

Lilienthal, R. (2013). The Mother, the Mountain, and the Mature Self: Three Tests of Environmental and Engineering Ethics. *MindCosiliums*, 13(9), 20-37.

**The Mother, the Mountain, and the Mature Self:
Three Tests of Environmental and Engineering Ethics**

Robinson Lilienthal, PhD

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Abstract:

This essay is still very much a work in progress. It is exploratory and tentative, intended more to elicit discussion and reflection than to seek ready agreement. Three tests, the *Mother*; the *Mountain*, and the *Mature Self* Tests are proposed in order to help the stakeholder analysis in the field of environmental and engineering ethics. The *Mother Test* is predominately applicable to human-centered or anthropocentric concerns, the human risk analysis. The *Mountain Test* is intended to be mainly biocentric, or ecological. Its main purpose is to evaluate issues of environmental concern and/or preservation. Both of these positions need to be considered in determining our stance towards the host of complex social, economic and environmental dilemmas which presently face us as individuals and as an increasingly global human community. The *Mature Self Test* is needed because it provides the prerequisite for the other two, as well as their culmination.

Keywords: environmental ethics, engineering ethics, teaching ethics, biocentric ethics, environmental preservation, human risk analysis, environment in global community.

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“A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”
(Aldo Leopold)

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy has fallen upon hard times. Once a goddess ardently pursued by the ancients, later an honored handmaiden of theology, and in early modernity briefly crowned Queen of the Sciences, today wisdom wanders alone and in rags, a homeless orphan proffering half-penny matches in the dead of winter. What can philosophy possibly say to today's busy citizens and students, the present and future engineers and doctors and lawyers of America? Why should they turn to wisdom and to those who attempt to befriend her, when they are already overburdened trying to master the many complex technical skills of their eagerly sought-after careers? What can those few drawn to philosophy today say in her defense? Philosophy, many say, bakes no bread, builds no houses, and puts no clothes upon our backs. At best it is irrelevant, a mere visit to cloud cuckoo land, at worst it confuses the main issue by diverting us from our self-interest, from our own profit, indeed our own survival. Why scruple over imponderables, is not the race to the swift, and is not he who hesitates (to think) lost? Surely right and wrong, like beauty, taste and value, are in the eyes of the beholder, and does not conscience of us all make cowards? Indeed the Lord helps those who help themselves, while the devil takes the hindmost! And so, many ask, what good is wisdom and its pursuit? And look, they say, what else besides confusion and conflict has this busybody down on her luck Queen ever brought us? Has anyone ever returned from such studies of wisdom any better off than they were before? Expediency, short term goals, and ready profits have little commerce with the long-term view dedicated to the elusive, impractical pursuit of wisdom.

But perhaps its very poverty is now philosophy's greatest strength. Beholden to no party, free

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for the arduous seeking, she is also beyond all buying and selling. And as we crowd one upon the other into our ever more uninhabitable cities, escaping ever faster from our ever more polluted and destitute rural lands, we are slowly beginning to hear her plaintive cry of, "matches, matches, Heraclitian, Platonic, Kantian matches, matches for sale - nay matches for the asking!" And as the darkness deepens, our need for light, even from philosophy's briefly lit matches, may become our one necessity, our salvation. For as my former teacher, Hans Jonas, movingly put it so often, we need wisdom most when we believe in it least, when the awesome power in our hands most cries out for responsible application. Perhaps our first step towards wisdom consists in the Socratic avowal of its absence, of our painful urgent ignorance, which then will lead us to ask the perennial yet often forgotten questions, and perhaps even to a few answers. And if perhaps we do indeed succeed in lighting even one match, let us then rejoice, and commence to build a fire whereby we may warm ourselves for a while, and offer thanks to the goddess for her gracious gift.

In teaching applied social, engineering and environmental ethics to a wide variety of students since the early 1980's I have found it helpful to encourage myself and my students to reflect upon and apply three moral thought experiments, in seeking to determine the moral correctness and wisdom of a contemplated action, plan, artifact, decision, or moral dilemma. What I am referring to specifically are the long term implications of our present novel powers of technology as these are applied to ever wider fields of human activity and the ethical dilemmas involved in our present engineering and environmental practices. In other words the pressing need to resolve the many new conflicts that have and will continue to emerge between business, technology, the environment and personal as well as collective responsibility. We need to find a way to preserve industrial society but also at the same time to preserve nature. The challenge is to move from the position that nature is only for our human use to one which strikes a balance between the rightful claims of both humanity and nature. The three moral thought experiments, or three tests, I propose are an attempt to contribute to the establishment of such a balance. However, I should start with an essential warning: none of these three tests are designed to give us clear cut or absolute answers. However, if they are applied in good faith, they may light a path towards some "right" answers, especially if they are applied in conjunction. These three moral thought experiments, or models, are tools for our moral imagination, tools to help us overcome our proclivity to purely abstract intellectual thinking that does not take into account the real life consequences of our actions both on human and ecological levels.

The first new test, which I refer to as the *Mother Test*, is predominately applicable to human-

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centered or anthropocentric concerns. It deals with what engineers and social policy makers refer to as human risk analysis. The second new test I call the *Mountain Test*, and it is intended to be mainly biocentric, or ecological. Its main purpose is to evaluate issues of environmental concern and/or preservation. Obviously we need to consider both of these positions in determining our stance towards the host of complex social, economic and environmental dilemmas which presently face us as individuals and as an increasingly global human community. But why do we need a third test, which I call the *Mature Self Test*? This final test is needed because it provides, in a sense, the prerequisite for the other two, as well as their culmination. Only The Mature Self would care about balancing the broad anthropocentric and biocentric concerns of the first two tests. That is, only the Mature Self would apply the Mother and the Mountain Tests, for only the Mature Self would be able to hear the call of these two, and only the Mature Self would be motivated to adjudicate their competing claims. The Shallow Self would follow a narrow or shallow model; it would only concern itself with and act upon its own narrow and immediate self-interest.

At the end of this essay, I will briefly discuss the concept of the Ombudsman of the Earth, which I believe follows from the Mature Self and constitutes its existential practice. These three tests are intended to supplement and to some extent run parallel to the three major classical ethical theories of western culture, namely the Duty Theory of Kant, the Utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill, and the Virtue Theory of Aristotle. But why do we need any new ethical theories at all if we already possess these three classical ones? For one thing, all three, albeit for different reasons into which we will not go here, are exceedingly cumbersome, both in their theoretical density and in their application. But most importantly, all three of the classical ethical theories are anthropocentric and make no place for the consideration of animals, plants, or the land. In short, they do not provide the ethical tools needed for the present and future needs of a humanity facing an unprecedented series of global ecological crises.

THE MOTHER TEST

Is there any culture that does not place the concept of "mother" in the highest position? To whom do we owe more, than to our mothers? Throughout all human history it is the maternal love and care that most humans look back upon as the most significant and happiest memory of their early life. True, all maturity eventually requires separation from the mother and the assumption of self-sufficient

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autonomy. Nevertheless, behind all nostalgia, behind all family and national affiliations and adherence, is easily detected the primordial loyalty to our birth, to our first caretaker, to *she* who bore and nurtured us when utter dependence was yet our state. The universal fact of human natality, that as mortal beings, we are also born beings as well, the mystery of *telos* in mortality is echoed in the equally mysterious fact of genesis. Tossed into being, thrown into existence, all born of woman, all once weak and small, helpless creatures cared for and nursed. These ineluctable facts of the human condition, that we were born from our mother, and owe our existence more profoundly to her than to any other creature. It is like Hannah Arendt's (1958) concept of natality, and tying it to freedom to new beginnings, to the toss of the dice. None of us chose to be born, or to whom and when we were born. We all share this existential fragility, uncertainty, and unmerited fact of having come into existence.

The reason I use the mother in this test is because she is the prototype of the person we most highly value and depend upon in early life, and therefore the person we would be least willing to endanger.

Thinking of our mothers, or those we hold close to our heart, helps us to close the gap between our own self-interest and the interest of the public at large, which is a more or less faceless entity for us; this makes real our responsibility towards those who will use and depend upon the products we are developing, be it a car, a bridge, an airplane, or any of the other millions of inventions of our civilization. This test, of course, need not be limited to one's mother, but could just as well be one's child, spouse, sibling, or friend. I have tried to state the centrality of the role of the mother, or the Significant Other in fairly general terms, but in actual application I would suggest that one proceed from one's own personal experience, namely to conjure up in the moral imagination memories of one's direct experience of being mothered, or of mothering. The content of this imaginative recollection will vary immensely, but I suspect that the depth of the Mother Test as actually applied will be in direct proportion to the depth and vividness of such an actual recollection. Indeed, all three of these tests depend upon such an active effort of depth recollection, and require the full activation of the moral imagination. This is one of the significant ways in which they differ from classical or traditional ethical theory.

The Mother Test entails asking the following question: "Is this product or artifact, this car or bridge, which you are making, or are about to produce, safe enough to use by someone you deeply care about, such as your own mother?" Notice that the question is not "would you use it yourself," for we may each choose to take certain personal risks that it would be unethical to subject others to. If you

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have any doubt about the answer, about whether you would risk your mother, then you know that this artifact is not yet ready to go out into the world; for if you would not risk your own mother, then you should not risk anyone else's mother, either. The point is that when we attempt to assess the safety or risk factor of an action, decision, or artifact, we tend to conceptualize it in terms of abstract statistical variables as applied to the complex interaction of artifact, use and agent. These agents are seldom envisioned as personally of ultimate value, but rather almost as robots, mechanical average users, people, them, those, but never those near and dear to us. Entering someone of ultimate value to ourselves into the equation changes it from an abstract mechanical calculation into a deeply existential concern, one that will call forth our best and most careful efforts.

And, since all persons are of ultimate value to someone, even if only to themselves, we should refrain from doing anything that we would be unwilling to do to those we ourselves value ultimately. Act as if every person affected by your artifact were your own mother, or child, sibling or spouse; design, build, plan, act as if your significant other were the end user, for indeed every end user of your artifact is in fact someone else's significant other, their sibling, child, spouse, mother, friend. Each of us, all of us persons, are equally precious and dear to themselves, to others. We do not really know in fact who the end users will be!

The Mother Test is related to the Duty Theory of Kant in a number of ways. First, it places absolute value on persons, and like Kant enjoins us to treat persons as ends in themselves, and never merely as a means to our own ends. And, second, through the realization that all persons are in fact, or potentially, someone's significant other, it comes close to mirroring the categorical imperative, but in reverse. Kant asks us if we would be able to universalize the maximum of our actions, i.e., to ask whether we could consistently advocate universal lying or theft, and to refrain from those actions which we could not so universalize because were we to do so the premise of our action would self-destruct. That is, if everyone lied when it was to their advantage to do so, then lying would become an impossible strategy, since no one would any longer believe what anyone else said, since all persons would know that all other persons were or could be lying. Here, in the Mother Test. the movement of analysis would go in the opposite direction, starting from the mother, outward to embrace all other persons.

The Mother Test is anthropocentric, for it places maximum value on human welfare, concerns, and life. But, since it also, in its second move, encourages us to expand the boundaries of our concern, it begins to move closer to a more biocentric ethics. This has its analog in human development. For a

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young child, the mother is the most important person in its life. Later the network expands to include the father, siblings, peers, spouses, children and the community at large. Finally, and hopefully, it later broadens to include all humankind, transcending the borders of ethnicity, language, religion and culture. The conventional notion of a mature self reaches its apex at the inclusion of all human beings. The Mother Test protects the rights of human beings to have their welfare taken into serious consideration whenever an artifact is being engineered in any way whatsoever, whether it is being designed, built, produced, used, repaired, thrown out, or dismantled. At every juncture, an affirmative answer to the question, “Is this artifact, action, plan, etc., safe enough, right enough, good enough for my mother?” is required before one may morally proceed.

Here the absence of a no does not imply a yes, for one’s mother is precisely that person whom one would not subject to risk or hazard, and would therefore compel us to count doubt as a no, and only an unequivocal yes as sufficient grounds to presume that the risk is one that we would be willing to subject our mother to. That is, if we are uncertain that it is safe enough for our mothers, then it is not yet safe enough. What does that entail as to risk assessment? Could we be prohibited from all action, because all action involves risk? Could any artifact ever be made that would fit such a strict standard? How safe does something have to be before it is safe enough for your mother? Fool proof? The current rule of reasonable safety or risk, I think, is too low, but is not the Mother Test too high? Yes, it is higher, and intentionally so, because of the altered nature of the power and impact of our artifacts: since these have changed, increased care is now required. The greater the power and impact, the greater the responsibility. This is a universal moral axiom, and one easy to overlook when applied to the subtle incremental power shifts in the normal development of technology, indeed, even when applied to quantum technological leaps, the task of moral judgment is frequently either irrelevant, or too late. Even so, we must strive to reach this goal, and when we have clearly not met it, and failed, and then we must act as promptly as possible to rectify, recall, regulate, correct, our mistakes, to minimize all possible further harm. The heuristics of fear should reign here, that something is unsafe until it has been shown to be safe — a devil’s advocate of the worst-case scenarios.

A couple of examples might make the application of the Mother Test clearer. The Ford Pinto, with its exploding gas tank, was produced and sold to the unsuspecting public in spite of this fact. I doubt very much that any one within the Ford Co. who knew of the Pinto’s problem owned a Pinto, or gave one to their family and friends. Willing to subject anonymous others to a danger they knew of, would they have been willing to allow their mothers to drive one? Since clearly the answer is no, their

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action violated the Mother Test, and indeed, perhaps had they thought to apply it, their actions might well have been different.

When Roger Boisjoly tried to convince Morton Thiokol and NASA to postpone the Challenger Shuttle launch, clearly no one involved asked themselves the Mother question — namely, if their mother were scheduled to fly next day would they still think that the pressure to launch outweighed the risk of an O-ring not seated properly due to the extreme cold? Clearly, neither money nor time can trump the Mother. At an absolute minimum, the artifacts we put out into the world should be essentially safe, so designed, tested, redesigned and retested so that their safety should not even be in question. And certainly, if a hazard is known to exist, then either the artifact should be withheld, recalled, redesigned, or properly labeled. A clear-cut distinction between experimentation and everyday use must be an inviolable rule.

The Mother Test helps to keep us in touch with reality, with the real people who must trust our artifacts, and who place their lives in our hands and our judgments. And the scope of our responsibility does not end with safety. It must also include the social, economic and political consequences of the artifact.

But the scope of our novel powers and hence novel responsibilities hardly comes to an end with caring for those we love, and for those who will use what we create. If the horizon of our duty is equal to the reach of our power, then our duty must now extend beyond the anthropocentric, for our powers now encompass the entire earth, and all living and non-living things upon it. Whether we choose to take nature into account simply for our own long term interests, or whether we come to believe that nature is itself a value, a carrier of rights, a good unto itself quite apart from human need or greed, in either case, one thing is now quite clear, if we do not begin to include nature, to take it into our care, we will put at fundamental risk both nature and ourselves. We must therefore now ask, not only, "is this action good for my mother?" and perhaps even more urgently, "is it also good for the mountain, which is for nature?"

THE MOUNTAIN TEST

Following the lead of Aldo Leopold, we need to redefine the concept of the ethical to include the non-human or biotic community as well. The unique task for the present and the foreseeable future is not that of defending the absolute value of human beings, but rather of finding a way to perceive and

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accept and act upon the value of the entire biotic community. In some sense, everyone agrees on the value of human life, if indeed only their own. What is most urgently needed now is to develop, articulate and practice a biocentric ethics which will reconcile the competing claims of both human civilization and nature. I suggest that the *Mountain Test* may be useful in such a quest. The mountain is where earth and sky meet and touch, the father of clouds and rain, snow and ice, streams and rivers; from the melting snows of earth's mountains comes much of earth's waters, the gift of life, as spring melts ice to frosty water. Mountains are the home and protectors of the wild, of nature's untrammelled dominion. They are vantage points from which we may see around us, from which the wide encircling horizon, seldom seen whole, is suddenly and dramatically revealed.

In modern Western tradition, the cult of the mountain begins surprisingly late. Historians tell us that the first text in which an author describes climbing a mountain for purely esthetic reasons is Petrarca's letter on The Ascent of Mont Ventoux in April of 1336: "Today I ascended the highest mountain in this region...Nothing but the desire to see its conspicuous height was the reason for this undertaking" (Petrarca, 1336/1948, pp.36-46). This is the first literary example of someone valuing nature and a mountain for its own sake. Petrarch did not climb it to get to the other side, nor to survey it, nor like Hannibal to bring his army and elephants to bear upon a back-entry attack on the city of Rome, nor to stake his claim to gold or timber or some other narrow economic or personal advantage--but as an end in and of itself. Thus Petrarch provides us with an example of a human being intentionally relativizing himself by placing his own existence into the larger context of wild nature. From Petrarch to the Romantics, from Henry David Thoreau to John Muir and Aldo Leopold, the tradition of seeking to de-center the self through the act of climbing, and thereby finding their true self in relation to the embracing horizon of nature, has continued. Furthermore, the image and symbolism of the mountain is a well-nigh universal one. Think of the Ziggurats of Babylon, the Pyramids of Egypt, the visions of Moses and Mohammed, the Tao of Lao-Tzu; from Machu Pichu to the earthen mounds of the North American Plains Indians, from Black Elk to Martin Luther King, everywhere the peoples of the world have revered, respected and treated with awe the terrestrial and majestic highest of mountain peaks, and sought them out as special, often holy places. To see the horizon unencumbered, to gain a vision of the distant future, to gain perspective on oneself and the world, this has always been the goal of those who seek out the tops of mountains. In short, the mountaintop experience is the analog to the search for wisdom, for insight, for a more encompassing knowledge and truth.

In his deceptively simple, but profound and now classic book, *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo

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Leopold (1949) describes an early experience of shooting an old female wolf and her yearling pups, and then seeing the fierce green fire dying in her eyes. Only later did he begin to realize that by eliminating the deer's major natural predator, far from ensuring the continuation of herds of healthy deer, such a policy leads inevitably to the initial overpopulation of the deer, and then to their slow demise. Allowed to reproduce unchecked, the deer begin to overgraze, they wander farther, reach higher, dig deeper. They strip the mountainsides as bare as they strip the bark of saplings and bushes. Wooded meadows become gullies as rains erode the denuded mountain - sides, streams run brown with precious soil, and run into rivers heavy with silt. The deer weaken, sicken and die in the freezing snows of winter. Some will no doubt survive, but the mountain will not. And that is why the mountain knows that where there are deer there must also be wolves. Thus, as much as the deer and the herder may fear the nighttime howls of wolves, the mountain fears their total absence even more, and with far more reason Aldo Leopold calls this chapter "Thinking like a Mountain." I suggest that learning to think like a mountain might constitute a second ethical thought experiment. *The Mountain Test*, then, would ask us to learn to think like a mountain, to ask ourselves what the mountain would think of our actions, our plans, our contemplated acts of human intervention. This test enjoins us to consider the long-term welfare of all members of a biotic community. This test, in other words, places its values not in any one privileged member of the community, but in the healthy functioning of the whole community. The mountain has one thing we sorely lack: it has time, such stretches of time that we can barely encompass. We creatures of a day are like sunlight fading in the grass, while the mountain and its streams and rivers, the seas and sands, are the earth's primordial foundations. We are not owners here, nor lords and ladies; rather, we are at best honored guests hosted by the generosity of earth's household; while at worst, we are looting soldiers, ignorantly despoiling what we do not understand, and rapaciously seeking to master what we can never hold.

In the final chapter of *A Sand County Almanac*, "The Land Ethic," Aldo Leopold (1949) states what has become his most famous and often quoted dictum: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (pp.224-225). This sentence is the closest that Leopold comes to compressing his ethics of ecology, or perhaps better, ecological ethics, into one principle, the integrity and stability and beauty of the biotic community. These famous two sentences, however, are far from being self-explanatory; indeed, all of *Sand County* could be said to stand behind them. Perhaps if we briefly consider the three crucial words: integrity, stability, and beauty, we may get a glimpse of what Leopold meant by his radical dictum.

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Integrity means wholeness and honesty. It refers to the fact that a biotic community is composed of many members, each living in its own niche or what Leopold calls "The Land Pyramid." By stability, Leopold means that the biotic community's balance is an essentially stable one, though of course clearly in flux, for as the various, members contend, they nevertheless, like the deer and the wolves, remain in essential harmony. Most elusive, perhaps, especially for those seeking to banish all anthropocentrism from their conception of nature, is the third and final term of Leopold, namely beauty. Is it really the case, as we are so often told that beauty is merely in the eyes of the beholder, ecologically speaking? Leopold clearly does not think so, and neither does John Muir, nor Henry David Thoreau. Beauty is an attribute of every healthy biotic community, both in its balance and harmony, and in its integrity. Indeed, while these three ideas are distinct, they are mutually inclusive, and the absence of any one of them compromises the other two.

Perhaps this dictum is the mountain's own thinking, and what we too would come to think, if we ever learned to think like a mountain. Surely the mountain would consider the extermination of any species, the pollution of any river, the destruction of any ecosystem, the clear-cutting of any forest, to be wrong. And just as clearly, the mountain would consider the preservation of any of these, or the attempt to do so, to be right. Thus, the Endangered Species Act, the Super Fund to clean up toxic dumps, recycling of our waste and garbage, conservation of earth's household resources, the use of alternative energy sources, the permanent setting aside of wilderness and breeding grounds, the reduction of all land, air and water pollutants, and the development of earth-friendly technologies would all find support from the Mountain. And likewise, the Mountain would unequivocally support such organizations as Green Peace, Friends of the Earth, Earth First!, the Sierra Club, and all such groups seeking to protect nature from its despoilers.

Learning to think like a mountain means facing up to the facts of limitation and finitude; learning to think that human beings are simply one member of the biotic community, and not its lords and masters. For most of their history, human beings have been forced to struggle against nature, to wrest food and shelter from the raw material of nature into which it was pitilessly cast. During the past several centuries, with the sudden advent of modern science and technology, that seemingly unalterable fact of the human condition has utterly changed. We have turned the tables, we have wrested from nature its secrets, and turned them to our advantage. Now it is nature which lies at our mercy, and we who hold its fate in our hands. Our will and intellect, our greed and ingenuity, our ambition and hubris, have finally gotten the upper hand over Mother Nature, and we have engaged in an orgy of plunder and

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exploitation beyond even the wildest dreams of previous visionaries and Utopians. The earth now lies before us as a storehouse from which we may presumably take what we will, as fast as we wish, and seemingly without limit. Our numbers have reached beyond counting, and our use of earth's household has grown beyond all awareness of limits.

The Mountain Test in some respects mirrors the Utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill, which considers not the good of one person, or member, but rather considers the greatest happiness of the greatest number. But, unlike Mill, the Mountain Test is not anthropocentric, nor is it majoritarian, nor is it based on a form of hedonism, upon the relative degrees of pleasure or pain. Yet, in its emphasis upon community, it is similar to Mill.

The mountaintop experience leads us to acquire a vision far beyond our own narrow and individual intentions. In the attempt to look at a problem from the point of view of a mountaintop experience, we seek to develop an all-encompassing view, both with respect to time, the long-range consequences of our work, the coming together of many ecological and human interactions, and the often conflicting interests they represent.

The Mountain Test protects the earth, the water and land and air, the life forms and biodiversity, the integrity and balance and beauty of the biotic community. It asks, what would the Mountain say to our artifact, plan, design, would it approve, be indifferent, or say no? But, if the Mother Test is a useful exercise to consider the human good, and the Mountain Test helps us to consider the deep needs of the natural world, to what can we appeal if and when these two come into conflict? To be forced to choose between the Mother and the Mountain, between the seemingly endless demands of modern industrial civilization and the fundamental ecological requirements of earth's natural economics, is indeed to be cast into a fundamental tragic dilemma. To balance and adjudicate these two competing claims is now our permanent condition.

THE MATURE SELF

Before we ask how the *Mature Self* emerges, or how it would act, let us begin by briefly asking what it is. What is the Mature Self? The Mature Self is a self that has grown up, that has come to see its mature responsibilities and is grappling with them. The Mature Self has applied the Mother Test, and has come to see that as second nature, namely to use it as a guide for its actions. Second, its use of the Mother Test has broadened sufficiently to become universal, encompassing all human beings on the

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planet, now, then, and in the future. The Mature Self has emerged from its ethnocentric narcissistic cocoon, and come to realize that we all have the same basic interests, rights, needs, and fears.

For the Mature Self Test I draw upon two very disparate sources, first from Arne Naess, the Norwegian philosopher and founder of "deep ecology," and his notion of self-realization. And second, from the psychological and moral developmental theories of such psychologists as Piaget, Erickson, and Kohlberg.

The point of conjunction is the transcending of the petty or shallow self to the achievement of a self in relation to others, to the place where the horizon of concern and identification embraces the world itself, where self and field are seen and experienced as being co-extensive and mutually interdependent. While some may judge this to be an illusory, mystical idea, for those who have reached this point, this stage of development, it is as clear and self-evident as the love of a mother for her child, or of a child for its parents. The Mature Self is one that has gone from the narrow identification of the self with its immediate antecedents and surroundings, from the comfortable given of the known and tried, to the wider sense of dependency and gratitude for the full horizon of *being itself*. The mature self knows that all things are connected, that the threads of being tie all that is into one unshakable heart of being, and that all things great and small are part of the complex dialectic of life. From the tiger to the rose, from the waves to the stars, from the oak to the firefly, from the amoeba to the whale, the cornucopia of life holds all within its calm embrace.

But how can this notion of a fully realized or Mature Self function as an ethical test or moral thought experiment? I would suggest that this test might be applied in two ways. First, we can project ourselves into the future, and then look back upon the present ethical question, and there, from that presumably more mature vantage point, ask ourselves, how might this decision look to us ten years from now? In other words, to posit precisely the Mature Self as attained in the future and to then call it to our aid in the present. Surely we have all had the experience of looking back and realizing that a former action or decision of ours was foolish, or mistaken, or at least unwise, and have come to regret it, really wished that we had then possessed the wisdom we only now hold in our grasp. But, suppose that this Mature Self is not so much a future attainment as a potential ever-present, and that at every moment we could tap into its wisdom?

The second version of the Mature Self Test is to reflect upon our decision as deeply as we can, deeper than our merely calculating reason can take us, to ask what does our moral conscience really say to us, deep down, and listen to it. For if we do not already have within us this germ of moral sentiment,

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we shall most likely never find it elsewhere. Having embraced the Mother Test, and having been to the top of the mountain, the mature self can now begin to weigh and balance these two considerations.

Yes, but how does the Mature Self go about doing this? Let us take as an example the case of the damming of the Hetch Hetchy valley, the first truly national environmental controversy in the United States. At the turn of the century, after its devastating earthquake and fire, San Francisco wanted to assure a steady and abundant supply of fresh water, both in the event of future catastrophes and to ensure its growth into a major west coast metropolis. The city political leaders and businessmen set their sights on tapping the Hetch Hetchy Valley, even though the valley was part of Yosemite National Park. They spent enormous amounts of time and money surveying the route, buying right-of-ways, and of course lobbying in Sacramento and Washington D. C. Other sources of water were available, but less convenient, and after all their investment, more expensive. The great champion of mountains and wilderness, John Muir, and the articulate spokesman for wise use land management, Gifford Pinchot, and their respective supporters, battled for nearly a decade, until finally President Wilson signed the bill, passed after bitter debate in Congress. Hetch Hetchy was dammed, and San Francisco got its water. The Mountain clearly lost, and the Mother won. However, never again was a federally protected park ever proposed to be reopened for commercial use. So, while Pinchot won the battle, Muir won that war.

Now, how would the Mature Self have resolved this conflict? Yes the Mother needs water, and if the choice were between her death, and the Mountain, we could surely be forgiven if we chose her. If filling in the Grand Canyon would save the lives of thousands of human beings, who would presume to speak up for the Grand Canyon? When push comes to shove, we are, after all, species-protective, anthropocentric. However, the goal of the Mature Self is to seek to avoid such do-or-die confrontations. San Francisco did not need the water of the Hetch Hetchy as a condition of its survival. Its citizens would not have died of thirst. At worst, San Francisco would have grown more slowly, which might not have been such a bad thing. For that matter, all of southern California is an artificial creation, a semi-desert masquerading as Miami, due entirely to its economic and political ability to divert immense amounts of water from elsewhere, thereby turning its true arid condition into an illusory aquatic abundance.

The Mature Self has been to the mountaintop, it has begun to learn to think like a mountain; it has seen acid rain turn lakes into pools of green algae, and acres of green firs turn brown; it has seen the clear cutting of the loggers, and the strip mining scars on the hillsides; it has seen the wolf and

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coyote and grizzly and bobcat and buffalo hunted to near extinction; it has seen the mountain waters polluted, dammed and diverted. And all in the name of progress, humanity, the comfort of the Mother! After centuries of opting for civilization, of giving privilege to the human interests, of laying waste to the wilderness, the Mature Self knows that it is now time to call a halt, to become an advocate of the Mountain, and engage in an affirmative action for nature. The tables have turned. Humanity now has nature on the run; after millennia of brute struggle for mere survival, we have won, and now we do not know where and how to stop. We have seen nature as neutral, as a free resource, taking no account of the cost of our actions toward it. In the Mature Self's balancing of Mountain and Mother, the true cost to the Mountain of human civilization must now finally be calculated. As long as we were weak, and few, our actions on the mountain mattered little, but now that we have become strong, and many, our actions carry the weight of consequences that we must become aware of and responsible for.

If we become faithful to the earth, and remain so, then we can also remain faithful to the Mother and the Mountain, for the earth is the condition of both earth, as sky and water, moon and sea gulls, earth embracing both, and all.

John Muir was right. The mountain was right. Hetch Hetchy should not have been dammed and its waters taken out of Yosemite National Park and diverted to San Francisco.

In the Mature Self we can also see an image of Aristotle's virtuous man, or person, of the self as guided by a grasp of its own strengths and weaknesses, aware of its *telos*, and guided by an image of virtue personified in a great souled person, aided by the search for the golden mean of virtue narrowly poised between the two extremes of vice. While such an ideal, as exemplified in Buddha, or Ghandi, or Jesus, or in the patron saint of ecology, St. Francis of Assisi, may seem too heroic, it is through the use of such models that we can summon inspiration and encouragement.

OMBUDSMAN FOR THE EARTH

In conclusion, I would like to propose a new pedagogical and existential model of being in the world, a new image of the human and environmental relationship that follows directly from the three exercises or ethical thought experiments we have considered above. This new image of human being in the world draws upon two sources, first to adapt to a new use the Scandinavian innovation of the Ombudsman, created to cut through some of the awful red tape of the state bureaucracy.

The office of the Ombudsman enables a citizen to appeal to one person charged with guiding

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others through the maze of the modern welfare state, someone who took into their care the welfare of an aggrieved and or injured party. I suggest that this notion of Ombudsman might be adapted to address our current environmental concerns. And second, I propose that we draw upon Martin Heidegger's (1986) notion of care, or in German, *sorge*, namely that special human capacity of concern and attention to the needs of other beings, especially those most vulnerable to state power and indifference. Based upon these two concerns, I propose that each citizen take upon himself/herself the care of the planet as a body, and more specifically, of a part or piece of it.

Every citizen must be educated to perform this role. I would suggest that the Earth Ombudsman is a natural development of the mature self. For someone who has attained the mature ecological self has also attained the level of Earth Ombudsman, or steward, in a way analogous to the philanthropy and charity of the traditional socially mature self. In both cases the Mature Self would not be doing this as part of a narrow or even broad self-interest, any more than one has nothing tangible to gain from feeding the hungry. Rather, the ecologically Mature Self would assume the task of Earth Ombudsmanship because of its larger recognition of being *part of the community of the earth*.

Whether or not any of these proffered matches have yet, or ever will burst into flame depends on how each of them is applied. While philosophy may have fallen upon hard times, its deepest tasks and responsibilities may well be ahead of it—a whole horizon of responsibilities which we cannot meet without a deeper wisdom than we have yet shown. And probably the greatest challenge facing the Mature Ecological Self will be the requirement of balancing the demands of the Mother, that is of human civilization, on the one hand, and the demands of the Mountain, namely the natural environment, on the other. We cannot keep the Mother without the Mountain. We need nature to survive. And without the Mother, the Mountain will become impoverished. Without humans, nature would lose the unique perception of its glory. The smiles of the birch, the grandeur of the mountains, the songs of the brook need human eyes and ears attuned to their beauty as much as we need earth, air, fire and water for our own survival.

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I look forward to all responses, and future discussions, asking only that any use made of this material receive prior authorial permission, and/or acknowledgment. Feel free to contact me at:

Robinson Lilienthal, PhD

140 East 17th St., 2E; New York, N.Y. 10003

Phone: 646-221-3349

Email: Robinson.Lilienthal2009@gmail.com

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