

The Moral Power of the World Conservation Movement to Engage Economic Globalization

Ron Engel

Foreword: Pushing the “Yes” button for Bob Linn

LATE ON THE EVENING OF NOVEMBER 24, 2004, THE RESOLUTION ON THE EARTH CHARTER finally reached the floor of the World Conservation Congress at Bangkok. The resolution called for the World Conservation Union to not only endorse the Earth Charter but “recognize it as an ethical guide for IUCN policy.” Years of work to bring ethics into the mainstream of the international environmental movement were nearing fruition. As a delegate of the George Wright Society, a organizational member of IUCN, I had the privilege to vote. In the moments that passed waiting for the vote to be taken a good part of my life was replayed. Right there at the center of it, like some guardian angel, was Bob Linn.

I first met Bob in June 1960 when stationed with my family on Mott Island en route to a seasonal ranger assignment on Amygdaloid Island, Isle Royale National Park. I remember the delight of my two-year-old son when he heard Bob play his marimba. As far as I could see, as park naturalist, Bob had the best job in the world—and he did not demur. A few years later, we were both to lament our exile in Washington, D.C. After my wife, Joan, and I built a cabin at the tip of Michigan’s Keweenaw Peninsula, as close as we could get to Isle Royale, and Bob had retired from the Park Service and was building the George Wright Society in Hancock, we shared leisurely walks and dinners and talked about everything under the Heavens—family to wolves to politics to evolution to God.

In the course of one of these conversations in 1983, Bob suggested I read an essay in *The George Wright Forum* on biosphere reserves. It took one afternoon for me to decide to devote an upcoming sabbatical to them. Bob gave me personal introductions—Bill Gregg, Ted Sudia, Tommy Gilbert, Jane Robertson, among others—and so sent Joan and me off on a journey that led, step by step, person by person, place by place, into the *terra incognita* of the international conservation movement. Eventually I landed on the doorstep of IUCN in Gland, Switzerland, and the office of Jeff McNeely, who invited me to form an “ethics working group.” IUCN, an acronym for International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (now known as IUCN–The World Conservation Union), is a supra-organization of some 1,000 governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Founded in 1948 to promote international cooperation on behalf of science-based conservation, it is the only organization with “observer” status in the United Nations General Assembly, providing expertise on the conservation of nature.

Over the following decade the IUCN Ethics Working Group grew into a network of per-

sons from sixty nations and helped pave the way for the writing of the Earth Charter in the late 1990s—the most comprehensive declaration of values and principles for a just, sustainable, and peaceful world the international community has yet composed (see www.earth-charter.org).

Bob was there the whole time. He published our first papers in the *Forum*. He worked in Ted Sudia's Institute for Domestic Tranquility to give these ideals roots in the American polity. And he was always there to listen and advise on those long summer evenings on the Keweenaw.

Now it is the evening of November 24, 2004, in the Queen Sirikit National Convention Hall in Bangkok. A representative of the American government asks to be recognized and states her judgment that the Earth Charter resolution ought to be defeated. A delegate from the Netherlands voices strong support. We are asked to vote. I push the green "yes" button in front of me—*this is for Bob Linn*. We wait for the tally of the hundreds of delegates to be displayed on the great screen in front of us. The motion passes, overwhelmingly, with a significant majority of both government and nongovernmental members. Applause sweeps across the hall. Another world *is* possible!

The following essay, which I delivered as a keynote address at the closing plenary on "Strengthening Corporate Social Responsibility, Law and Policy" at the Congress Forum, is dedicated to the life and ideals of Robert Linn.

I want to thank Jeff McNeely, IUCN chief scientist, Josh Bishop, IUCN senior advisor for economics and the environment, and David Harmon, editor of *The George Wright Forum*, for their comments and suggestions on this manuscript.

Ron Engel, Copper Harbor, Michigan, June 2005

The ethical basis of conservation

Forty years ago when I arrived on the doorsteps of the University of Chicago to take up studies in religion and philosophy, I was worried whether anyone on the faculty would understand my enthusiasm for nature and the kind of work I wanted to do in what has since become known as the field of "environmental ethics."

My first night in Chicago I attended a rally for SANE—the leading anti-nuclear organization in the states at the time—and one of the speakers was introduced as a professor at the University of Chicago Divinity School. Joseph Sittler began his speech by reading a poem by Richard Wilbur entitled "Advice to a Prophet," which includes these haunting lines:

What should we be without
The dolphin's arc, the dove's return,

These things in which we have seen ourselves and spoken?
Ask us, prophet, how we shall call
Our natures forth when that live tongue is all
Dispelled, that glass obscured or broken . . .

. . . come demanding
Whether there shall be lofty or long standing
When the bronze annals of the oak-tree close.

Not only were my worries alleviated that evening, but I had my first lesson in environmental ethics.

The roots of environmental ethics lie not in philosophy books but in our gratitude for the gift of life—“gracias a la vida”—the gift of our bodies as well as our souls. In and through our experience of nature we create the world of interlaced meanings and metaphors that constitute our distinctive existence as human beings. The very notions of “lofty” and “long standing” emerge through the alchemy of the human imagination interacting with other unique actualizations of creative evolution. “How shall we call our natures forth when that live tongue is all dispelled, that glass obscured or broken?”

As Joseph Sittler later wrote, “Not in abstract propositions or dramatic warnings but in powerful, earthy images the poet makes his point. The point is single, simple, and absolute: human selfhood hangs upon the persistence of the earth, her dear known and remembered factualness is the matrix of the self.”

This is the ultimate motivation, I suspect, for our work in the international conservation movement. We love life—“everything which is natural which is infinite which is yes” as the poet e.e. cummings expressed it, we know we owe everything to it, we are profoundly grateful, and we want to repay our debt by responsible care and respect, building a civilization that sustains life as long as Earth shall last. I believe this is true whether we work professionally as leaders of environmental NGOs, as scientists, artists, or teachers, or as dedicated conservationists in the worlds of commerce, industry or government.

The moral authority of the World Conservation Union

What this means for the topic at hand is that *the single most fundamental asset we have as members of IUCN is our moral authority*. By “moral authority” I mean our capacity to articulate, justify, defend, and practice principles of human action that enhance the flourishing of the evolutionary adventure, including all its human members. This authority has been built up over many years by thousands of persons who have found in this organization a way to act responsibly and effectively on behalf of their affirmation of the sacredness of life.

We can identify a number of ways in which we draw upon this moral authority in our conservation activities. A good example is our work in environmental law, which finds its justification in its appeal to justice, among other moral values. Articles 2–9 of the IUCN Law Commission’s *Draft International Covenant on Environment and Development* spells out the most basic moral affirmations that ground the treaty’s legal obligations, e.g., Article 2: “Nature as a whole warrants respect; every form of life is unique and is to be safeguarded independent of its value to humanity.”

The scientific credibility of the Union is also ultimately based on its moral authority—the belief that truth is a morally important value and that scientists are trustworthy truth-tellers regarding the biological health of the planet. Our worldwide networks of scientific experts labor diligently to be sure this trust is well-placed. Similarly, the political persuasiveness of the resolutions we pass at this Congress rests on the moral authority of the Congress as a democratic decision-making body—the fact that we truly represent the international community, and practice fair, open, and informed

debate. As Valli Moosa, the newly elected president of IUCN has stated, "It is from diversity that we gain our strength and political niche, and our unique moral authority." In addition, we depend upon our moral authority for support for our community conservation projects. It is assumed that we serve the common good and that our actions will be in keeping with our stated purposes. Any perception that our principles are being compromised is damaging to our moral reputation, and hence the practical effectiveness, of our projects.

In recent years a major source of the moral authority of the Union has come from our willingness to tackle the societal roots of environmental problems. It was not only a realistic policy decision, but a courageous exercise of moral responsibility, that led the Union to decide that nature protection alone was not enough, and that human poverty, lack of political participation and education, and regional and global inequities, must also be addressed. Our decision to tackle these issues not only added to our moral authority but required our moral authority. We had no standing in the international community that warranted this kind of activity until we took on board the fundamental moral premise of sustainable development, that concern for people and concern for the environment are mutually interdependent. Prior to Stockholm [the 1972 U.N. global conference on the environment], this was not the case. Martin Holdgate recounts in his history of IUCN, *The Green Web*, that it took years of experience in the field, internal debate, and institutional self-examination to bring the Union to adopt the vision of a "just world that values and conserves nature."

Since unsustainable and unjust eco-

nomical growth is one—if not *the*—cause of biodiversity loss, restructuring our domestic and global economic systems is an urgent priority. Ashok Khosla of Development Alternatives in India pointed out at this Congress, "The fact that after 50 years of international development, \$1 trillion in development assistance, and a 20-fold growth in the world economy, there are more poor people and vastly reduced forests should be a cause for worry among those who design our economic systems." But redesigning our global economic system is likely the most difficult and complex task we can undertake, involving powerful government and business interests, some of which are corrupt or weak or otherwise incompetent, immense geopolitical forces, entrenched professional and academic interests, passionate public opinion, the welfare of countless individuals and communities, and high stakes for the future of the biosphere.

I therefore heartily commend the IUCN leadership for having the moral courage and foresight to initiate an engagement with economics and the business community. The kind of serious dialogue between conservationists and business leaders that is conceptualized in *A Strategy for Enhancing IUCN's Interaction with the Private Sector* (approved by the IUCN Council in March, 2004), and is now being modeled at this Congress, is long overdue. Furthermore, I believe the IUCN initiative has placed the goal where it needs to be: biodiversity conservation and human well-being must become a central aim of business, not merely a regulatory obligation or charitable expense.

To meet this challenge, we will need to marshal all the resources at our disposal. As the *Strategy* suggests, in addition to our

capacities in environmental economic policy analysis, environmental science, law, strategic planning, and community development, we also need to bring to the table our moral values and authority. The moral standing of the Union gives us access to centers of decision-making, both private and public, which few other organizations in the environmental field can reach.

But we face a double challenge. To be successful, our approach to this work must not only draw upon our hard-won moral authority, it must proceed with utter moral credibility. It would be a blow to the moral authority of the Union if this initiative should be perceived as a capitulation to the reigning economic powers. The *Strategy* explicitly recognizes this risk, and acknowledges a “widespread skepticism in the conservation community about the merits of collaborating with business.”

We are seeking to overcome a division that has existed for over two centuries between movements for environmental preservation and proponents of modern forms of economic development. We will need to cut to the ethical roots of this conflict if we are to succeed in building meaningful partnerships between conservationists, community advocates, economists, and business leaders.

As a first step in that direction, let us acknowledge that it is proper that we use other forms of life. This is a condition of our existence as participants in the evolutionary process, and as co-creators and beneficiaries of the productive powers of human society. But from an ethical perspective, use value is always secondary to intrinsic and systemic value—to the flourishing of the community of life on planet Earth. This is the concern many of us have as we begin to walk down the road of engagement with

business and markets. The moral conscience of the Union strongly protests not only economic inequality between persons, but any attempt to reduce life to its mere “resource” value. Animals, for example, are not inherently “production units.” As worthy of admiration as human artifacts may be, achieving at their finest a second-order cultural form of intrinsic value, the baseline value that must be preserved at all costs, because it is the ultimate generative source of all other forms of value, is the wild value original to the universe as given. The magnificent flourishing of organisms, life forms and systems that we inherit can be imitated, but never replaced. It is they alone that inspire us to “reverence for life.”

The need for ethical terms of reference

What we need are ethical terms of reference for this engagement. We cannot afford marriages of convenience. To achieve significant policy improvements we will need principled agreements that are binding between all parties—citizens, corporations, governments—new moral compacts, not mere contracts. As Paul Hawken writes in *The Ecology of Commerce*, business will become meaningfully involved in the transition to sustainable development when it understands itself as “part of a larger covenant.” We can say the same of the conservation movement. Clear, strong, experientially informed, rationally defensible, ethical frames of reference are essential preconditions to a true partnership *in any aspect of human affairs*.

It is at this point that one more source of our moral authority (often taken for granted) comes into play. This is the work we do in ethical reflection.

In the final analysis, everything depends upon our capacity for critical and

constructive ethical thought. To step back—to *examine* as objectively as possible the issues at play in any decision or choice; to *appreciate* the multiple, often conflicting, values at stake; to *listen and learn* from what others report of their experience; to *question* not only the opinions in play but the presuppositions of the conversation itself; to turn the direction of discussion as much as possible toward *joint inquiry*; to bring every bit of *knowledge* available to the table, scientific, cultural, personal; to consult the *moral wisdom* of our traditions regarding what principles, virtues, and purposes are most crucial and helpful to the subject at hand; to allow one's *imagination* to freely entertain novel alternatives; to offer *reasoned moral arguments*, and to carefully and genuinely consider the moral arguments offered by others; to *propose* without demanding; and then finally to reach *explicit consensus* (but always revisable if new considerations make it necessary)—this is the best description I can give of what is involved in ethical reflection, sometimes called “practical moral reasoning.” Most typically this kind of critical and constructive moral thought happens as a step or moment within the natural flow of shared conversation, but there are times when it must be quite deliberate, public and systematic. In my judgment, this is one of those occasions. If the engagement of IUCN with business and markets is to follow “clear priorities and guidelines,” as the *Strategy* recommends, we need explicit attention to what ethical terms of reference are required.

There are several reasons why.

First, it assures our ethical integrity. Even if the ethical terms of reference that we propose are not initially acceptable to our business partners, they make our intentions clear, and give us a road map to follow when

issues become intractable. This kind of “truth in advertising” cannot help but receive respect from the business community, and will reassure our constituencies that we are keeping our mission intact. Ethical integrity does not require ethical rigidity or dogmatism. But we will put everyone on notice that convincing public reasons will need to be given for any changes we make.

Second, *ad hoc* ethical norms are insufficient to give us the comprehensive moral direction we need. Our focus in this Congress Forum is upon industries and businesses directly involved in natural resource development or capitalizing upon ecosystem services. This is an appropriate beginning point. To be practically effective, ethical terms of reference need to address the special issues and conditions involved in each particular form of economic activity. The IUCN Council has taken steps to define such terms by insisting that “prior informed consent” and “restoration of legacy sites” are among the key issues for discussion (and for evaluating IUCN’s dialogue) with the mining industries. But sooner or later specific ethical guidelines such as those developed for the mining industries must take their place within a larger and more complex ethical framework—an ethical philosophy, if you will—which has the capacity to provide general terms of reference for all of our engagements. The suggestions I will be making below leap-frog to this point in the process. In our future work we can anticipate a creative interplay between the norms that emerge in the course of our work in specific contexts and the task of constructing general ethical terms of reference.

Finally, social compacts between business and conservation based on clear reasoned ethical terms of reference, far from

being a naïve and idealistic diversion, are one of the most hard-headed and realistic things we can do in the cause of sustainable development.

While visiting Australia recently I had the opportunity to talk with Geraldine McGuire, who worked for several years as a community facilitator for Rio Tinto, the multinational mining company, to help achieve “responsible closure” of a large open-pit gold mine in a remote area in Indonesia. Her responsibility was to help build a “tri-sector partnership” between the company, government, and civil society (including environmental advocacy groups) in order to address the issues involved in the mine closing, most especially the protection of worker rights and sustainable livelihoods, dam safety, land compensation, and environmental restoration.

McGuire underscored what a published case study prepared by the Natural Resources Cluster of Business Partners for Development (BPD) also emphasized—that three ethically significant components in the process were of primary practical importance in achieving positive outcomes. One was moral trust, the *sine qua non* of everything else. The second was clear agreed-upon social and environmental criteria and goals. The third was the writing of a “charter” for the Mine Steering Committee, the decision-making forum that brought together stakeholder participants in structured dialogue. The charter defined the purpose of the partnership, the roles and responsibilities of its members, decision-making principles (decisions were to be arrived at by consensus in the spirit of *musyawarah untuk mufakat*—the local Indonesian moral tradition), and the requirement that participants use an agreed-upon list of social and environmen-

tal criteria when making their decisions. The point McGuire wanted to drive home was that without the charter the partnership would likely have dissolved in rancor and misunderstanding. It was essential that these constitutive terms of reference be established at the outset, because it would have been impossible to establish them in the course of the negotiations.

One of the most important conversations we can be having right now is about what ought to be the ethical terms of reference for such charters.

Let me suggest three different sets of terms for your consideration today. I believe that all three sets are essential if meaningful partnerships are to be formed. These are preliminary thoughts, however, my first cut at this subject. I welcome your thoughts, criticisms, and suggestions.

The first set has to do with *our common moral situation*—the reality we share, the ground upon which everything must be built; the second with the process of engagement, the *procedural norms* that should govern it; and the third with the *agenda for discussion*—the ethical issues that we agree beforehand must be on the table for discussion.

Our common moral situation

I would like to propose that the following description of our common moral situation serve as the fundamental ethical context and framework for our engagement with business and markets:

- We are members of a planetary community of communities, an evolving interdependent community of life. We love life, we know we owe everything to it, we are profoundly grateful, and we want

now to return the gift by building a civilization that sustains life as long as Earth shall last.

- We acknowledge that each member of the community of life, human and other-than-human, has independent dignity and value regardless of its economic worth or use, and that we are so closely related to one another that the welfare of each is bound up with the welfare of all.
- As a species engaged in a great evolutionary experiment testing whether or not it is possible to create a form of social life governed by free, morally reflective, cooperative individuals, we affirm that we are members of a universal moral community, personally and collectively responsible for the care and respect of the community of life, and for the equitable sharing of the goods of life across present and future generations.
- We have so far largely failed in that responsibility, separating ourselves from the community of nature and humankind, hoarding the goods of life and the fruits of our shared labors, and as a result are alienated from the ground of our being and from one another. Some bear much greater culpability than others, due to profound inequalities of power and resources.
- Yet the experiment is not over and we have hope because we are all born with the potential for developing moral sensitivity, reason, and choice, and because our communities and institutions have at critical times in history demonstrated the ability to transform themselves and pursue authentic ethical purposes.
- The aim we all share is to place our immense capacities for technological innovation and economic production in the service of a flourishing planet in

which the capacities and rights of each person are realized.

This is a thumbnail sketch of the ethical world view that has emerged in recent decades across international civil society, portions of which are expressed in IUCN documents such as the *World Charter for Nature*, *Caring for the Earth*, and the *Draft International Covenant for Environment and Development*. The most comprehensive and widely endorsed of these declarations is the Earth Charter, which affirms that “the spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature.”

You will also recognize that the moral landscape I have described is far distant from the moral ontology assumed by neo-classical economics, the world view that dominates most public policy today and which provides the implicit ethical underpinning for economic globalization.

As Stephen Marglin, professor of economics at Harvard University, who initiated research aimed at opening debate within IUCN on the ethical foundations of public policy, has argued, the view of our common moral situation assumed by the discipline of economics is based on assumptions of hyper-individualism, radical subjectivism, maximization of self-interest, and unlimited wants, prioritizing the values of efficiency, competitive advantage, and growth. This is an inaccurate picture of reality, and ethically inadequate for formulating sound environmental and social policy. Marglin’s analysis builds on the work of progressive economists such as Herman Daly, who, in works such as *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community*,

the Environment, and a Sustainable Future, has sought to resituate our understanding of economic activity in a relational, evolutionary, purposive world view, one which gives support to values such as respect, responsibility, cooperation, and love.

Ethical guidelines for dialogue

The second set of ethical terms of reference that are essential to a productive partnership between business leaders and conservationists involves the ethical criteria for the dialogue that must necessarily lie at the heart of such a relationship.

The *Strategy for Enhancing IUCN's Interaction with the Private Sector* sets forth a set of "ethical and practical principles" for guidance. The IUCN program for the period 2005–2008 also does a laudable job of identifying some of the most important of these criteria (although it does not name them as "ethical") in its discussion of rules of governance. Although there is substantial overlap, I find the latter to be the most comprehensive and relevant to our discussion here. To quote: "IUCN believes that governance should be based on the principles of:

- Transparency—openness in decision-making
- Access to information and justice—accurate, effective and open communication
- Public participation—genuine involvement in decision-making
- Coherence—a consistent approach
- Subsidiarity—decisions taken at the lowest level appropriate
- Respect for human rights—interwoven with 'good' environmental governance
- Accountability—for economic, social and environmental performance
- Rule of law—fair, transparent and con-

sistent enforcement of legal provisions at all levels."

This is an excellent set of ethical standards for serious engagement and dialogue between business, the community, and conservation advocates. I would not remove one from the list. Let me, however, rephrase, unpack, or otherwise expand a few so that their ethical aspect is a bit more prominent.

Transparency. There is openness in decision-making so that all interested parties, including the public at large, are aware of the course of discussion; the economic and other interests of the parties are fully disclosed; it is made explicit what each is agreeing to, and therefore pledging to honor; there is no hidden pressure to reach any particular outcome.

Coherence. Each participant in the dialogue makes proposals and offers justifications in terms others can understand and might reasonably accept; ethical principles, e.g., equity in the climate change debate, are viewed as ends or standards of action as well as means to facilitate agreement on courses of action.

Public participation. Each person enters the conversation on a basis of moral equality; there is no privileged position (no greater virtue, or power, resides with any party); each is assumed to have equal capacities for ethical reflection and judgment; the membership of the dialogue is truly inclusive, not only conservationists and business leaders, but representatives of the communities affected, labor as well as management; protesting and dissenting voices are not only tolerated (assuming civility prevails) but sought out for the important moral perspectives they can offer.

Accountability. Independent (third-

party) ways of measuring performance and outcomes are built into the process from the beginning.

It is one thing to outline abstract criteria of this sort, and quite another to do the spade work required to ensure they are implemented. But without the spade work, we risk trafficking in moral platitudes. Ethical seriousness requires that the necessary conditions be provided for the criteria to be meaningfully employed and recognition of this fact should also be an important ethical term of reference for our engagements.

Let us take participation as an example. Because of distrust, language and cultural barriers, and other factors, the parties most affected by a particular business operation are often not at the table. How would we secure participation of the villagers who gathered to protest the Thai–Malaysian gas pipeline project because of its impact on their beach in Songkhla Chana? Does IUCN have sufficient contact with the most morally energized grassroots movements and alternative development organizations trying to address the problems of economic globalization? One of the principal ingredients in the success of the trisectoral partnership at Kelian Mine (described above) was that the community and labor participants were remunerated for the time they devoted to the steering committee meetings. How can we bring to the table the particular business interests that most need to be there? As Ashok Khosla also noted at this Congress, if we publicly named and engaged the 120 companies responsible for 80% of global carbon dioxide emissions in the world, as identified by the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2000, we might begin to find effective solutions!

The subjective conditions for success-

ful dialogue and engagement are as important as the objective ones. These have to do with the personal moral values and character of the parties to the dialogue. Although such matters are typically treated as strictly private affairs, in fact they are not. Our personal values have as much a place as more utilitarian considerations in policy decisions. As reported in the journal *Environmental Values*, when researchers interviewed senior policy advisers active in global climate change negotiations, the majority articulated deeply held personal environmental values, but kept these values separate from their professional environmental and policy activities. As one official said, “Personally I’m willing to sacrifice quite a lot of my material well being in order to protect the environment ... but as a government official, of course I’d have a much more balanced view...” An important ethical term of reference will be making sure that participants are encouraged, and have structured opportunities, to share their personal experience and values, and that they sincerely try to understand the experience and values of others.

Successful dialogue also depends upon the moral maturity of each of the participants. Such qualities as compassion for the situation of others; willingness to admit error, deceit, or wrong-doing; ability to keep one’s word; or perhaps most difficult of all, what the Buddhists call non-attachment to material things, are determining factors in the quality of discussion. One of the most difficult moral truths to accept is that, while win-win solutions are always to be preferred, on most occasions there will be losses involved, sometimes serious losses that might be most accurately named “sacrifices.” One or more of the parties will need to give up important advantages for the sake

of the common good. We will need to find ways to help participants in our engagements prepare for the morally difficult choices they will sometimes need to make.

The agenda for deliberation

Finally, I believe there is a set of critical economic, social, and environmental issues that all parties must agree to place on the agenda for explicit and deliberate ethical reflection and decision. As the list below will show, I believe our ethical terms of reference should include good-faith deliberations on both the ways in which particular economic policies can be improved and how the system itself should be transformed.

Reform of business and market practice. The first set of agenda items are those which we have concentrated upon in this Global Synthesis Workshop, and which advocates of green commerce have sought to promote in a variety of programs and publications.

It is essential that we continue in our engagement with business to show why conservation of biodiversity is both good business and good ethical practice, to strengthen corporate social responsibility (CSR), pursue investments with the “triple” bottom line of financial return and social and environmental results, promote tax and other economic incentives for environmentally positive investing, encourage socially responsible investing, build public moral support for more effective regulatory mechanisms, create honest markets by incorporating indirect (external) costs of providing goods or services into prices, make sure company standards and codes of conduct respect sustainable thresholds of natural systems, and construct new ethically informed indices of economic progress. It

also is essential that we continue to define and press the crucial ethical principles pertinent to each economic sector, such as prior informed consent, and legacy obligations in the mining industries.

Ethical analysis of major environmental economic issues. A second set of agenda items has to do with the leading global environmental issues with significant economic components and the ways in which ethics can contribute to their resolution. I do not need to tell you that this list is long, and many—including biotechnology; the rights of indigenous peoples; sustainable use of wild species; health, human rights and the environment; the definition of “sustainable development” and its key components such as the precautionary principle—are of direct concern to members of our IUCN Ethics Specialist Group (ESG). Let us look more closely at two illustrative examples.

Global climate change is negatively impacting the intrinsic, instrumental, and systemic values of biodiversity throughout the planet, and sabotaging attempts to lift the world’s poorest out of poverty. ESG member Don Brown will be convening a meeting at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in Buenos Aires on the ethical dimensions of the climate change negotiations, pointing out that the figure set for the absolute ceiling on carbon dioxide emissions is ultimately an ethical judgment, and that questions of equity and the respective responsibilities of wealthy and developing nations hold a vital key to lasting agreements.

Security has emerged on the global agenda as an increasingly urgent geopolitical issue and one that the conservation community quite rightly seeks to show has environmental as well as economic, social, and

military aspects. No doubt the most neglected dimension of the issue, however, is ethical. The root causes of violence in the world are to be found in conflicting world-views and values. Other important contributing factors, such as endemic poverty, the spread of deadly armaments, large-scale population movements, ecosystem breakdown, new and resurgent communicable diseases, and rising competition over land and other natural resources can often be shown to be due to personal, corporate, national, and international moral failings. To try to address these problems without acknowledging moral culpability, or apart from ethically inspired efforts at peace-keeping, equalization of living standards, democratic governance, and ecosystem conservation, is futile. The greed and triumphalism that dominate American society at present are primary causes of its failure to collaborate in the multilateral efforts necessary for true international security and this will only change when the moral conscience of the nation, including its business community, is re-awakened.

Economism. If there is to be progress on restructuring the global economy, we must distinguish between ethically justified economic development—sustainable development in the best sense of the term—and what is called by Herman Daly the ideology of “economism”—the belief in unlimited economic growth, unregulated markets, limited government, and the positive benefits of consumer culture.

I sometimes have the impression in these meetings that there is an elephant in the room and no one is talking about it. As a citizen of the United States, I can assure you the elephant is real and quite large. The ideology of economism, and the petroleum-based economy that underwrites it, has

such a tight grip on our society that it is in effect our secular religion. But not only that of the United States. As Sulak Sivaraksa, Thailand’s leading spokesperson for engaged Buddhism, has said: “Western consumerism is the dominant ethic in the world today.”

We must convince our responsible business partners that this phenomenon deserves a high place on our agenda for discussion. All the CSR, market incentives, scientific studies, and dialogues between conservationists and business representatives will be of little avail if the ideology of economism remains intact, and if the aggregate economic demands on the ecosystems of the planet continue to accelerate.

This ideology operates at three interdependent levels, each of which needs special analysis. We briefly treated the first in our discussion of the moral ontology assumed by the discipline of economics, the world view that dominates most public policy today, and rationalizes the present pattern of economic globalization. To show you just how alive and well this ideology is in the United States, one of the members of the University of Chicago “school of economics” recently argued that if we are to obtain the “marvelous material benefits of capitalism” we must submit to competitive markets that are “relentless, ruthless, unruly, and irreligious.” This helps explain the widespread fatalism that economic globalization in its current form is inevitable, and that if we are to receive its alleged economic benefits we must be willing to make substantial environmental and social sacrifices.

The second level is that of corporate power and influence. The mainstream corporate sector broadcasts the ideology of economism and benefits from it. As one

academic analysis of journalism notes, news today must “fit” within the “info-tainment” strategy and profit-seeking guidelines of the corporations which own most major news media. A principal component in the ideology is that government control of the economy through regulatory law is inefficient and oppressive. When we speak of governments as being too weak to deal with environmental and social problems we are seeing a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The third level is that of popular consumer culture, based on the widespread and largely unconscious assumption that we have unlimited wants, that the good life consists in the acquisition of ever more manufactured products and experiences. Can we expect biodiversity to be valued and preserved when our public spaces are filled with advertising images that pander to the crudest material appetites, and that glorify a lifestyle of excessive material affluence? In the United States today the metaphor of marketing pervades and corrupts virtually every facet of public, business and personal life, including attitudes toward the land, defined as investment “real estate.”

We must face this destructive reality in which we are all caught up—citizens, conservationists, politicians, businesses alike—and place it squarely on the agenda for discussion. In Vaclav Havel’s words, “the system of consumer culture and development” is the “lie” which most of us live, and yet we act as though it were reality; whereas “living in the truth” is to call it a lie and tackle the immense cultural challenges and realignments of economic and political power necessary to change it.

Global corporate governance. I do not see how this can be done unless conservationists and enlightened business interests together examine the ethical justifica-

tion for the reigning form of economic organization, the corporation, especially in regard to the question of internal and external democratic political governance.

In a very short period of time corporations have grown from small organizations legally chartered for clear and precise purposes and operating under clear stipulations, with full shareholder liability, to a global economic hegemony, with the same rights and protections as those of individual persons, plus limited liability, and the legal responsibility to earn a profit for their owners. The corporation is an artificial human creation and there is no reason to believe that it is the most morally justified form of economic organization that it is possible to contrive. It is now a very hierarchically ordered organization, with gross disparities between levels of remuneration and opportunities for meaningful participation—the opposite of the kind of responsible mutuality and equality we try to nurture in a democratic social order. In what specific ways is it therefore legitimate and justified? What other forms of economic organization could be more ethically defensible instruments for ensuring the well-being of nature and human life?

A closely related question, one that is being increasingly asked throughout international civil society, is what new forms of global political governance can make economic organizations—whether corporate or otherwise—more directly accountable to the citizens of the world. The immense impact of transnational corporations makes this question both urgent and inevitable.

Hope for IUCN

I have argued throughout this paper that reconstructing the global economic system will be the primary test of the capac-

ity of the World Conservation Union for moral leadership in the 21st century. My hope is that IUCN will take this challenge seriously and continue to work to build consensus on the ethical terms of reference for a transformative engagement between conservationists, civil society, government, and business.

Fortunately, we are not alone. We can and should link arms with the many persons throughout international civil society, in the United Nations and other international institutions, and most especially

within the progressive business community, who are as desirous as we to find an alternative development path based on ethical commerce, just and sustainable communities, and new ways of measuring human progress.

To do so would mean keeping faith with all those who have gone before us in this organization, and the many millions more, who have hoped against hope that our species would rise to the challenge of governing its economic affairs in such a way as to honor the gift of life.

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