

NOTES

THE COMMON GOOD: AN ETHICAL FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATING ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The 1970's, it is frequently said, will be the Decade of Ecology.¹ The gravity of our present "environmental crisis"² must elicit broadly-based concerted action during these years lest we all head down the road to extinction, according to the clarion call sounded not only by the mass media of television and weekly periodicals but by more sophisticated professional journals as well. The modern-day Amoses remind us that the ecological facts of life are grim, that the survival of human life is integrally tied to the complex web of biological processes which make up the earth's eco-system, and that man through modern technology is doing precisely those things which are ecologically destructive and thus threatening the most fundamental requisite of human existence.³ The word "ecology," like Spiro Agnew, has become a household word, bandied about (and even exploited by unsavory, profit-minded, detergent manufacturers) until people are growing tired of hearing about it before they understand what it means—the perspective which views an organism in relation to its total environment, in relation to other organisms of different species, and to those of its own kind.⁴ Book publishers' fairs feature dozens of new titles dealing with ecological matters, and learned societies devote sessions to the topic. Card-carrying members of the ecology movement include a motley assortment of leftists and rightists, conscientious housewives and suave advertising agents for

¹ Barry Commoner, a biologist who has written widely on ecological matters, wrote in the April 1970 issue of *The Progressive*: "I believe that we have, as of now, a single decade in which to design the fundamental changes in technology that we must put into effect in the 1980s—if we are to survive. We will need to seize on the decade of the 1970s as a period of grace—a decade which must be used for a vast pilot program to guide the coming reconstruction of the nation's system of productivity" ("Salvation: It's Possible," p. 17).

² The way in which the phrase "environmental crisis" has been thrown about in speeches and writings may give the mistaken impression that we are facing a totally unprecedented situation in environmental deterioration. Clarence J. Glacken, in numerous writings, shows that environmental changes and interest in the changes are of recent acceleration but not of recent origin. See, e.g., his "Man's Place in Nature in Recent Western Thought," in *This Little Planet*, ed. Michael Hamilton (New York, 1970) pp. 163-201.

³ An excellent introduction to "The Ecological Facts of Life" is found in an article with that title by Barry Commoner in *The Ecological Conscience: Values for Survival*, ed. Robert Disch (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1970) pp. 2-16.

⁴ Paul Shepard, an ecologist, argues that ecology "is not a discipline: there is no body of thought and technique which frames an ecology of man. It must therefore be a scope or a way of seeing," in his "Introduction: Ecology and Man—A Viewpoint," in *The Subversive Science: Essays toward an Ecology of Man*, ed. Paul Shepard and Daniel McKinley (Boston, 1969) p. 1.

polluting corporations, long-time conservationists and newly-inspired "eco-freaks." "Everyone wants to save the environment but no one knows quite what to do."⁵

Since I am not suited by temperament or training to play the role of environmental doomsday prophet, a role which Paul Ehrlich, Garrett Hardin, and others perform well as they utter their oracles on late-night television talk shows, I shall confine myself to the more modest task of discussing some of the aspects of the "environmental crisis" that might be clarified by a Christian ethicist.

Christian ethical reflection, James Gustafson has reminded us, can begin from at least four base points: (1) situational analysis, (2) fundamental theological affirmations, (3) moral principles, or (4) the nature of a Christian's life in Christ together with its proper expression in moral action. No matter which one of these four is chosen as a point of departure in making a particular moral judgment or decision, one will, Gustafson argues, move toward the other three if his judgment or decision-making is sound.⁶ Recent discussions on ecological matters by theological writers have tended to begin with and most strongly emphasize the second of Gustafson's base points, fundamental theological affirmations.⁷ Whether writing from the perspective of theology proper or theological ethics, these authors have been trying to answer in the affirmative the question which Joseph Sittler raised at the third assembly of the World Council of Churches: "Is it possible to fashion a theology catholic enough to affirm redemption's force enfolding nature, as we have affirmed redemption's force enfolding history?"⁸ The answer to this question is important, for the way in which men view "nature" theologically will affect their basic disposition toward the world and the way they think about and fulfil their purposes and actions in the world.⁹

⁵ That is the title of a perceptive essay by Frank M. Potter, Jr., in *The Center Magazine* 3 (March-April 1970) 34-40.

⁶ James M. Gustafson, "Context versus Principles: A Misplaced Debate in Christian Ethics," *New Theology* No. 3, ed. Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman (New York, 1966) pp. 69-102. The article first appeared in *Harvard Theological Review* 58 (April 1965) 171-202.

⁷ Among the many writings in this genre, the following stand out as noteworthy: Conrad Bonifazi, *A Theology of Things: A Study of Man in His Physical Environment* (Phila., 1967); Frederick Elder, *Crisis in Eden: A Religious Study of Man and His Environment* (New York, 1970); H. Paul Santmire, *Brother Earth: Nature, God and Ecology in Time of Crisis* (New York, 1970); *IDOC-International—North American Edition* (Sept. 12, 1970) esp. the articles by Loren R. Fisher, John B. Cobb, Jr., and Joseph Sittler.

⁸ Joseph Sittler, "Called to Unity," an address delivered at the World Council of Churches, New Delhi, 1961 (mimeographed).

⁹ The status and dignity of "nature" is an important matter for ethics. One of the more interesting discussions of this is found in Santmire's *Brother Earth* (n. 7 above), in which he argues persuasively that there are moral transgressions of nature apart from the harm done

Therefore, it is not because I disagree with those who begin their discussion of environmental issues from an explicit theological or doctrinal stance that I choose another base point; rather, it is because I think the emphases in the base point I choose, the ethical framework or moral principles which might help us interpret and guide our action in relation to these issues, have received insufficient attention in recent discussions of the "environmental crisis." In these reflections I shall not explicitly state when I move from the starting base point toward the other three, but I am conscious of when the shifts occur.

AGGREGATIVE AND DISTRIBUTIVE PRINCIPLES

In discussing moral principles it is helpful to distinguish, following Brian Barry, between "aggregative" and "distributive" principles.¹⁰ An aggregative principle—such as public interest, common interest, public good, general welfare, or common good—is one which refers to the social good of the reference group or community as a whole, whereas a distributive principle—such as justice, fairness, equity, equality, or equality of opportunity—has reference to the way in which certain "goods" or "burdens" are to be divided among the members of the reference group or community. For example, if one is concerned to provide a more equal distribution of wealth in the nation, or to provide every citizen with a decent house, income, and job, then one's moral justification of the reforms needed to bring this about would rely upon one or more distributive principles, such as justice, equity, or equality. If, on the other hand, one is concerned to arrest or reverse population growth, to impede the development and implementation of superfluous technological gimmicks, or to stop the proliferation of deadly weapons systems, one's moral justification would involve an appeal to some aggregative principle, such as the public interest, common interest, or common good.

These two aspects of political morality are not easily brought into a harmonious coexistence; quite often there will be conflicts between the two. Recently, for example, the ecology movement has been harshly criticized as a squeamish revulsion against the just demands of the poor

to human beings. Charles Hartshorne also makes this point forcefully when he writes: "I am one of those who think that nature would be, once was, and most likely will be again, unspeakably magnificent entirely without man," in "Man and Nature," in *Experience, Existence, and the Good: Essays in Honor of Paul Weiss*, ed. Irwin C. Lieb (Carbondale, Ill., 1961) p. 90.

¹⁰This distinction is developed by Brian Barry in *Political Argument* (London, 1965) pp. 43-47, and in "Justice and the Common Good," *Analysis* 21 (1960-61) 86-90, reprinted in *Political Philosophy*, ed. Anthony Quinton (New York, 1967) pp. 189-93. This distinction is quite different from, and for the purpose of my discussion more helpful than, the distinction commonly employed by philosophers between "teleological" and "deontological" criteria.

by Richard Neuhaus, a Lutheran pastor in Brooklyn. Neuhaus castigates Loren Eiseley's *The Invisible Pyramid* for being more concerned about the "cities clothed in an unmoving haze of smog" and the quality of the watershed than about the poor who must live in those cities, who do not have decent housing, equal job opportunities, a chance at an education, or a fair share of political power.¹¹ The aphorism he quotes, "Who wants to breathe clean air in a racist society?" epitomizes the conflict which can exist between the requirements of aggregative and distributive principles. Clean air is obviously a good for everyone in a society; racism, though a cancerous sore sapping the health of the whole society, manifests itself most directly in the inequalities in the distribution of rights or benefits of societal co-operation.

Although one can make a moral case against pollution on the basis of a distributive principle, insofar as it is asymmetrical, arguing that it is unjust for polluters to continue the activities which thrust the major burden of the ill effects of pollution not on themselves but on others without their consent,¹² one can more effectively talk about the deleterious effects of environmental deterioration on the whole society by employing aggregative principles. When we do this, we become aware of the choices that may have to be made to resolve conflicts between distributive and aggregative considerations. We cannot say in advance which kind of concern should be given priority. The proper balance between the sets of values related to each cannot be determined in the abstract, or accomplished by appealing to some final, ultimate principle as the final standard of morality; rather, the decision as to the weighting of principles must be done in the contingencies of concrete, historical situations. To take the population problem as an example, there is no easy resolution of the conflict between the right of a married couple to privacy in their bedroom chambers, and to their choice of use of contraceptives, and the right of the community to limit the number of children a couple is permitted to procreate. Similarly, the adoption of a policy of "abortion on demand" as a way of lowering the birth rate pits the rights of fetuses to be born and to live (assuming that one views the fetus as having the moral status of an individual human being, and not merely as biological matter in the uterus) against the presumed social good of reduced population growth. The loss of individual freedom incurred in the movement toward some type of command government must be weighed against the need to provide systematic, long-range planning

¹¹ Richard Neuhaus, "Not Nature Alone," *Harper's Magazine*, October 1971, pp. 100-105.

¹² See Marna K. and Frederick S. Carney, "The Economics and Ethics of Pollution Control: An Interdisciplinary Analysis," *Soundings* 54 (Fall 1971) 271-87.

for resource management.¹³ One may have to come very close to the creation of police-state controls to ensure complete compliance with rigid regulations to prevent pollution of the air and water. In each of these illustrations there is a conflict between the requirements of a distributive principle, construed in terms of individual rights, and an aggregative principle, which we might call the public interest or the common good.

American Protestant ethicists, especially those who are heirs of the tradition of "political realism" largely shaped by Reinhold Niebuhr, have been primarily concerned with the formulation and application of distributive criteria, such as justice and equality, and have rarely thought deeply and extensively about aggregative criteria, such as the common good. We find in Protestantism, for example, an abundance of books and pamphlets dealing with an equitable distribution of the earth's abundance,¹⁴ but very little is written about the values tied to the production of wealth in the first place. The assumption seems to be that man's insatiable lust for gain will take care of that, so that all that matters morally is that each man gets a proper share of what is produced. Papal encyclicals have demonstrated more wisdom in seeing the production of worldly goods as important for the common good of humanity.¹⁵

THE POVERTY OF LIBERALISM

Perhaps one of the most important reasons for the lack of attention given to aggregative considerations by Protestant ethicists is the abiding influence of the ideology of liberalism in the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr and the whole tradition of "political realism" following him.¹⁶ The basic understanding of political society that characterizes liberalism can be found in John Locke and John Stuart Mill, who are classical representatives of this tradition. Those familiar with Niebuhr's writings on politics

¹³ For a persuasive statement of the need for social planning, see Donald N. Michael, *The Unprepared Society* (New York, 1968).

¹⁴ The quality of ethical reflection on economic matters in American Christian ethics has not been as high as one would like to see. The National Council of Churches in the United States produced a series of books on Ethics and Economic Life, but the complex interrelationships between ethical and technical economic considerations are not developed nearly so well as one finds in the writings of the British economist and lay theologian D. L. Munby. See, e.g., his *God and the Rich Society* (London, 1961).

¹⁵ A good analysis of these encyclicals is found in Jean-Yves Calvez and Jacques Perrin, *The Church and Social Justice*, tr. J. R. Kirwan (Chicago, 1961).

¹⁶ Wilson Carey McWilliams makes a persuasive case showing how Niebuhr is a "liberal" in spite of himself; cf. "Reinhold Niebuhr: New Orthodoxy for Old Liberalism," *American Political Science Review* 56 (1962) 874-85. For a further development and documentation of this, see Walter Merle Longwood, *The Ends of Government in the Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr and Jacques Maritain: A Study in Christian Social Ethics* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1969) chap. 1.

will note the significant similarities between Niebuhr's thought and what I sketch here in broad strokes as characteristics of liberalism.

Despite the differences in their formulations and the emphases in their thought, in the end Locke and Mill are in basic agreement in their views about the political society. For Locke, men join together in the "social compact" for the "mutual *Preservation* of their Lives, Liberties and Estates," the three basic goods which he sums up in one general term, "Property."¹⁷ Mill, on the other hand, draws up a long list of individual liberties which society must protect, but in the end he also sums them all up in a single sentence: "the only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it."¹⁸ For both men, what finally matters is that the justification of the political society is determined by a conception of individual liberty. The purposes, as well as the limits, of societal action are determined by the one end or value which must be established or secured: the free and unhampered development of the individual.¹⁹ There is little discussion of the political society as a whole, or as a community; rather, the political society is viewed as a complex of interest groups, each competing to attain the power of government and the benefits of social co-operation. The theory about politics and the formulation of policy present in liberalism has been designated by Robert Paul Wolff as a "vector sum" or "give and take" theory.²⁰ The representatives in governmental office, according to this theory, are the focal point for the pressures exerted by various interest groups throughout the nation—the interests being expressed either indirectly through political parties or directly through lobbies or other less formal means of influence. The laws and policies that emerge from the governmental process are shaped by the variety of forces brought to bear on those elected officials.²¹

The point is that "political realism," along with this tradition, views

¹⁷ John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government: An Essay Concerning the True Original Extent and End of Government*, chap. 6, par. 57; chap. 9, par. 123, in *Two Treatises of Government* (A Critical Edition), ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, Eng., 1950) pp. 323–24, 368.

¹⁸ John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty," in *The Utilitarians* (Garden City, N.Y., 1961) chaps. 1, 4, 5 (pp. 475–89, 552–97).

¹⁹ For a critical discussion of the view of political society and the state in liberalism, see A. P. d'Entrèves, *The Notion of the State* (Oxford, 1967) pp. 204–5, and A. D. Lindsay, *The Modern Democratic State* (New York, 1962) pp. 121–46.

²⁰ Robert Paul Wolff, "Beyond Tolerance," in *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, by Robert Paul Wolff et al. (Boston, 1969) pp. 40–46.

²¹ A representative statement of this viewpoint is David Truman, *The Governmental Process* (New York, 1953).

social moral problems almost exclusively as matters of distribution. Politics is conceived of as a contest among interest groups for control of power and decision, and the social problems are identified as those instances in which one group is getting too much, another too little, of the society's resources. The focus of moral concern is the matter of achieving a rough "parity" or "balance of power" among competing interest groups. Characteristically, proposals for new policy originate within whichever group feels that its interests have been slighted, and the policy is advocated as a means of redressing the imbalance.

Although this "realistic" aspect of politics is important and even necessary—and one looks in vain for a recognition of its importance in the writings of many Catholic political theorists—it does not provide a sufficient basis for dealing with many of the social problems of contemporary industrialized society. Many of our greatest problems today are not related to a maldistribution of resources, and they cannot be solved by redressing the balance of power or equalizing the wealth between groups. Foremost among the problems which cannot be adequately understood or dealt with by this essentially "liberal" view of the political society are those related to the environment. Our air, especially in places like New York City, Detroit, Chicago, and Los Angeles, is getting filthier and may even be cancer-inducing.²² Our potable water, almost everywhere in the nation, is increasingly becoming more scarce and less drinkable. Continent-long strips of asphalt and concrete, with their omnipresent billboards and neon jungles, cover more and more of the nation's earth and pare away the community neighborhoods and remaining wilderness areas. Our cities are decaying. Our public-school systems throughout the country are deteriorating. Everywhere the refuse of planned obsolescence, brilliantly documented in Vance Packard's *The Waste Makers*,²³ piles up. All of this, while the citizens of this country are growing richer, whatever their relative standing in society's economic rankings. The reason for this is that clean air and water, community neighborhoods and wilderness areas, a decent public educational system, and enduring manufactured products are not an "interest" which belongs exclusively to any particular social group. These problems cannot be solved by shifting the balance of power or by redistributing the

²² Robert and Leona Rienow point out in their polemical little book *Moment in the Sun* (New York, 1967) that a recent scientific analysis of New York City's atmosphere concluded that a New Yorker on the street took into his lungs the equivalent in toxic materials of 38 cigarettes a day. In addition to the possible ill effects of other materials, experiments have shown that benzpyrene, which is common in urban air pollution, can produce cancer in rodents and dogs. See Virginia Brodine, "A Special Burden," *Environment* 13 (March 1971) 22-24, 29-33.

²³ New York, 1960.

societal resources among existing groups. Of course, this cluster of environmental problems, especially in urban America, tends to hurt the blacks more than the whites, the poor more than the rich, and in that sense there is injustice; but fundamentally they are problems of the society as a whole, not of any particular group. These "aggregative" problems are not taken into account by interest-group liberalism, since they are not problems of distribution or even of an amalgamation of individual "interests." They are problems which pertain to the "common good," and to deal with them it is necessary to have a conception of the political society as a whole constituting a group, or community, with genuine purposes or values which are appropriate to it.

While it would be naive to forget the political significance of the overlapping economic, religious, ethnic, and geographic groups, it is important to view these groups as existing within a larger and more complete human community, which includes the various groups but is not reducible to a sum of them. Concerns such as environmental issues are matters which affect the community as a whole, and there is need for serious ethical deliberation and a collective determination of social choices in relation to them. The political society is not merely an efficient means to obtain desirable political ends, such as freedom, peace, order, or distributive justice, as prevailing liberalism, in its secular or religious forms, tends to see it.²⁴ Rather, the political society is, at its best, an embodiment of the activities, an expression of the hopes and concerns, of the human beings who come together to reflect upon their common life and to act for their common good. What is required, normatively, is a conception of the political society as a "community."

In contrast to the liberal view of the political society, which I have summarized above, the view of the political society for which I am pressing affirms with Aristotle, and the Thomistic tradition after him, that man is fundamentally, by nature, a social being, and that his true being, or essence, necessitates involvement in a human community. Aristotle made the point well when he remarked in the *Politics* that those men who by choice live outside a human community are either lower or higher than other men—that is, either animals or angels.²⁵ The human

²⁴I am indebted to a number of recent discussions of liberalism for my own critique, especially Robert Paul Wolff, *The Poverty of Liberalism* (Boston, 1968); Theodore Lowi, *The End of Liberalism* (New York, 1969); Charles McCoy and John Playford, eds., *Apolitical Politics: A Critique of Behaviorism* (New York, 1967); and William Connolly, ed., *The Bias of Pluralism* (New York, 1969). For an extremely good critique of Wolff, however, see Alasdair MacIntyre, "Political and Philosophical Epilogue: A View of *The Poverty of Liberalism* by Robert Paul Wolff," in *Against the Self-Images of the Age* (New York, 1971) pp. 280-84.

²⁵Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a.

personality, according to this view, is bound up with the smaller and larger communities of which it is a significant member, and its development, structure, and continued functioning takes place and finds its meaning within these contexts. Through his membership in family, church, state, and other institutions, a person is sustained physically, mentally, and spiritually, and at the same time restrained by the limits that are placed upon his activities by the obligations and duties inherent in communal life.

Saying this is not to deny the demonic and destructive ways in which human communities may affect the human personality. It is hollow to emphasize the positive and supportive roles of structures and institutions to ghetto blacks or reservation Indians who are daily confronted with repressive structures and institutions. Critical inquiry into the possibility of radical social change must be an item near the top of any agenda for Christian ethics. But to overemphasize the corruption, perversion, and distortion of personhood that occurs in communities is, speaking theologically, to fail to give them the level of dignity they deserve in our understanding of God's gracious preserving and redeeming work among men. Political institutions, laws, and policies are God's gracious gifts, given not only to restrain sin and evil but to enhance man's good or well-being as well. A fundamental insight of the Christian faith is the idea that man does not fulfil his life on his own, that he finds fulfilment only in sharing in the life of the community, that in losing his life for the sake of an other he will find his true humanity.²⁶

THE COMMON GOOD AS AN ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

I have emphasized the differences between the conceptions of the political society found in classical liberalism and in the tradition I broadly categorized as Aristotelian. In relation to our focus upon moral principles, one can note a significant difference in the principles which are emphasized by each tradition. The difference is not only that distributive considerations seem to predominate in the liberal tradition whereas aggregative considerations emerge as much more important in the Aristotelian tradition; it is also that when aggregative criteria are formulated in the liberal tradition, they are of quite a different sort than one finds in the Aristotelian tradition. Whereas those in the Aristotelian tradition prefer to speak of the "goods" which men seek, individually and corporately, those in the liberal tradition prefer to speak of the "interests" which men pursue. The distinction here is more than semantic; it is closely related to the different understandings of the

²⁶ Mt 10:39: "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it." Cf. Mt 16:25; Mk 8:35; Lk 9:24.

political society that I have sketched above. Although the notion of "interest" is now a commonplace in political and moral discourse, it is a relatively recent innovation. "Interest" carries individualistic and subjective connotations which have seldom been associated with the concept "good," at least not until very recently in ethical theory.²⁷ In fact, it was not until subjective, individual interests became regarded as the primary objective of politics, during the rise of modern utilitarianism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that "interest" could replace "good" as the primary concept for describing and prescribing the ends of political action.²⁸ Individual interests came to be conceived as the "desires" of which the individual is uniquely aware and of which he is the best judge. The "interest" of the community is merely an amalgamation, or sum total, of the individual interests of its separate members. This is in considerable contrast to the concept of "good," which has connotations suggesting the healthy functioning or total well-being of a person or community.²⁹

The distinction between "interest" and "good" requires further elaboration. The distinction is, first of all, a distinction between a "subjective" and a more "objective" evaluation of what ends are morally valuable.³⁰ "Interest" stresses heavily the subjective evaluation, whereas "good" suggests a more objective basis for making such a determination. A slightly different way to express this contrast is to distinguish, following Brian Barry, between "want-regarding" principles, "which take wants as given," and "ideal-regarding" principles, "which rank the satisfaction of some wants higher than the satisfaction of others even if the preferences of the person whose wants are in question are different." "Ideal-regarding" principles are thus contradistinguished from "want-regarding" principles. One need not accept Barry's undue deprecation of "ideal-regarding" principles as so "idiosyncratic, fluctuating and vague"

²⁷ G. E. Moore's "open question" argument, in *Principia ethica* (Cambridge, 1966) p. 43, can be used effectively to refute those who would define the "good" as the object of desire, subjectively determined.

²⁸ One of the best analyses of this metamorphosis of thought is found in S. S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Boston, 1960). See also Richard E. Flathman, *The Public Interest* (New York, 1966) esp. chap. 2.

²⁹ Jacques Maritain is highly critical of the individualistic, subjective interpretation of the social good in what he calls "individualistic liberalism." It leads, in his opinion, to the "anarchy of atoms," dissolving society as such for the benefit of its parts. See his *Scholasticism and Politics*, translation edited by Mortimer J. Adler (New York, 1940) pp. 69-70.

³⁰ Alan Gewirth attempts to distinguish between "subjective" and "objective" determination of the social good in "Political Justice," in *Social Justice*, ed. Richard B. Brandt (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1962) pp. 158, 162. He does not, however, relate these two views to "interest" and "good" as I am suggesting; rather he sees both as ways of conceiving "good."

that it is scarcely correct to speak of them as "principles" at all³¹ to appropriate the useful distinction that he makes. The significance of this distinction can be made evident by comparing two "interest" concepts, commonly found in the writings of interest-group liberalism, with the concept of the "common good," which I am proposing.³²

1) *Common interest*. Of the three aggregative concepts I shall examine, this one is the most individualistic and subjective. It does not deny that different persons or groups may have a shared goal, but it insists that this goal is viewed by the different persons or groups each from their own interest. A common interest which two persons or groups may share in adopting policy X rather than policy Y does not assume they have a common interest in all policy matters. References to common interest are, in fact, often made to differentiate those interests which members of a group or which different groups have at the expense of someone else. Thus, detergent manufacturers could be said to have a common interest in preventing legislation which limits the percentage of phosphate that their products may contain. The common interest would be an appropriate criterion to appeal to if what the environmental crisis is *all* about is survival, as many writers, especially the doomsday prophets, suggest. If, however, we have a concern beyond survival, if we want to survive as a *human* community, then the criterion or value to which we appeal should be one which incorporates more than this minimal concern for existence.

2) *Public interest*. In this concept the reference is to those interests which people have in common qua members of the public. It is somewhat less individualistic than the common interest in that it recognizes a "public" which does have an "interest" that is not merely a goal held in common by those whose divergent interests just happen to coincide. The antonym of "common interest" is "divergent interest"; the antonym of "public interest" is "special interest." Although individual interests are still regarded as amalgamated in the public-interest view,³³ there are

³¹ Barry, *Political Argument* (n. 10 above) p. 95.

³² In developing the distinction below, I am indebted to Barry's *Political Argument*. For a further elaboration of the distinction I am developing here, see my unpublished dissertation, (n. 16 above) chap. 5.

³³ Robert Dahl probably summarizes this view as well as any representative when he writes: "I expect that if one rejects the notion that the public interest is some sort of amalgamation of private interests, there is little philosophical mileage to be gained from using the term at all" (Letter to Committee, cited by Wayne A. R. Leys and Charner Marquis Perry, *Philosophy and the Public Interest* [A document prepared for symposium of the Western Division of the American Philosophical Association, under the direction of the Committee to Advance Original Work in Philosophy, 1959] p. 17). This view of "public interest" is also present in the book which Dahl coauthored with Charles E. Lindblom, *Politics, Economics and Welfare* (New York, 1953) esp. pp. 324, 326, 339, 350, 500-501, 508.

some interests which people share qua members of the public which may conflict with their interests as members of special-interest groups. Thus, those instances in which the effects of pollution are strikingly asymmetrical—that is, disproportionate between those causing it and those suffering from it—which some would discuss in terms of the principle of justice, could be dealt with in terms of the conflict between the public interest and the special interests of the polluters.

3) *Common good*. This concept embodies what I have suggested are “ideal-regarding” considerations. Unlike the two “interest” concepts, it suggests those actions or policies which would promote or entail the healthy functioning or well-being of a person or community. To speak of “X being for the good of A” suggests that X will aid in the survival, growth, or improvement of A. For example, the reordering of governmental policies, the instituting of urban and educational planning, and the changing of consumptive habits, in such a way as to take into account the ecological facts of life, would be appropriately justified by appeals to the common good. The policies inaugurated to accomplish these things may not come about if men are allowed to express their “wants” or “interests” in the pluralistic, political marketplace, unless one assumes, à la Adam Smith, that there is a benevolent “invisible hand” operative to produce a harmonious common good from the clash of private interests.

In arguing for the concept of common good as an ethical framework for evaluating environmental issues, I am not proposing that the common good be viewed as an all-inclusive end, subsuming all distributive and aggregative requirements into it, as tends to be the case in some of its formulations in the Roman Catholic tradition.³⁴ The focus of the common good is upon aggregative considerations of a particular sort, so it is not appropriate even to regard it as *the* aggregative principle that ought to be consulted in making a moral judgment. There are times when it is more appropriate to appeal to the other aggregative principles I have discussed. For example, the control of nuclear weapons in order to prevent the destruction of the human race might be argued for most convincingly by appeals to the common interest of quite divergent political powers. But when we deal with environmental issues, in which we have to be cognizant of the way in which we exist in a web of life, which is a complex and subtly balanced system in which all the parts function to maintain the quality of the integrated whole, the concept of the common good seems particularly appropriate. Our conception of the common good must obviously include the whole biotic community, since

³⁴ This is especially true in Maritain's writings. See, e.g., *The Rights of Man and Natural Law*, tr. Doris C. Anson (New York, 1943) pp. 9–10; *Man and the State* (Chicago, 1951) pp. 11–12.

the quality and health of human life is integrally tied to the quality and health of the lives of all the other members of the biosphere. There is, after all, only one ecology, not a human ecology on the one hand and a subhuman ecology on the other.

As we face the environmental crisis forthrightly, we realize that a massive amount of technical data will be required to redress the damages to the system of life which we have already wrought. Scientists and technicians will have to have not only plenty of knowledge but plenty of wisdom, that is, knowledge tempered by judgment. Since science and technology together form the social and economic dynamic of our times, serving as pacesetters in the political sphere where our solutions must be hammered out, we must hope for a considerable measure of social responsibility³⁵ among their practitioners. But the snowballing effects of population growth, industrialization spreading to the Third World, the increasing exploitation of nonreplaceable fossil and atomic fuels, the continuing push in all parts of the world to increase per capita consumption, the increasing reliance on chemical fertilizers and biocides to boost agricultural yields, are surely problems less in the realm of technique than in the realm of values. If we find the value assumptions or claims of Paul Ehrlich and some of his fellow "commissars" unsatisfactory or even repulsive, we have our own job cut out for us: to provide a fresh vision of man's place in and the common good of the biotic community of life in the future, for which we yearn and to which we make our present commitment.

As a means of providing perspective as we attempt to face realistically the environmental crisis, I have suggested in this essay that we need to delineate an ethical framework or set of moral principles to help us interpret and guide our action. I have argued that there is a poverty of liberalism, particularly evidenced in an analysis of environmental issues, because liberalism focuses almost exclusively upon distributive concerns and fails to take into account the aggregative concerns of society as a whole. I have proposed a modified version of the traditional concept of the common good, related to but distinguishable from the concepts of common interest and public interest, as a normative framework for evaluating issues related to the environment.

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³⁵I have developed the notion of responsibility as accountability in relation to environmental matters in another essay, "Toward an Environmental Ethic," in *That They May Live: Theological Reflections on the Quality of Life* (Staten Island, N.Y., 1972) esp. pp. 58-64.