

Environmental Ethics and the Business Professional: Responsibilities and Opportunities

Philip Cafaro

I Introduction: Environmental Issues

Environmental issues loom large in contemporary life, at all levels of decision-making. They encompass everything from personal decisions about where to live and what car to buy; to a city council's deliberations about whether to widen a road or designate a park; to enactment of key national environmental laws, such as the U.S. Clean Air and Endangered Species Acts; to international treaties to enhance environmental protection, such as the Montreal Protocol to phase out production of ozone-depleting chemicals. Many business decisions, such as whether to install new pollution control technology or how to harvest trees, also have important environmental ramifications. Key environmental issues include air and water pollution; preservation of wildlife and wild lands; population increase (locally, nationally, internationally); global climate change; transportation systems; agricultural practices; and more.

Our environmental problems are the fruits of success, a function of a century of tremendous economic expansion. The twentieth century saw a nearly 4-fold increase in world population, from 1.6 billion to 6.0 billion, and an astonishing 35-fold increase in total industrial output and 25-fold increase in world GDP. The world auto fleet increased from a few thousand to 650 million autos, the number of personal air miles flown grew from 0 to 1.7 trillion miles per year, and world fertilizer use jumped from one or two million tons to 140 million tons per year. Along with increased wealth and productivity came a tremendous increase in energy use. In just the past 50 years, fossil fuel use jumped from 1600 to 8500 million tons of oil (equivalent).

Increased economic activity and energy use, in turn, has led to greatly increased discharges of pollutants into the air and water. From 1950 to 2000, airborne carbon emissions jumped from 1800 to 7000 million tons annually, sulfur emissions climbed from 30 to 70 million tons, and nitrogen emissions jumped from 7 to 30 million tons. These emissions have been conclusively linked to a variety of human health problems (one study suggests that sulfur and particulate pollution causes 4 to 5 million new cases of bronchitis and half a million premature deaths each year). Over the same period, atmospheric CO₂ concentrations increased from 315 to 370 parts per billion and the average temperature at the earth's surface increased one degree centigrade, from 13.8 degrees in 1950 to 14.6 degrees in 2000.

The twentieth century also saw the birth of many new substances for industry and war. In the late 1890's, Henri Bequerel and the Curies discovered radioactivity; mid-century witnessed the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan and the first civilian nuclear power plants in the U.S. and Soviet Union; the century ended with world governments struggling to decide how to safeguard thousands of tons of highly radioactive waste, some of which will remain dangerous for millions of years. While nineteenth-century chemistry largely worked with naturally occurring substances, tens of thousand of new chemicals were synthesized and brought into commercial production in the twentieth century, many of them highly toxic. 350 million tons of hazardous industrial waste is generated annually, much of it released directly into the environment. Agricultural pesticide use has increased 10 to 15 times over the past fifty years, making agricultural lands killing fields for birds or mammals unlucky enough to live on or near them, and poisoning groundwater supplies throughout the world.

While it has been a great century for novelty, many old favorites have disappeared. The twentieth century saw the extinction of numerous biological species, with estimates ranging from

hundreds of thousands into the millions. According to one estimate, tropical forests alone could account for 27,000 extinctions per year, given current rates of forest loss due to logging, mining and conversion to agriculture. Worldwide, forests once covered 40% of the earth's land surface. That has declined by 1/3 in recent centuries, with most of the loss occurring in the past 50 years. Only 1/5 of the world's forests remain in large, relatively natural ecosystems. Conservation biologists expect these trends to accelerate as expanding human populations appropriate ever more land for human uses. At current rates, ¼ to 1/3 of all species could go extinct in the next 50 years.¹

On the one hand, then, expanding human populations and industries have greatly stressed the environmental support systems that are needed by human and non-human life in order to survive and thrive. On the other hand, large sectors of these expanding populations have the wealth and leisure to look beyond their immediate needs, and see a clean environment, uncrowded cities and towns, and accessible parks and wild lands as important to their health and happiness. This article explores the question: How should business professionals respond to environmental issues and decisions? To do so, we must put business life in its proper context.

II Professional Goals

Most readers of this essay have entered a profession or a particular business career, or are considering doing so. Why? What do you hope to accomplish?

¹ The preceding three paragraphs rely on the following sources: Lester Brown, et al., Vital Signs: The Environmental Trends that are Shaping Our Future (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992-2000). The World Bank, Entering the 21st Century: World Development Report 1999/2000 (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2000). The World Bank, World Bank Development Indicators (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1999). Center for Biodiversity and Conservation at the American Museum of Natural History, "Humans and Other Catastrophes: Perspectives on Extinctions" (<http://research.amnh.org/biodiversity/acrobat/extpubl.pdf>, September 2000). Joni Seager, The New State of the Earth Atlas (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994). The Economist, Pocket World in Figures (London: Penguin, 2000).

Perhaps you are excited about getting involved in the business world or a particular profession. Perhaps you hope to earn a decent living, or more (maybe much more!). Perhaps you believe a certain career or profession will help you develop your particular talents. Perhaps you see this as one way to contribute to society. Maybe several aspects, or all of these, have played some role in your decision.

No matter how you answer these questions, going through the process of answering them helps you think about your long-term goals and put your career goals within the proper, larger contexts. Those larger contexts are living a good life -- however you define it -- and contributing to the communities to which you belong -- again, however you define those contributions. Some of you will emphasize personal goals, some, your contributions to larger communities. But we all pay attention to both kinds of goals, to some extent. Your particular definitions of these goals, how you balance them, and how, specifically, you try to achieve them, all define your ethical philosophy. This, in turn, defines how you judge your own actions: good or bad, right or wrong, pointless or useful.

Another way into the same question is to ask: how do you define “success”? You are embarked, or about to embark, on a business career. You want to succeed in that career. What would you consider a successful list of accomplishments at the end of ten years? At your retirement? Your answer might focus on professional honors and the esteem of business colleagues; how much money you made; building a large or lucrative business; your own personal development (for example, a lawyer’s ability to analyze and successfully argue cases, or a manager’s ability to get the best work out of a diverse group of employees). Your answer might focus on achievements within your profession or on what it allowed you to achieve outside of it (support a family, or play a leading role in your community).

It makes sense to put professional success in the context of living a successful life. In addition to professional success, a successful life might include raising a happy family, personal friendships and contributions to your community, being able to travel and see the world, and much more. Business success can help you achieve these goals.

Making money is an important part of economic life, whether one is earning a salary or trying to increase a business' profits. Money is useful for all sorts of purposes, and beyond that, it is a measure of business success. Successful businesses grow, while unsuccessful ones fold; successful businessmen's personal wealth increases, while unsuccessful businessmen file for bankruptcy. But presumably, success cannot be wholly defined in terms of money or profits. If you doubt this, ask yourself whether you would be willing to give up your career plans and spend the rest of your life jumping over a pile of leaves, if you were guaranteed a 5% higher salary than you would have if you followed your current plans. Or, whether you would be willing to earn a handsome living torturing newborn infants. People who define success wholly in terms of money are mistaken. If they are seriously mistaken, we call them immoral (when they harm others in order to pursue profit) or foolish (when a single-minded pursuit of profit makes them miss out on the good things in life).

Often, perhaps usually, the pursuit of profit helps us improve our lives and the lives of others, but sometimes that pursuit conflicts with our other values. Most important issues in business ethics arise out of such conflicts and out of our attempts to harmonize the pursuit of profit with living good lives. These issues divide fairly neatly under two general headings: (1) Cases where, arguably, we should limit our pursuit of profit, because it harms others. (2) Cases where we may specify ways to increase profits, or at least secure reasonable profits, while improving our own lives and the lives of others. (This second sort of case is usually left out of

business ethics discussions; mistakenly, I believe. Ethics should discuss opportunities, as well as restrictions.) The next two sections take up these two sorts of cases in turn, with special reference to environmental issues. In order to discuss the first sort of case, we must clarify the notion of rights.

III Rights of Others

A right is a justified claim on other people to respect our important interests, and treat or refrain from treating us in certain ways. When we speak of a right to liberty, for example, we mean that other people may not interfere in our personal decisions, absent some compelling reason (usually, that such interference is necessary to prevent harm to others). We specify a right here because we have an important interest in making our own life choices and living as we wish to live; preserving this right allows us all to live better lives.

We may speak of both legal and moral rights. Legal rights are formally granted by a government, and apply (primarily) to a state's own citizens. Legal rights are thus conventional, and can be qualified or revoked by the governing body that granted them. Most people believe there are also moral rights, which all people have simply by virtue of being human. We should uphold such universal moral rights, they believe, regardless of the current state of the law. An action may be legal, yet wrong. For example, members of a despised minority may not have a legal right to freedom from assault, yet those who assault them still act immorally.

The concept of rights applies fairly directly to environmental issues in which a person's or company's actions affect another person's health, happiness, or property. Consider an issue that has recently become important throughout the rural U.S.: the siting of new hog production facilities. Raising hogs is a dirty, smelly business and as the size of these facilities has increased,

so have the possibilities for air and water pollution, and a variety of other undesirable effects on their neighbors. New facilities can be profitable, however. When and where is it permissible to site a new facility?

Laws vary from state to state, and even from county to county. But let us assume that there are no legal restrictions and instead ask: what is the morally right thing to do? The answer is: respect your neighbors, and refrain from interfering with their rights to health, happiness, and use of their property. The odors from these facilities can be so bad that they undermine human health, an extreme case of irresponsibility. But beyond this, your neighbors should be able to enjoy dinner outside on a Saturday afternoon, without having to flee indoors. Practically, this means that a person has to leave enough room between his facilities and his neighbors, after taking into account prevailing winds. He might have to limit the size of the facility. He might have to cover his manure lagoons, or take other costly measures to reduce odor. Such restrictions are the price of being a good neighbor, which decent people willingly pay.

Water pollution can also be a problem with these facilities. Typically, hog wastes from larger operations are dumped into lagoons and allowed to decompose, then spread on surrounding fields as fertilizer. This system can work, if the lagoons are carefully built, sited and maintained; if the manure is spread over a large enough area of land and not applied too often; and if buffers are left around all streams. If these stipulations are not followed, local streams can become polluted. In many cases, careless operators have killed tens of thousands of fish, creating “dead zones” miles downstream from their facilities. Such actions clearly harm the interests of other people, polluting streams that run across their land or ruining wells that they depend on for their drinking water. Such selfish actions can ramify far beyond immediate neighbors to undermine important public goods: a local river or lake can be an important

resource for the fishermen, hunters, bird watchers, and schoolchildren from a wide area. It is wrong to degrade this resource for personal profit.

At this point, a skeptic might point out that virtually all our actions have some environmental effects, and that agricultural and industrial activities would grind to a halt if perfect purity were demanded. This is a valid point, and no one can expect to live in a perfectly pure world. So we must set thresholds, some of which will be fairly obvious. Someone who wants to be a good neighbor will find a way to do this: making an honest calculation about whether he owns enough land to buffer his activities from interfering with their lives; not pushing beyond the number of pigs he can raise without also raising a stink. If you want to be a good neighbor, consider the consequences your actions have for others, widen your sense of responsibility to include all the consequences that impact other people's important interests -- and pay attention to how they define "important." When in doubt, ask yourself: if the roles were reversed, what would I consider fair treatment?

We all understand how to act responsibly in such personal, "neighborly" examples, but what about when business becomes big business? The past decade has seen a shift in the U.S., from small-scale to industrialized hog farming. Instead of individual farmers raising a few dozen pigs at a time and spreading the manure on their own fields, we now have corporate-owned facilities, whose huge buildings house hundreds and sometimes thousands of pigs. The owners of such facilities site them where it is most convenient, and it is never most convenient near their own homes. The new methods generate immense profits for a few individuals, and vastly greater opportunities for air and water pollution for their neighbors. A recent spill in North Carolina released 22 million gallons of hog waste into the New River, resulting in massive fish kills and environmental damage that will take decades to undo.

Any company that does business in a locality is a member of that community. If it simply uses the community's resources without regard for community well-being, using up or degrading those resources in the process, it acts no better than any immoral individual. Such a company must be rigidly disciplined by environmental (and other) laws, enacted by those who are looking out for the interests of the community. If a company persists in violating the law, its corporate charter should be revoked. Fortunately, not all individuals working within corporations take such a predatory view of business life. Individuals holding responsible positions within large corporations have tremendous opportunities to do good, helping provide valuable products, services and jobs to communities, while preserving and enhancing community health and well-being (see the next section).

The ethical issue of individuals' responsibilities within large companies is a complex one. Who, for example, is responsible when discharges of toxic chemicals from a factory regularly exceed legally permissible levels? Workers may claim that it is up to the bosses to solve such problems, while higher-ups may insist that they do not know the details of how each factory is managed. Mid-level managers, in turn, may feel strong pressure to produce profits and thus to cut corners on environmental protection. We must look at who makes specific decisions and who carries them out: these are loci of responsibility. More broadly, we also assert that if someone benefits from the opportunities provided by a firm, he or she bears some share in its environmental and other responsibilities. In other words, all members are responsible. In corporations that promote such attitudes, hierarchical organization can work as an environmental fail-safe, rather than a method for avoiding responsibility.

These considerations apply to a broad range of environmental business issues. The technical issues and pollutants involved in raising hogs are different from those related to

coal-fired power plants or plastics factories. Yet the same basic principles apply: know the consequences of your actions, and respect the rights of those whom your actions will affect.

Those consequences extend beyond human beings, of course. The shift from family farms to large-scale industrial hog production has led to real hardships for the animals involved. Pigs are naturally sociable, curious, and highly intelligent. Previously, they lived most of their lives in small family groupings, and could root and explore outside for at least part of the year. In factory farming, hogs are confined in solitary pens, often so tightly that they cannot turn around. Many grow depressed and listless, and engage in so-called “stereotypic” behavior: senseless, repetitive motions such as bar biting. The increased efficiency and rationalization of pork production has led to lower prices for consumers and higher profits for large-scale industrial farms, but also to a greatly decreased quality of life for the animals themselves. Legally, the hogs are just property. Their owners can and do treat them as they please. But is this permissible morally? Are we a better society for having made this change?

IV Personal Flourishing

So far, we have considered environmental restrictions on business: the rights of others limit what the businessman may do. But ethics is not just about what we cannot do; it is about aspirations as well as limitations. The greening of the economy is opening up wonderful new opportunities for businessmen, and businessmen with green inclinations are in a position to do a lot for the environment.

Consider Sally Fox, who breeds naturally colored organic cotton. Conventionally grown white cotton uses large amounts of pesticides -- more than any other major crop -- and dying white cotton involves many toxic chemicals. Naturally colored cotton can eliminate the need to

dye cloth. By breeding long-fiber varieties that are suitable for modern garment making, Fox has made possible its widespread use. She has also opened up exciting business opportunities, for herself and others; her Natural Cotton Colours, Inc. recently made \$5 million a year in sales. By growing her cotton organically, she plows some of her profits back into sustainable agricultural practices.

Or consider Molten Metal Technology, Inc. of Fall River, Massachusetts, the creation of Christopher Nagel and William Haney III. These thirty-something entrepreneurs raised \$105 million on MMT's initial offering on the NASDAQ exchange; currently, the company employs 300 people. MMT is using, and constantly refining, a new technology called "catalytic extraction processing" (CEP), which could revolutionize hazardous waste processing and disposal. CEP utilizes careful monitoring of the waste stream, extremely high temperatures, and a molten metal base, to recover useful materials from hazardous wastes. If successful, CEP could replace conventional incineration, which releases dangerous chemicals into the air and creates residual waste that still must be landfilled. CEP represents an important step towards true recycling, and helps the environment twice: once when toxins aren't released in the incineration process, and again when the materials generated are resold and reused within industry.²

Such examples can be multiplied through all sectors of the economy. They include housing developers who cluster houses and preserve open land, or who site and build their houses to minimize energy use; and also real estate agents who help clients set up conservation easements for clients. They include foresters who are moving away from environmentally-damaging clear-cutting and returning to selective tree thinning; and ranchers

² Fox's and MMT's stories, and those of many other environmental entrepreneur's, may be found in Steven Lerner, Eco-Pioneers: Practical Visionaries Solving Today's Environmental Problems (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998).

who are experimenting with new methods to reduce the effects of grazing, such as fencing stream courses and moving herds more often.

In all these cases, we see business-people making money, while also changing environmental practices for the better. In some cases they may give up some profit -- maybe a few more houses could be squeezed into a development, for example. But many professionals are committed to protecting the environment. They find a special satisfaction in knowing that their business is helping to make their communities more environmentally sound. Sometimes the opportunities are modest and basic: for example, when a contractor follows the law and puts in suitable insulation, glazed windows, and low-flow toilets in a new building. Sometimes the opportunities are greater, as when whole new green products and industries are created.

Leaders within even the most environmentally backward industries are beginning to recognize these opportunities. At the same time that it has been lobbying against government initiatives to combat global warming, General Motors has spent hundreds of millions of dollars to develop electric and hybrid electric/gasoline vehicles. Several years ago, the CEO of British Petroleum broke with other leaders in the oil industry and asserted that global warming was a real problem that his industry had a moral responsibility to address. B-P has recently committed \$1 billion to develop solar power and wind energy. Not only is this the right thing to do, but it could turn out to be more profitable than defending the status quo.

But suppose it does not? Suppose that over Mr. X's tenure, British-Petroleum averages profits of \$10 a share per year and helps the world meet the challenge of global warming, while during Mr. Y's tenure, Arco averages profits of \$15 a share per year and does so in part by retarding an effective response to global warming. Who will have succeeded here: Mr. X or Mr. Y? Or ask the same question at the local level. Who will have succeeded, the developer who

builds the most beautiful houses, the most environmentally-friendly houses, the housing developments which sustain the greatest sense of community among their inhabitants -- or the developer who gains the most profit from his houses?

Our answers will depend on how we define success. If we define success in terms of positive contributions to society, we will get a very different answer than if we focus primarily on money. Since business decisions do, in fact, affect society in important ways, it seems sensible to widen our view of business success to encompass our effects on others.

V Community

Respecting the rights of others, and paying attention to our own well-being, lead naturally to an account which puts it all together: the personal and the political; the “thou shalt nots” and the “go for its.” It leads naturally to the notion of business activity that promotes community flourishing in a healthy environment.

What would an environmentally-conscious, business-friendly economic system look like? Certainly it would include strong environmental laws designed to protect human health and biological diversity, for current and future generations. Beyond that, it would be a system where most people, including most business leaders, held an environmental ethic which led them to actively promote environmental values. Key values would include sustainability, land health, and ecological integrity.

Sustainability is the ability of a particular human activity to continue indefinitely without depleting resources or damaging the environment. Sustainability can also refer to the lifestyles of particular groups or whole societies. The focus is on preserving resources which future generations will need. For example, mainstream farming practices in the U.S. are largely

unsustainable: they erode soils faster than they can be replenished, often depend on water inputs which deplete aquifers faster than they can be recharged, and apply fertilizers and pesticides so heavily that the runoff pollutes streams and rivers. Alternative farming methods seek to limit soil erosion, avoid some harmful chemicals altogether and limit applications of others, and reduce the pollution associated with agricultural production. They thus work to keep the land producing food and healthy populations of non-farm animals, in perpetuity.

The example shows that sustainability involves numerous factors, and is a matter of degree. Current world energy policies are obviously unsustainable, relying primarily on a one-time draw down of fossil fuel reserves while generating massive amounts of air and water pollution. “Scrubbers” on industrial smokestacks, more mass transit, more efficient automobiles, and more stringent regulations on mining and oil extraction can all lessen the environmental effects of energy use. But to be truly sustainable, we must move towards new technologies that are less polluting and truly renewable: such as wind and sun power, and perhaps hydrogen cells. We must also design communities that use less energy: where we can walk, bike or take mass transit to work, school, shopping and recreational areas. Obviously, to move towards truly sustainable energy use, businesses, governments and consumers will all have to work together.

Sustainability is necessary to preserve the long-term economic productivity of the land. An exclusive focus on economic productivity, however, is insufficient. We also want to preserve land health. Just as a healthy human being is free from disease and able to perform his characteristic functions well, a healthy forest or stream is free from air or water pollution, excessive siltation, or invasion by exotic organisms. Such stresses impede or radically alter the systems’ natural functions (such as photosynthesis or production of new plant growth) and composition (often eliminating sensitive species and simplifying biological communities).

Healthy ecosystems provide both natural biodiversity and a wide array of products and services valued by humans. A healthy thousand-acre forest in the piedmont region of Georgia, for example, may support dozens of species of trees, several hundred species of birds, thousands of species of insects -- while also providing humans with wood for fuel and building materials, and recreational hiking, swimming, fishing and hunting. And it can do this sustainably, forever, as long as humans do not undermine its healthy functioning. In order to preserve healthy ecosystems, we must limit our pollutants and avoid taking too much at once (overharvesting trees or overhunting deer, for example).

If simplified ecosystems are managed well, they may stay healthy for humans and a reduced biota, remain stable and resilient to stress, not pollute surrounding ecosystems (e.g., not dump excessive silt or fertilizer in streams), and continue to perform valuable ecosystem services. Because some relatively intensive land use is necessary and this can be done better or worse, it makes sense to apply concepts of land health to simplified ecosystems. At the same time, excessive simplification across a large landscape leads to extinction of species and loss of characteristic natural communities. When humans appropriate natural resources too exclusively, this is arguably unjust towards all the other species of animals and plants with whom we share the earth. It also harms us, since we no longer can explore and enjoy wild areas, or reap the scientific and aesthetic benefits that wild nature provides.

Land health thus should be supplemented with the ideal of ecosystem integrity -- the preservation of wild, natural landscapes with their full complement of native species. In a recent “State of the Parks” report, Parks Canada defined ecological integrity as “the condition of an ecosystem where the structure and function are unimpaired by human-caused stresses, and the biological diversity and supporting processes are likely to persist” without excessive human

interference. Ecosystem integrity thus includes the notion of land health, but implies a greater measure of wholeness and freedom from human manipulation.³

Integrity is a key environmental ideal because it encompasses the full preservation of biological diversity, including individual organisms, species, natural communities, and the ecosystem processes which have created and sustain them. It includes the radical notion that some places should be left alone, to be what God or nature makes of them. Some of our fiercest environmental battles are being waged around the issue of whether to exploit or preserve wild lands. For example, energy companies want to drill for oil on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, in northern Alaska. This area is a remote, largely untouched wilderness, supporting huge herds of caribou and musk oxen. Should one of our last, best, wilderness areas be developed to provide oil for the world industrial economy, jobs for oil workers, and profits for Exxon and Mobil?

A business community that values ecological integrity will be willing to forego resource extraction and development in some wild areas. For example, the DuPont chemical corporation recently dropped plans for a molybdenum mine on the outskirts of Georgia's Okefenokee swamp, which might have degraded water quality at one of the nation's premier wildlife refuges. In an act of corporate statesmanship, DuPont agreed to sell its land at cost, making the permanent protection of Okefenokee possible.

Just which lands to protect and which to develop, and how much of the overall landscape to preserve, are difficult questions which defy precise answers. Many environmentalists argue that the amount of land devoted to human use is already too high, and that both "biotic justice" and a fuller account of human interests demand that more land be dedicated to wild nature. We

³ Panel on the Ecological Integrity of Canada's National Parks, Unimpaired for Future Generations? Conserving Ecological Integrity with Canada's National Parks. <http://parkscanada.pch.gc.ca/parks>. September, 2000.

could, for example, prohibit timber harvesting and other extractive uses of our national forests, and work to reestablish populations of all native animals within them. We could purchase and set aside as park land extensive samples of native tall grass prairie, southern long-leaf pine savannas, and other natural ecosystems that are not currently represented in state or national park systems. As with sustainability and land health, we will make more progress towards preserving ecological integrity if business, government, and individual citizens all recognize this as a valid goal and work to secure it.

Conclusion

Over fifty years ago, Aldo Leopold wrote of the need for a “land ethic” to guide human beings towards a more just and sustainable life on earth:

All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts . . . The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.

Can you imagine living your life, making business and personal decisions, as if you were a member of such a larger community? As if the continued existence and flourishing of all nature’s creatures was your responsibility? Of course, this would limit your freedom of action, in some important ways. But Leopold was convinced that it would also improve our lives. For preserving wild nature also preserves many human opportunities to know and appreciate the natural world: aesthetic, scientific, recreational, and spiritual experiences, which are part of what makes us human. Once we get beyond looking at other people as simply “resources” for our

own use and enjoyment, we can get more out of being with them. Something similar might hold for our relationships to wild nature.

Regardless of whether or not we extend our notion of community to include non-humans, our membership in human communities means we will have to consider environmental issues in terms of a larger, common good. It would be foolish to minimize the difficulties and complexities of meshing business life with environmental concern. In particular, there is an inherent contradiction between businesses' desires to expand and consumers' desires to increase consumption, and the need to limit our use and transformation of the natural world, in the name of sustainability, land health, and ecological integrity. Some industries can stimulate demand and increase profits with little or no ecological damage: if people spend more on compact discs, books or telescopes, no great harm is done to the environment. Other industries cannot expand without doing environmental harm: the large oil and automobile corporations will have to completely transform themselves, before their increased profits do not also register as decreased environmental quality. This means that society must accept slow-growth, no-growth and even negative-growth economic sectors, and individuals must redefine their "pursuit of happiness" in important ways, in order to protect the environment. Clearly we will need to do so sooner or later, if we are to preserve a world fit for human habitation, and reap the benefits of a century of economic progress.