and shows have a direct influence over buying patterns (even if we like to believe we're immune to these persuasion tactics). The more television we watch, the more money we spend, even though we have less time to spend it! Spending leisure time in ways that reconnect us to friends and family rather than electronic gadgets is a key way to increase wellbeing while lowering consumption. Try it!

The Living Earth Ethical Principles: A Family for All Families

Erik Assadourian

The fifth in a series of essays on a system of ecological ethics for living sustainably. This and the remaining essays describe the 10 Living Earth Ethical Principles in detail. For references and additional discussion, visit www.livingearthethics.org.

A Family for All Families. *Until the human population returns to a number that the Earth can healthily maintain, all couples should moderate their reproductive fruitfulness. Those wanting larger families should consider adopting as many children as they have the longing and means to raise. All families should focus on teaching their children to tread as lightly on the Earth as possible.*

We need to shrink the human population as fast as humanely possible if we expect the majority of humans to live in anything but the most abject state of poverty on a disrupted planet with ecosystem services increasingly less able to sustain humanity. But a reduction of how much, exactly? The conservatively calculated Ecological Footprint indicator suggests that the Earth can sustain about 2.1 billion high-income individuals *or* 6.2 billion middle-income individuals *or* 13.6 billion low-income individuals (this assumes all of Earth's biocapacity is used for humans). Few will be willing to return to a state of poverty, nor should they, so really we need to aim for either a high-income ("consumer") population one-third of today's population (and no one else), or, more realistically, a larger but still much-reduced middle-income population—one that maintains a simple but satisfying way of life.

So, the Earth can sustain 6 billion mindful individuals or fewer consumers—yet we're en route to a total population of about 9 billion, including 2–4 billion consumers. That means our survival depends on an aggressive campaign to reduce population *and* consumption, starting right now. In part we can address this by offering opportunities to women to control their own reproductive choices. Many have written about this, including Worldwatch vice president Robert Engelman in his recent book *More: Population, Nature, and What Women Want.* In essence, he notes, "women aren't seeking more children, but more *for* their children." If we can provide education, support, and access to contraception, many women will choose to have fewer children.

Family planning efforts like the ones Engelman describes will help significantly, but they typically only focus on low and middle-income individuals. What about those women who are seeking more children in consumer countries, where each child has the impact of many children in low-income countries? The goal here also needs to be to encourage moderation in fruitfulness. Successful population management will most likely require not only good access to family planning but a new reproductive norm—that bearing one, or at most two, children is the very best choice—whether through ecological education efforts, social marketing campaigns, or religious teachings.

The trend seems to be going in the other direction, at least in the United States, where families are having two, three, four, even 18 children in the case of Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar, a reproductively energetic family prominently showcased on the Discovery Health Channel. Yet what few U.S. or other consumer-class citizens fully understand is that even their smaller families consume staggering amounts of resources and thus have a hugely disproportionate impact. The average U.S. family has 2.1 children, yet from a global resource perspective each of these children uses the resources of 9.4 children in a low-income country. In other words, the average U.S. family has about the equivalent of 20 children (while the Duggars have 169). So the problem is more to be found in rich countries than in poor countries where families are having just three to five children.

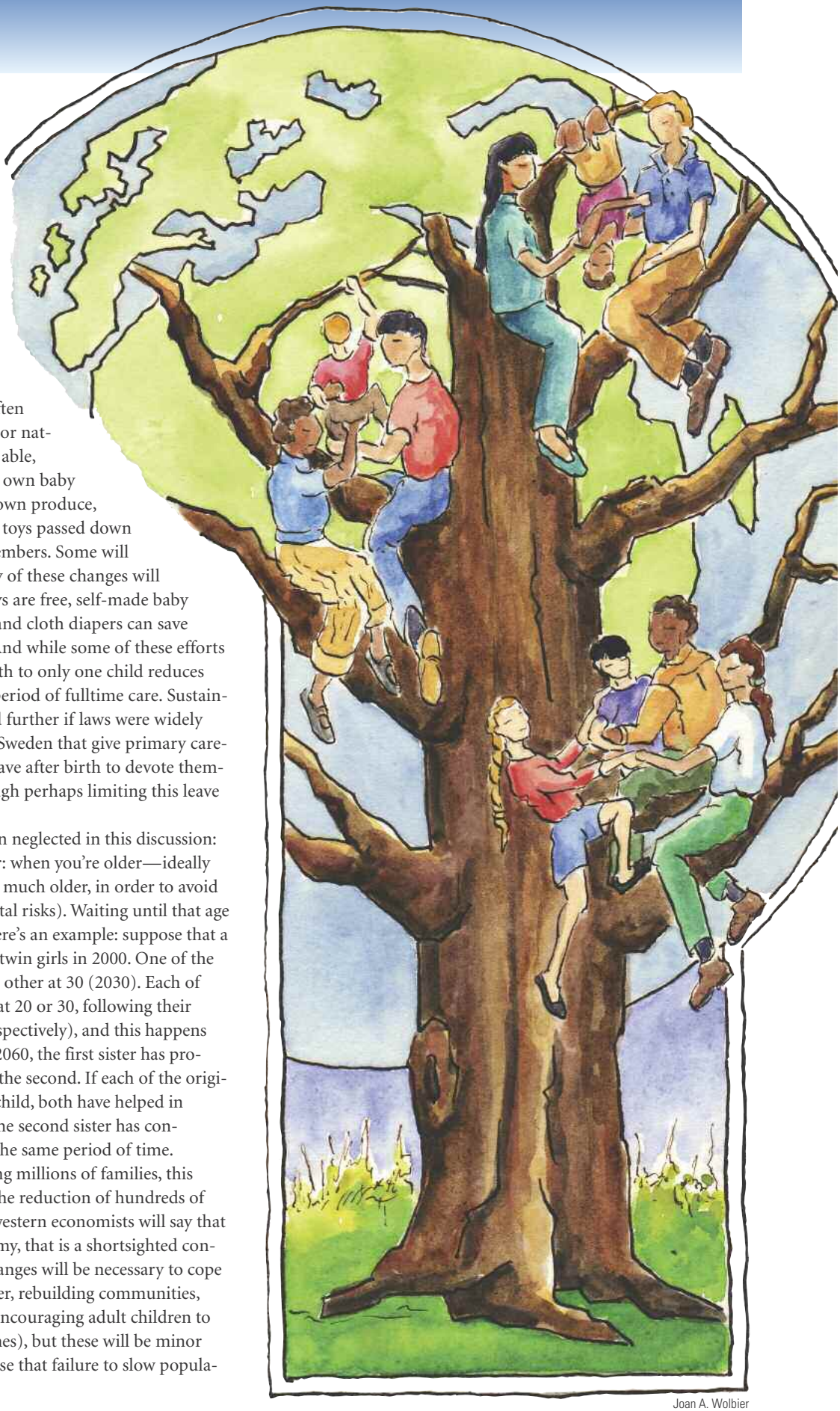
While few people will be willing to forego children altogether, anyone truly committed to global justice, the environment, sustainability, ethical living, stewardship of God's creation—however one personally frames today's converging social and ecological crises—must choose fewer children. A one-child goal, adopted as a personal choice and reinforced through tax incentives and the intentional cultivation of a new social norm, may be the best solution until population and consumption habits regain balance with the planet's longterm capacities.

But isn't it true that "only" children turn out to be spoiled brats? Writer Bill McKibben investigated this question in his book *Maybe One: A Case for Smaller Families* and found that single children were smarter, better motivated, and better adjusted than children with siblings. But if you don't want to believe the research or you just want a big family, simply adopt more children—ideally kids who would have grown up in consumer families whom you can raise sustainably instead.

Along with choosing the number of children, parents have

an important role to play both in the values they instill and how they raise their children. By teaching ecological values early—through the stories, lessons, and activities they share—parents can help their children internalize these values, slowing down acculturation into consumerism and helping to create a new and lasting cultural norm. Parents can raise their children sustainably often by choosing the most traditional or natural options: breastfeeding when able, using cloth diapers, making their own baby food from organic and locally grown produce, reusing second-hand clothes and toys passed down from older friends and family members. Some will think this is unrealistic, but many of these changes will save money (used clothes and toys are free, self-made baby foods are cheaper and healthier, and cloth diapers can save thousands of dollars per child). And while some of these efforts take time or add work, giving birth to only one child reduces the workload and the necessary period of fulltime care. Sustainable childcare could be promoted further if laws were widely adopted like those in Norway or Sweden that give primary caregivers 10 or 15 months of paid leave after birth to devote themselves fulltime to child care (though perhaps limiting this leave to just the first child).

Finally, one last question often neglected in this discussion: *When* to have a child? The answer: when you're older—ideally around the age of 30 (though not much older, in order to avoid increased health and developmental risks). Waiting until that age helps slow population growth. Here's an example: suppose that a 20-year-old woman gave birth to twin girls in 2000. One of the twins has a child at 20 (2020), the other at 30 (2030). Each of their children has one child each at 20 or 30, following their mothers' leads (2040 and 2060 respectively), and this happens once again in 2060 and 2090. By 2060, the first sister has produced one more generation than the second. If each of the original twins gives birth to only one child, both have helped in slowing population growth, but the second sister has contributed a third less growth over the same period of time. Assuming this is happening among millions of families, this demographic shift could lead to the reduction of hundreds of thousands of people. And while western economists will say that this will disrupt the global economy, that is a shortsighted concern. Yes, social and economic changes will be necessary to cope with the shift (such as retiring later, rebuilding communities, altering migration patterns, and encouraging adult children to bring parents back into their homes), but these will be minor compared to the ecological collapse that failure to slow population growth will bring.



Joan A. Wolbier

The Living Earth Ethical Principles: Life of Service and Prepare for a Changing World

Erik Assadourian

This is the sixth in a series of essays on a system of ecological ethics for living sustainably. This, and the previous and remaining essays, describe the 10 Living Earth Ethical Principles in detail. For references and additional discussion, visit www.livingearthethics.org.

Life of Service. *We are all part of a greater system, and the whole will only be healthy if its constituent parts are. Thus we should help those who are in need, especially in ways that provide a useful understanding of the world and our role in it—namely that we are dependent on and part of the Earth, and that only through sustaining this beautiful, fragile system will we lead meaningful and satisfying lives.*

With the current recession, economic insecurity is spiking worldwide. But even before this crisis, there were almost 2.6 billion people living on less than US$2 a day. Those of us with the means to help others less fortunate than we are have an obligation to do so. I won't justify that statement here; anyone who has seen others suffering and doesn't feel compassion to help will surely not be transformed by anything I might say in this essay. Nor will I go into the ample research showing that helping others often makes one happier and more fulfilled. But what I do hope to make clear is that some ways of helping are better than others.

There's an old Chinese proverb, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." Of course, that was before oceans were acidifying and fish threatened to become a rare luxury, but the broader point still rings true. Providing temporary aid that doesn't get to the root of the problem is futile.

Considering our rising population and declining ecological systems, it's imperative that we teach people to live simply. Not surprisingly, living simply will actually reduce economic worries, while increasing free time and reducing impact. Too often wealth is conflated with wellbeing, when in fact the two are only tangentially related. By recognizing that a good life depends not on wealth but on health, basic security, community, and purpose, lives can be very good while being simple and low-impact.

Charity, in theory, could be a perfect vehicle to teach this, but is rarely utilized in that way. Instead, most charitable operations provide a fish each day and do nothing to counteract the billions spent by advertisers to teach that unless you have not just swordfish on your plate but a yacht to catch them from, you're not going to be happy. Hence, people have trouble making ends meet, even when earning good salaries, because they've reached their credit-card limits and taken additional mortgages on their oversized homes—all for consumer goods like flat-screen televisions that increase their electricity costs and encourage them to sit still and watch more ads.

Imagine if charities were designed to reeducate "failed" consumers in simple living, ecological stewardship, and informed citizenship, so that when a new family walks into the food pantry

they receive food aid, but only after they agree to enroll in a course on financial planning, living simply, media analysis (to help defend against advertising messages), our ecological footprints, and so on. Or when a diabetic walks into a free clinic, he is treated—but only after agreeing to take a course on healthy cooking and to work several hours in the clinic's community garden. Yes, give fish to those in need, but teach them how to fish while they eat. Slowly but surely, by replacing the influences of the consumer society, people will learn how to live healthier and more sustainable lives, and most likely become happier in the process.

Of course, one problem here is that few such programs exist. For the social entrepreneurs reading this, consider starting one. For others, don't let the Perfect be the enemy of the Good. Search out a local urban garden or food security agency that at least understands these points and then push them to do more to address root causes.

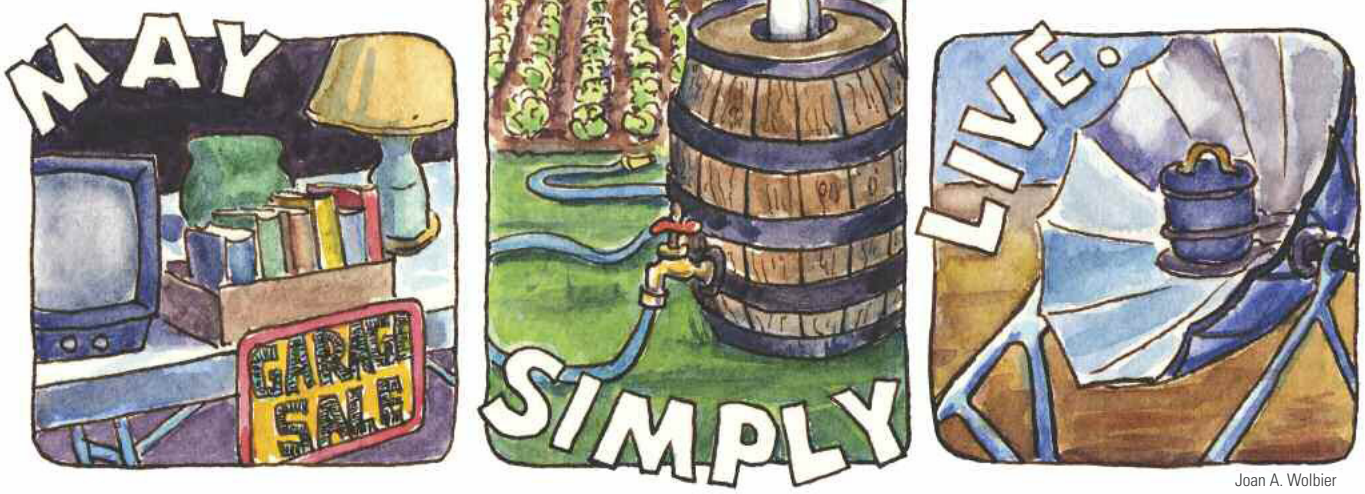
Ultimately, the best way to serve may be the least satisfying: lobbying to make major changes in the systems that prop up the consumer culture. But one can be an advocate for change while helping individuals directly. And every person awakened from the consumer dream can also start helping others, both directly and through advocating systemic changes.

Prepare for a Changing World. *Because of the rapid decline of the ecological systems on which human society depends, the probability is high that serious political, social, and economic disruptions will occur. We should prepare for this contingency, especially by cultivating one or more basic skills, such as food production, construction and repair, basic medicine, basic sanitation, and so on. Having these skills and teaching them to others will be vital in maintaining and rebuilding human civilization in the event that a collapse occurs.*

The danger with including a principle like this is that it sounds so "doom and gloom," so apocalyptic. But that isn't the point at all. This is more an example of hedging one's bets. To quote a cliché: "The only thing that's certain in life is change." If we're lucky, we'll be able to live our entire lives in a country that has access to hospitals, grocery stores, clean tap water and sanitation, and electricity. But there is no guarantee of this. Much of the infrastructure in the United States is old; we expect it will be repaired when it breaks, but if a major depression occurs it's possible that increasing numbers of Americans will no longer be able to count on access to basic services we see as natural. And in many other places these services are still just dreams. Almost a billion people are underfed, and lack of clean water and sanitation accounts for 10 percent of the global disease burden.

If we don't shift our economy away from being dependent on ever-increasing levels of consumption—an impossibility on a finite planet—Earth's ecological systems will fail and, with them, the economies of many countries. (And these will be deep failures that will make the current recession seem trivial.) Already the effects of climate change are being felt in some areas and are leading to less certainty in crop cycles, declining access to fresh water, and more erratic weather patterns. Not possessing a diverse set of skills or the knowledge to adapt to changing conditions will leave you at the mercy of others—but having a skill will enable you to adapt, and to barter your knowledge. And if these changes don't occur in your area or lifetime? Many of these skills can be fun to learn, so just consider them eccentric leisure activities and fodder for cocktail party banter.

Over the years a slew of books has offered survival tips in case a rapid economic or ecological decline makes our current way of life impossible. *The Post Petroleum Survival Guide and Cookbook* is a recent one that injects a sense of humor into what could be a dire discussion. (See www.livingearthethics.org for a list of many more.) This readable guide includes many important tidbits of information—from how to can food, grow sprouts, and do basic first aid to instructions on designing rainwater collectors, composting toilets, and solar ovens. It also provides references for those who want to specialize in a specific topic. Of course, it's impossible to learn all the skills, but learning a smattering of many or gaining expertise in one will be useful, in case all the skills in Excel, Word, and surfing the Web we've been honing over a decade become suddenly irrelevant.



Joan A. Wolbier

The Living Earth Ethical Principles: Shifting Perspective and Active Political Engagement

Erik Assadourian

This is the seventh in a series of essays on a system of ecological ethics for living sustainably. This, and the previous and remaining essays, describe the 10 Living Earth Ethical Principles in detail. For references and additional discussion, visit www.livingearthethics.org.

Shifting Perspective. *A satisfying life comes not through affluence, but through leading a life of meaning, being healthy, being economically secure, and sharing one's life with a supportive community. Far from helping in the pursuit of these goods, the consumer culture often hinders their attainment as well as leading to the exploitation of both the Earth and its people. Letting go of the consumer value system and shifting our focus to these more essential elements of human life will improve our own wellbeing, as well as that of the broader society and the Earth itself.*

According to a growing body of psychological research, we derive much of our "subjective wellbeing," or happiness, from good health, robust social networks, basic economic security, and a purposeful life. But the consumer dream often cuts us off from these roots of happiness.

For example, suburban living, through its design, promotes a sedentary lifestyle, longer commutes, car dependency, and separation from neighbors; it thereby also increases obesity, ill-health, and social isolation, and disrupts civic engagement. Or consider our diets: they consist more of processed foods than fresh, more meat than vegetables, and more calories than necessary (choices stimulated by advertisers). This promotes obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and other illnesses. And these all interact: after an hour's commute through frustrating traffic, who has the time or patience to make a home-cooked meal?

Ultimately, these and other choices are shaped by a cultural system in which the acquisition and use of goods and services has become "the surest perceived route to personal happiness, social status, and national success," as ecological economist Paul Ekins has put it.

But of course, this is not sustainable. Moreover, because the consumer dream is actually an impediment to our present and future wellbeing, we'll need to work intentionally to tune out the cultural pressures that encourage us to consume and instead orient ourselves toward the roots of wellbeing: purpose, security, community, health.

If you are religious, perhaps that is as simple as allowing your religious values to bubble up through the ever-present swamp of consumerism. Most established religions have clear admonitions against excessive materialism and direct life towards a set of higher ideals—charity, thrift, moral living, and, increasingly, sustainability. And many religions are starting to voice their recognition that caring for Creation is at the center of their doctrine. Amplify those voices with your own. For those without specific religious traditions to lean on, perhaps this value reorientation will come through centering their lives—like I am working to do—on ecological values. Instead of defining personal happiness through how much I consume, I now ask how much am I helping to redirect humanity toward a sustainable path, and how little direct ecological impact

both, Joan A. Wolbier

am I having. I do this at the store, at the office, at home, everywhere I can.

Of course, that doesn't completely eliminate the pressures to keep up with the latest exciting new products and experiences that the consumer culture offers. So I regularly remind myself that there are hundreds of millions who are just as deserving as me but barely have enough to eat (let alone access to consumer goods), so that while all the cultural forces around me encourage me to fly to exotic places, eat until I'm stuffed, buy something because I "deserve it," in reality I am *not* entitled to the consumer lifestyle—no matter how much advertisers, celebrities on TV, and friends and family members tell me otherwise. The only way I will be able to preserve a high-quality life for myself and family (and in my small way help free up resources to allow others to have a decent life while not destroying the longterm viability of the planet) will be to renounce my role as a consumer and help build a new culture reaffirming that wellbeing is not sold at the mall but can only be found through a healthy life, focused on family, friends, and service to the Earth.

Active Political Engagement. *We should be fully engaged citizens, advocating changes in the political systems over which we have influence, so that exploitation of the Earth and those without power will cease and so that fair and sustainable political systems will take root.*

Regardless of where we live, we must be politically engaged if we expect the human species to redirect its path from self-destructive to sustainable. Political systems (whether referring to the rules governing one's office place or the laws of nations) are a leading tool to orient how large groups of people live. Consciously shaping these rules with the Earth's natural limits in mind will be essential for putting humanity on a sustainable path.

Easy to say, hard to do. First, the rules of most systems are stacked against engagement—whether because of the extensive political influence of private interests that weakens the voice of the people, or (in some countries) the risk of death or imprisonment if one speaks up for change. Second, there are so many other, more satisfying ways to spend one's time: with friends, watching the latest movie, even volunteering at the local soup kitchen, which feels like a more tangible way to help people. Third, there are so many campaigns, so many crises to choose from—climate change, health care, education, gay rights, abortion, gun control, immigration, and on and on—that it's hard to know which to focus on.

Addressing the first obstacle may be as simple as just committing to being active, regardless of the barriers. Naturally, the barriers you face will shape *how* you get involved, but by staying silent, you're handing the victory to those who currently control the system—not likely leading proponents of sustainability.

Second, you can find a way to make political engagement satisfying. Recruit friends so that advocacy becomes a social event. Choose efforts that work with your personality—an introvert might choose to do the essential behind-the-scenes work instead of lobbying or protesting.

Third, seek a campaign that keeps you energized and excited, and that addresses root causes. Look at climate change, for example—we're trying to regulate emissions while ignoring their ultimate source, our consumer culture. As essential as it is to pass a carbon tax, passing subtler laws that address climate change and improve quality of life (while building up barriers against consumerism) is also important. A law that shortens the work week could not only improve quality of life for millions, but also create jobs while reducing pay to each employee. So some—with the new jobs—will have better access to the basics, while others will have smaller salaries, which would mean less spending on superfluous consumer goods that keep us distracted and pollute our environment.

So, get engaged, make it fun, and choose how you participate wisely. And when you start to run out of steam, just remember Horace Mann's words: "Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity."

The Living Earth Ethical Principles: Spreading Community

Erik Assadourian

This is the eighth and final essay in a series that describes a system of ecological ethics for living sustainably. For references, earlier essays, and additional discussion, visit www.livingearthethics.org.

Spreading Community. *To succeed we must educate others and encourage them to adopt an ecological way of being in the world. As the movement grows, outreach efforts should be established around the world, whether through social enterprises, meeting houses, social service providers, or other means. These efforts will help keep members engaged and energized, facilitate their efforts to do good works, and teach others to live by this philosophy.*

I have saved this principle, perhaps the most controversial, for last. I have laid out 10 organizing principles that might bring together those who understand that sustainability cannot be achieved by a watered-down climate change bill, carbon capture technologies, green jobs, or even vast areas of solar panels. Sustainability will only be achieved through a dramatic transformation of how we live, of our very cultures. And considering the level of capture of governments by special interests, the only way to do this may just be through individuals and communities actively spreading a new cultural norm—intentionally, proactively, and systematically. An ecological philosophy may be a useful organizing tool to drive this effort forward.

A few political and religious philosophies throughout history have spread globally and persisted over decades, centuries, or even millennia. In recent times we have Communism and consumerism, but more remarkable are the missionary religions: Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam, to name the largest three. These religious philosophies have oriented how people interpret the world for millennia, evolving with new geographies and eras.

How have they spread? I see three clusters of tactics worth discussing (a fourth being the sword, which, at least for this ecological philosophy, is not on the table). First, the use of marketing and franchises has been incredibly effective, particularly in spreading consumerism. Second, the tools of governments have worked in spreading Communism and consumerism, as well as religions (in times and places where the state has had an official religion). Third, and most importantly, "people power" has proven a potent method. Early Christianity spread via traveling believers preaching the lessons of Jesus and building communities of adherents from among those who embraced their message. Buddhism started in India and was then spread across Asia by the Buddha's disciples. Missionaries effectively spread philosophies as diverse as Mormonism, Bahá'í, and even the controversial Scientology. And the efforts weren't limited to preaching, but included the creation of communities, charity operations, fraternal organizations, hospitals, and schools—helping to improve people's lives and in turn helping to spread the philosophy.

Likewise, an ecological philosophy could be at the center of efforts to mobilize people to start social enterprises, community groups, social service providers, and so on. The philosophy would thereby spread, helping people to live healthier, more joyful lives that have a lower impact on the planet (and thus increase the odds that their children will also enjoy high-quality lives).

Some impressive tools of earlier eras could probably be applied today to spread an ecological philosophy. In the opening essay of this series, I described franchising different businesses, such as cafés, that could be exciting places to visit as well as means to start infecting people with a sustainability ethic, all while generating a revenue stream for the broader movement. Just as a seemingly basic concept like McDonald's could grow to 31,000 restaurants across 119 countries, so could other ideas be spread using the same basic formula—with the right branding, marketing, and mix of store elements, such as tasty food, convenience, and inducements like playgrounds or happy meals to drive children, and their parents, to the stores.

Another interesting means could be to mobilize youth. As an example, the Young Pioneers, the Communist equivalent of the Boy Scouts, is used to indoctrinate children in Communist ideology. In 2002, the Chinese version supposedly had 130 million members. Along with teaching the Communist ideology, the Pioneers, like the Boy Scouts, also teach good manners and basic skills, instill societal values, and build confidence. But it's the camaraderie, sense of purpose, and fun factor that make groups like these so successful (and in the process spread the philosophy).

Another tool is social service providers. As most religious, social, and political movements have learned, there are few better vehicles than schools, hospitals, clinics, and hunger alleviation programs to spread a philosophy. You can see this whether you look at Christianity, with its Catholic schools and hospitals, Islam with its madrasas, or more recently with the Black Panthers and its breakfast programs for school children. Or consider Hamas and Hezbollah, which are typically regarded as terrorist organizations in several countries but are leading providers of

Joan A. Wolbier

social services in Palestine and Lebanon.

Fraternal societies (or their co-ed equivalents) may also be effective tools. One example is the Catholic Knights of Columbus, which has 1.7 million members worldwide. Founded in 1882 to help provide support for recent Catholic immigrants to the United States (who often worked dangerous jobs and were excluded from labor unions), it provided life insurance to care for widows and orphans if members were killed. Today it underwrites more than US$70 billion in life insurance policies and continues to be active in charitable and political activities (for example, it was the largest financial supporter of Proposition 8, a so-far successful effort to ban same-sex marriage in California).

I use these examples intentionally. Many organizations espouse ideologies with arguably questionable goals—whether consumerism, Communism, militant liberation efforts, or opposing gay rights—yet employ effective vehicles. The interesting thing is that these vehicles have rarely been applied by environmentalists, who continue to stay mostly in the realm of political advocacy. (A recent exception is the creation of the Earth Scouts in the early 2000s, which could be an effective tool in spreading an ecological ethic to children.)

Ultimately, to embed sustainability into cultures, we'll need to do more than ask people to go hiking, sign a petition, and send an annual contribution to whichever organization they are "members" of (member in this context loosely meaning someone who makes an annual donation and receives the organization's newsletter). Instead, we'll need people to fully commit themselves to an ecological way of living (not necessarily this rudimentary attempt but *some* ecological philosophy). No philosophy—whether Christianity, consumerism, or sustainability—spreads without proactive and emphatic organizing.

I admit that all of this may sound a bit "out there." But why? To anyone not fully in denial, it's clear that we are making the Earth uninhabitable for humans with our current high-consumption way of life, and that the only way to prevent a massive die-off of humanity and many other species is to radically change how we live. This won't come through politics as usual, but will take real changes, including sacrifice. Who is willing to sacrifice in these days of immediate gratification? Only those devoted to a higher calling. Often that's God, but for some, it may be healing the Earth—helping to restore it to the equilibrium that it had been in for the last 100,000 years so that humanity can thrive long into the future. While this dedication will entail some sacrifice, it will also bring other joys that we've lost in our pursuit of more and more stuff: mislaid gems like community, time, security, peace of mind, and a higher sense of purpose.

▸ On "Ethics"

I am writing to object to a strategy recommended by Erik Assadourian under the banner "The Living Earth Ethical Principles" [January/February *World Watch*].

Where is the ethics in Mr. Assadourian's recommendation to employees of "foot dragging, an effective tactic to imperceptibly slow down, whether by moving just a bit more slowly, filing papers incorrectly, or entering data with a small error (just a few examples). If done right, managers won't detect it's intentional (or you!)"?

If Mr. Assadourian and, by association, the Worldwatch Institute, advocate subterfuge and deception, let it not be under the banner of "Ethical Principles." I am truly dismayed by the lack of personal integrity and ethics put forth by this staff member of Worldwatch.

Sara Bhakti
Kirkland, Washington, U.S.A.

▸ As a donor I hold your organization to high ethical standards. *World Watch* disappointed me in a part of "The Living Earth Ethical Principles: Just Livelihood and Mindful Consumption" by Erik Assadourian: "If done right, managers won't detect it's intentional (or you!) and the company's productivity will decline." One of the boldest signals of unethical and quite possibly illegal activities is when you are hiding what you are doing.

In addition, the reality is that this behavior is counterproductive to the stated goals of consumption reduction. The cost of achieving the company's mission will be increased, and cost equals consumption. Others' time will be wasted and wasted time is consumption. Innocent parties will be impacted because the perpetrator(s) have taken it upon themselves to be the prosecuting attorney, judge, and jury deciding that they know and understand everything and therefore it is appropriate to give their employer and the customer they are serving less than an honest and fair day's work.

We face real challenges restructuring our lifestyles and adapting to environmental realities. One of those challenges is to maintain a level of motivation through compensation and incentives that do not destroy our world. However, if everyone is going to live in the same tiny space, eating the same food, and wearing the same second-hand clothes, then who wants to be the manager who has to deal with childish staff who intentionally destroy what the group is trying to do? Behavior of this type is harmful to the process of moving the herd toward "mindful consumption."

Lionel Hastings
McGill, Nevada, U.S.A.

Author Erik Assadourian responds: *In his book* Rules for Radicals, *community organizer Saul Alinsky updated Machiavelli's statement, "The ends justify the means," with a question: "Does this* particular *end justify this* particular *means?" Of course, the ethics of any action depend not only on the action itself but the intention behind the action (i.e., the end).*

With footdragging (slowing down one's work), if the end in mind is to get back at a boss you don't like or because you don't enjoy your job anymore, as happens today with millions of Americans (according to the book I Quit But I Forgot to Tell You*), then the action of footdragging is unambiguously unethical. But if the end in mind*

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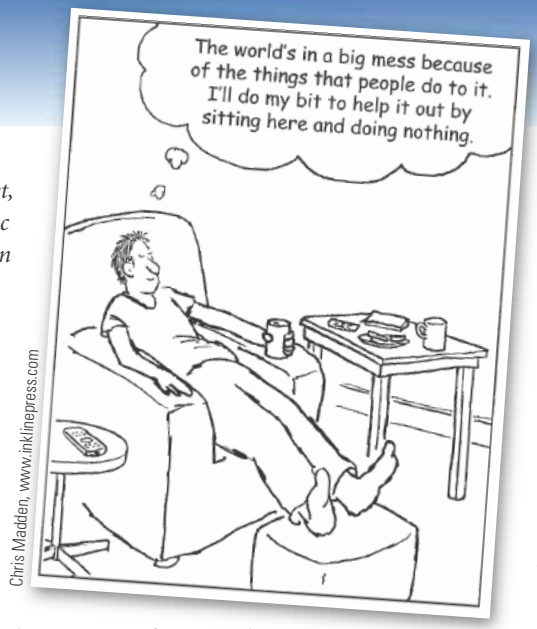

is to reduce the destruction of the planet, the poisoning of communities with toxic chemicals, or the profits of a corporation that benefits from the above (ethical ends), then footdragging in this case would be an ethical means.

This description of ethics is not as black and white as most people would like, but neither is the real world. So let me reiterate what I said in the essay: footdragging is not the first or best option. Of course one should try to change the behavior of the company (directly through discussion, or if that's impossible through whistleblowing), or if that doesn't work, find a new job. But if those are not options, then should one do one's job as effectively as possible when that means more efficiently sickening the planet or killing innocent people (even if that's just an unintended consequence of the business)? Or should one redefine one's job to do it more deliberately, more methodically (that is, more slowly), hoping in a small way to save lives and slow down the system while others build new responsible businesses that eventually replace their unsustainable competitors? Particularly in oppressive economic climates, where job opportunities are limited and overt dissent could lead to imprisonment or worse, quiet footdragging may be the only means of resistance available (as anthropologist James Scott notes in his book Weapons of the Weak*). To dismiss this tactic out of hand is unrealistic at best, unethical at worst.*

▸ Today it is obvious to all that our planet is suffering at a level that seriously puts all life, even human life, in danger. The world is coming to the end of an era at a speed that we are almost incapable of diverting. I do not wish to sound pessimistic, but I would like to emphasize the need to take corrective action. There is a great deal of international effort to overcome the problems that threaten our future—whether it will be sufficient is yet to be seen.

During the last decade I have been predominantly occupied with matters that worry most of us: achieving a sustainable future. As you well know, problems cover a wide range, including famine, poverty, energy, global warming, water shortages, biodiversity, pollution, soil fertility, erosion, and lately even security. The more I search for a solution, the more strongly I believe that it all comes down to a matter of building a different code of ethical behavior. Greed seems to be the biggest drive behind today's human activities. We urgently need to adopt a different lifestyle rather than a consumption-based lifestyle. As we consume the Earth's natural resources, we need to realize we consume our future lives too.

We are living in a world where 20 percent of the world population uses 80 percent of the natural resources—where the wealth of the world's three richest people exceeds the total wealth of 48 countries. As these numbers indicate, poverty does not seem to be an issue of insufficient resources, but more like a matter of sharing what is available.

Numbers are sufficient to indicate what an unbalanced world we are living in. It is hard to create a better world under these circumstances unless we find another way of living. We should allow others to live in order to make our way of life sustainable. By others I mean the whole of living things on which our lives depend. We should replace war with peace and change our behavior from cutthroat competition to an ethic of "care and share." We should ask ourselves, as Alan Durning so correctly spelled out; "How much is enough?" We should stop diluting people's minds, stop telling them lies through advertisements which push them to spend, spend, spend till they forget who they really are. We should stop molding minds that are only conditioned to consume and believe that the more they consume the happier they will be. We should tell them this is the biggest lie ever told on Earth and is soon to burst like a balloon. If we are to reshape our future, we need to look out for justice, love and care for each other, help and share with one another, see the wisdom in simplicity, and search for a fairer balance.

We must be able to see that eco-logy comes before eco-nomy, as logic comes before *nomos* (meaning rules in ancient Greek). Hence, I cannot help thinking how foolish we are in setting economic "growth" targets for each year that comes by. No one asks at what price that economic growth can be achieved. Should growth—sounds to me nearly like greed—be the correct aim in saving our suffering planet or is it the very reason for its suffering? And is it the only measure for humankind's well-being? Can growth achieve a sustainable future? Asking these questions of myself, I came to an answer which I tried to explain above. In a nutshell, we need a different kind of life ethics.

I do not wish to sound naïve and I do realize that real transformation can only start individually in each person's mind and soul. I strongly believe that one day conscience and wisdom will be in power. So, till then, we should keep showing the way out.

Hayrettin Karaca
Yalova, Turkey
(The writer is cofounder of TEMA, Turkey's largest environmental organization.)

▸ California: Efficient, but…

Energy efficiency is indeed the fastest, most cost-effective way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and combat global climate change. Your article ["Energy Efficiency, Rediscovered," January/February] points to California as "probably offer[ing] the most notable example" of significant success in harvesting this low-hanging fruit via utility programs and state appliance and building efficiency standards. The proof: "[California] has the lowest per-capita electricity use in the United States, and this has remained flat over the last 30 years…."