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Ecological Imagination in Moral Education, East and West

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Relational philosophies developed in classical American pragmatism and the Kyoto School of modern Japanese philosophy suggest aims for greater ecological responsiveness in moral education. To better guide education, we need to know how ecological perception becomes relevant to our deliberations. Our deliberations enlist imagination of a specifically ecological sort when the imaginative structures we use to understand ecosystemic relationships shape our mental simulations and rehearsals. Enriched through cross-cultural dialogue, a finely aware ecological imagination can make the deliberations of the coming generation more trustworthy.

Moral education for the 21st century must better enable youths to intelligently negotiate complex systems, from economic systems to ecosystems, in private choices and public policies. Educational institutions must do a better job helping youths to see beyond simple relations of consumers to commodities if we are to respond to a global economic milieu in which affluence sanctifies the innocence of consumers – an innocence purchased by ignorance of the social, environmental, and inter-species hazards posed by our "business as usual" behaviors. Contemporary moral perception requires supplementation and expansion beyond the speck of self-interest around which most daily consumer concerns orbit.

In order to clarify and develop aims for moral education that are relevant to the global effects of our choices and policies, we need sustained, cross-cultural philosophical dialogue that taps intellectual resources for reinvesting our social and natural interconnections while avoiding moralistic or authoritarian instruction that chokes growth. East Asian and American philosophical traditions, despite the paucity of environmental virtues in the current majority cultures of either, can help us to better perceive the relational networks in which our finite lives are embedded. In the first section of this paper I explore relational thinking in classical American pragmatism and the Kyoto School of modern Japanese philosophy to help develop, in the second section, a concept of "ecological imagination." In the final section I draw from the

foregoing to clarify appropriate aims for contemporary moral education if it is to contribute to greater ecological responsiveness.

1. Relational Imagination, East and West

Acknowledging upfront that comparative projects can tend toward "self-centered, monological, and appropriative modes of ... historical thinking,"[1] it will nonetheless be helpful to identify several general affinities between the relational thinking of American pragmatism and many East Asian traditions, inasmuch as these affinities suggest aims for ecologically responsible moral education. To keep the scope manageable, I draw primarily on ecological wisdom distilled from the Kyoto School.

Kyoto University is where modern Japanese philosophy began with Nishida Kitarō's (1870–1945) work reconstructing the tools and concepts of western philosophy, such as the idea of pre-conceptual pure experience in James, to contribute an eastern standpoint to western philosophy.[2] Nishida built the philosophy department at Kyoto University, secured an appointment for Tanabe Hajime, launched the career of Watsuji Tetsurō, and attracted Nishitani Keiji among other students, continuing what became known as the Kyoto School (*Kyōto-gaku-ha*) tradition.[3]

The Kyoto School philosophers were among the first to bring a distinctively East Asian perspective to enlarging and challenging the philosophical tradition that began in ancient Greece.[4] They are part of an ongoing global philosophical dialogue that extends – or should extend – well beyond the confines of Asian Studies or Japanese Studies. "When I say 'philosophy,' Nishitani wrote, "I first of all mean Western philosophy, since this is the most influential one. ... To think [the Buddhist] standpoint by way of philosophy is my basic concern."[5]

A. The American pragmatist tradition joins many East Asian traditions in avoiding fallacies of reification that privilege agents over situations, static forms over processes, the substantive over the transitive – what James dubbed the "psychologist's fallacy," Dewey recognized as "*the* philosophical fallacy" (LW 1: 27–29), and Whitehead labeled the fallacy of "misplaced concreteness." The words "frog" and "pond" signify not only objects one can point to at simple locations, but also "an organized integration of complex relationships, activities, and events which incorporate a whole transactional field."[6] Whitehead's fallacy of "simple location" highlights our tendency to forget this horizonal field that is incorporated into focal objects.[7]

Individuals co-constitute their horizonal field. Social and natural relationships are popularly conceived as discovered, found, *given*. James and Dewey recognized that we create relationships as well as find them, and we thereby change reality. We do not create from outside or above. Instead, our relational constructions are possibilities of situations that we actualize through interactions – most clearly through the arts, our source of renewal and redirection.

Awareness of the often-obscured and forgotten relational horizon could fund more meaningful, value-rich, and responsive lives. This is why John McDermott claims we are suffering in techno-industrial societies from "spiritual anorexia," a moral, aesthetic, and intellectual starvation for relations.[8] James's therapy for healing relation-starvation, his radical empiricism, aims in part to respect experience through "the re-instatement of the vague," especially through attentiveness to the horizon.[9] Following James, Dewey's contextually sensitive "denotative method" aims at an "intellectual piety toward experience" that compensates for our excessive "will to impose" conceptual *and* practical schemes on experience.[10]

More than any western philosopher before him, James opened the way to mutually transformative east-west dialogue by prioritizing the fullness of embodied experience over narrowly conceptual experience and thereby perceiving a relational world of "pure experience." As McDermott observes of James's contributions to global culture: "James's stress on relations rather than objects ... is congenial to cultures other than that of Western civilization; he espouses a congeniality far more in keeping with the contemporary reality of a truly global culture."[11]

Like the pragmatist tradition, many East Asian traditions articulate a foreground-background and focus-field model of experience.[12] Japan's Zen-steeped Kyoto School is a vital and still underappreciated case in point. The recognition that things never exist wholly by themselves informed the Buddha's teaching that all things are conditioned and impermanent so that our thirst for fixity is the source of avoidable misery. The core idea of dependent co-origination (Sanskrit: *pratītya-samutpāda*) was developed in *The Heart Sutra* as the doctrine that form and emptiness (Sanskrit: *śunyata*) are identical. In "The Standpoint of *Śūnyatā*," Nishitani conceives inter-being through the image of a tree root: "To say that *a thing is not itself* means that, while continuing to be itself, it is in the home-ground of everything else. Figuratively speaking, its roots reach across into the ground of all other things and help to hold them up and keep them standing. It serves as a constitutive element of their being."[13] (In contrast to Nishitani's rationalistic tendencies, James holds that we also directly experience discontinuities, equally real, and we must be as open to disjunctions as to conjunctions.)

Nishida critiques what he sees as a western tendency to cognize form as timeless and placeless being:

> In the splendid development of Western culture in which form is regarded as being, and giving form as good, there is much to be respected and learned. But at the bottom of the Eastern culture that has nurtured our ancestors for thousands of years, isn't there something such that we see the form in the formless and hear the sound of the soundless? Our hearts long for these.[14]

Nishida's reification of East and West leads him to overstatement, but for vivid contrasting images, compare Plato and Aristotle in Raphael's "School of Athens":

with a revered image of Buddha turning his head to the side.

The former is exhibited, fittingly, in the Vatican Museum, while the latter can be encountered at *Eikan-do* temple in Kyoto. Plato and Aristotle are, of course, debating the locus of our knowledge of form as the disclosure of a thing's timeless, essential being. The Buddha, on one common interpretation, appears as a Bodhisattva beckoning a straggling monk. Note his peripheral attention. While Plato and Aristotle dispute the locus of an ethereal, transcendent grounding, the Buddha turns toward the horizon, toward the deep and irreducible networking of things.

Bashō's most famous haiku helps to further clarify Nishida's Mahayana Buddhist point about the form of the formless: old pond / a frog jumps in / the sound of water (*furu ike ya* / *kawazu tobikomu* / *mizu no oto*).[15] The sound of the soundless forms the auditory horizon of Bashō's poem. That is, silence *forms* this haiku as much as the "plop!" We have a greater felt awareness of the silence because it is not verbalized. The reader may intellectualize the haiku's immediate visual and sonorous images, but she is brought back to *this* concrete event, unbroken into subject and object. The conspicuous particularity of this undifferentiated "plop" is not an isolated unit. It can be seen in light of the relational network that it directly implicates. Independent of this network, it is empty, which is to say that substantive emptiness *means* interdependence. Bashō helps us to look out of the corners of our eyes toward the contextual horizon while celebrating the focal beauty of a transient event. This is the East Asian standpoint that Nishida longs to contribute to global philosophical dialogue. It is, tragically, a standpoint complicit with wartime anti-individualistic excesses at the other extreme from atomistic ontologies, but approached critically and creatively it also suggests a path to ecological wisdom.[16]

B. The Kyoto School philosophers further developed *śūnyatā* into the notion of nothingness (Japanese: *mu*), as in Nishida's phrase "the field (or place) of nothingness" (*mu no basho*) and his concept of "absolute nothingness" as the absence of an absolute foundation or timeless metaphysical superstructure. For Nishida, to closely paraphrase a central thesis of James's radical empiricism, the parts of existence are held together by relations that are themselves parts of existence. Ours is a relational world, spatially and temporally. For Nishida as for James, there is no logical need for any "extraneous …connective support."[17] By extension to moral education, while we of course need all the help we can get to square our deliberations with our best ideals, no transcendental, extra-relational plumb line is required as a reference to orient our moral philosophies or our moral lives.

This rejection of simple location and atomistic ontology in favor of trans-actional fields suggests an analogy for moral philosophy from modern physics, a field that influenced the development of both traditions. Einstein demonstrated in the general theory of relativity that gravity is the geometric pattern of space-time in the presence of massive bodies, and these bodies are themselves not ultimate individuals independent of velocity and time. Contrary to the common-sense Newtonian view, gravity is not a simple "force" that reaches out to attract

distant objects. Spacetime is more a relational *event* than a substantive thing that contains separately existing bodies in motion. To postulate a connective support beyond this relational field (such as the Ether) would be superfluous.[18] Analogously, just as the "force" of gravity in Einstein's theory is a function of relational interplay without any extraneous pressure or presence, so no *transcendent* reference point outside the push and pull of experience is logically required or practically necessary as a connective support in our moral philosophies – say, to bind moral agents to what is good, right, or virtuous. Divine commands, unchanging moral laws, transcendental principles, fixed teleologies, or the like are in this respect analogous to the ether of 19th century physics. And like the ether for physical education, they are of mostly historical importance to moral education.

C. Much twentieth and twenty-first century philosophy has been a training ground for relational imagination. For example, like the pragmatist and Kyoto School traditions, many contemporary environmental philosophies emphasize intrinsic and constitutive relations over extrinsic ones.[19] Hence these traditions criticize moral philosophies based on radical autonomy, and they reject the Kantian transcendental subject – I emerge as a differentiated locus of activity through interactions; I am not an antecedently existing entity.

As Roger Ames observes in recent work on Confucian role ethics and American pragmatism, both traditions urge that it is redundant to postulate something extra-relational like Reason-ruled will to explain and support personal identity and behavior. Dewey recognized at least as early as his 1896 critique of the reflex arc that we achieve integration and coordination through our relationships, not despite them through exertions emanating from the inner space of mind. Ames illustrates this with James's analysis of "climate" in *Pragmatism*: "[T]he phenomenal properties of things ... do not inhere in anything. ... The fact of the bare cohesion itself is all the notion of the substance signifies. Behind that fact is nothing."[20] As Dewey argues in *Experience and Nature*, no superordinate-level substance like mind or soul or God is logically or practically *required* for experience to cohere, value to emerge, and criticism to reconstruct. At best, God is optional. The opposite view is one of our chief intellectual obstacles to ecological wisdom.

D. Bao Zhiming compares the model of moral agency in Confucian-influenced societies like China, Korea, and Japan with the familiar model of free-willing autonomy that has dominated western law and ethics. He writes: "Ultimately, man is social, hence relational.... Man as an individual abstracted away from the social and political relationships he is born into never enters the picture of Confucius' ethical world."[21] This east-west contrast reveals itself in linguistic usage. For example, English urges speakers to identify causal agents when interpreting events, whereas it is customary in Japanese to avoid attribution of casual agency.[22] Yet for both classical pragmatism (arguably sans James) and the Kyoto School, individual and society emerge from each other; neither is derivative of the other. For example, Dewey and Watsuji Tetsurō

oppose individualistic philosophies that, Watsuji writes, "remove the human being from social groups, and deal with him as a self-sustaining being." "The locus of ethical problems," Watsuji asserts, "lies not in the consciousness of the isolated individual, but precisely in the in-betweeness of person and person (*Hito to hito to no aida*)."[23]

Deep tonal and conceptual differences between the Kyoto School and classical pragmatism are revealed as they flesh out this "betweeness" of person and person, person and society, and person and nature. Some contrasts are as stark as that between classical pragmatism and the "pragmatism" of Realpolitik. For example, Watsuji's *Rinrigaku* challenges any form of universalizing in moral philosophy, and Dewey's own conception of a universal human nature – which underlies his moral, educational, social, and political thought – should be reconsidered in light of Watsuji's critique. Watsuji, meanwhile, retains controversial elements of feudal communitarianism by subordinating individuals to the emperor as the symbol of communal life. The state, according to his most famous student Yuasa Yasuo, thus becomes for Watsuji "the ultimate standard of value."[24] Meanwhile, Dewey conceives a democratic way of life as the way of communal existence and prioritizes communicative interaction that secures "flexible readjustment" of social institutions.[25] Watsuji's ethical and political theories tend toward centralization and unification, while Dewey's are pluralistic and democratically de-centralized.[26] Yet both develop theories of "betweeness" in which we cannot know who we are or how we ought to live without first knowing where we are, when we are there, and who we are with.

E. In *Neglected Themes & Hidden Variations*, Bret Davis highlights another important affinity between the Kyoto School and pragmatism: anti-zealotry and a rejection of absolute moral bedrocks. Davis discusses the rich, pragmatic anti-zealotry of Ueda Shizutera's Nishida-influenced interpretation of Zen. Davis explains Ueda: "The zealous moralist who does not pass through this radical experience of letting go [of cherished distinctions between good and evil] would remain driven by the three poisons of desirous attachment to whatever has been posited as categorically good, hate of whatever has been posited as categorically bad, and delusion with respect to" the possibility of an epistemological bedrock for passing absolutistic ethical judgments.[27] Nishida translator Christopher Ives adds that for Zen ethical conceptions are "pragmatically useful distinctions rather than unchanging, metaphysically grounded essences."[28]

No matter how socially concerned or eco-friendly she may be, the moral zealot, fearful of ambiguity, clings to received codes as fixed compass points and becomes, to use a well-worn quip by Mark Twain, good "in the worst sense of the word."

These affinities between classical pragmatism and the Kyoto School suggest a path to greater ecological wisdom in a relational world. But what is involved in an attempt to supplement and expand moral perception in light of

these insights? To better guide moral education, we need to know through what cognitive prism ecological perception becomes relevant to our deliberations, and hence to choices and policies. There is need for a theory of ecological imagination.

2. Ecological Imagination

Like the terms space, time, and mass to the modern physicist, the terms individual and system signify to the ecologist things and the relationships that synergistically constitute them rather than ultimate existences. Conditions demand that we extend perception deeper into the socio-cultural, natural, and interpersonal relationships in which we are embedded. Ecological literacy has become essential to this. But even the most thorough knowledge about complex systems will overwhelm rather than enhance moral intelligence if that knowledge is not framed by *imagination* – here understood not as a faculty but as a function – in a way that relates one's individual biography to one's encompassing environment and history.

Ecological thinking, at least as it enters into our deliberations about private choices and public policies, is a function of this sort of imagination. But in order to build a working definition of ecological imagination, it is essential first to better understand (or at least to stipulate) what imagination *is* and *does*, particularly given dramatic variability among western theories of imagination.[29]

What *is* imagination from a cognitive standpoint? Cognitive scientists studying the neural synaptic connections we call imagination define it helpfully as a form of "mental simulation" shaped by our embodied interactions with the social and physical world and structured by projective mental habits like metaphors, images, semantic frames, symbols, and narratives.[30]

What does imagination *do*? More than a capacity to reproduce mental images, Dewey highlights imagination's active and constitutive role in cognitive life. "Only imaginative vision," he urges in *Art as Experience*, "elicits the possibilities that are interwoven within the texture of the actual."[31] Only through imagination do we see actual conditions in light of what is possible, so it is fundamental to all genuine thinking – scientific, aesthetic, or moral. It is also an ordinary and integral function of human interaction, not the special province of poets or daydreamers.

Imagination is essential to the emergence of meaning, a necessary condition for which is to note relationships between things. To take a simple ecological example, many migratory songbirds I enjoy in summer over a cup of coffee are declining in numbers in part because trees in their winter nesting grounds in Central America are bulldozed to plant coffee plantations. Awareness of this amplifies the meaning of my cup of coffee. "To grasp the meaning of a thing, an event, or a situation," Dewey notes, "is to see it in its relations to other things."[32] Or as Mark Johnson recently put it, "The meaning of something is its relations, actual or potential, to other qualities, things, events, and experiences."[33]

Meaning is amplified as new connections are identified and discriminated. Ideally, this amplification operates as a means to intelligent and relatively inclusive foresight of the consequences of alternative choices and policies.

What is *ecological* imagination?[34] Michael Pollan observes that "proper names have a way of making visible things we don't easily see or simply take for granted."[35] Ecological imagination names a cognitive capacity that tends to be taken for granted by environmental and social advocates. Environmental thinkers have long recognized that ecological thinking helps us to forecast and facilitate outcomes so we can better negotiate increasingly complex systems. Yet little direct attention has been given to theorizing about the imaginative dimension of such thinking. Ecological thinking is fundamentally imaginative, at least in the sense that it requires simulations and projections shaped by metaphors, images, etc. These metaphor-steeped simulations inform choices and policies by piggybacking on our more general deliberative capacity to perceive, in light of imaginatively rehearsed possibilities for thought and action, the relationships that constitute any object on which we are focusing. By means of this general deliberative capacity, relational perceptiveness can enter into practical, aesthetic, and scientific deliberations so that we understand focal objects through connections distant in space and time.

There is of course nothing uniquely ecological about the workings of this general sort of relational imagination in moral life, save in the etymological sense in which the ecologies study the homes of biological organisms. In Confucian role ethics, relational imagination is guided by metaphors of family and filial responsibility, not by ecological metaphors.[36] Philosophers from Dewey to Nishida to Merleau-Ponty were skilled in a form of imaginative inquiry often discussed in hindsight as ecological. But they seldom framed connections in terms of organism-environment interactions that affect the distribution and profusion of organisms, and the tendency to refer to all thinking about interrelatedness as ecological has contributed to the concept's excessive vagueness.

Ecological imagination is a concept too broad to encompass in an essay, but the foregoing suggests a working definition that will suffice to urge its import for moral education. Ecological imagination is here understood as relational imagination shaped by key metaphors used in (though not necessarily originating in) the ecologies. That is, imagination is specifically "ecological" when key metaphors and the like used in the ecologies organize mental simulations and projections. Our deliberations enlist ecological imagination when these imaginative structures (some of recent origin and some millennia old) shape what Dewey calls our dramatic rehearsals.

Many remediable moral failures stem from mal-development of our capacity to oscillate in our imaginative rehearsals between things and relevant relations, as is painfully evident in our troubled dealings with complex social and natural systems. Examples are the familiar stock-and-trade of U.S. environmental advocacy: the social and environmental costs of Wal-Mart's

"everyday low prices," the soda (corn syrup) or cheese (corn-fed cows) hitched to the eutrophied "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico, the iceberg lettuce linked to California's Imperial Valley border farms drawing off the last trickles of the Colorado River, the light switch twined up with the deaths of miners in West Virginia's coal industry, the oil furnace interlaced with BP's 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill. To deliberate about any of these things requires a sort of imaginative stretching in which we hold relationships before attention as we reflect. Such stretching can confer significance upon otherwise mechanical and surficial experiences, and it opens the way for critical assessment and redirection of individual and institutional practices.

A culture's understanding of ecosystems is an in-road for revealing how they conceive their place in a matrix of relations.[37] Indeed, the sort of imaginative simulation used to understand an ecosystem is often relevant to our dealings with other complex systems. The horizon of ecological imagination is to a considerable degree structured by metaphors.[38] There are many conventional metaphors by which English-speakers make sense of ecosystemic relationships (e.g., web, network, community, organism, economic system, field pattern, whole, home, fabric) and trophic relations (e.g., cycles or loops, energy flows, (food) chains/links, pyramids, musical performances). Image-schematic structures such as containment, up-down, balance, and the like also play a vital role. These metaphors and image schemas structure the logic of much of the debate clustering around eastern and western folk metaphysical models: what Ames contrasts as the "object ontology" implicit in the folk metaphysics of many modern western cultures and subcultures (compatible with a mechanistic, linear-sequential, and reductive philosophy) and the "field ontology" of Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist thinking.[39]

Although further development is beyond the scope of this paper, a full account of ecological imagination would need to build a case for three interrelated theses. By way of summary of what has been said above: (1) Moral deliberation is imaginative in several senses, including the straightforward sense that it involves mental simulations shaped in part by metaphors. (2) One practical upshot of this is that, oriented by such interpretive structures, we are able to zoom in on things, events, concepts, institutions, and persons without losing sight of their relational context – say, a child in relation to family, a sunrise in relation to the solar system, a statement in relation to its interpersonal, socio-cultural, or literary context. (3) Our deliberations enlist specifically ecological imagination when metaphors used in the ecologies shape our mental simulations, and this offers a valuable resource for negotiating complex systems.

3. Aims of Ecologically Responsive Moral Education

The foregoing reflections support several interrelated, general inferences about appropriate experimental aims to guide moral education toward ecological responsibility.[40]

(1) There is rarely a single right thing to do. Moral education – across the curriculum, not as a separate area of study – should help to cultivate tolerance for ambiguity.

(2) We can rarely if ever do a single thing. Insofar as actions affect any complex system, wise deliberations forecast relevant, overlapping ripple effects that spread invisibly and irrevocably. For example, although above-ground we see trees as individuals, they form network communities in which individuals are root-grafted to each other and share energy through mychorrizal fungi, so logging often kills non-targeted trees. As the Kyoto School philosophers recognize, *any* focal object is simultaneously "on the periphery of …others, proximal to some, distant to others."[41] Due to relational continuities of this sort, no action has a singular result.

Note, however, that from the standpoint of classical pragmatism, a vague sort of religious awareness of *general* interconnectedness is insufficient on its own and may be empirically unwarranted. We must attend to *specific* relationships relevant to our dramatic rehearsals, *this* situation pregnant with connections, if we are to mediate troubled situations. Moral education should aim to cultivate the habit of forecasting (in imagination) the way *this* act *here* will tug at proximal and distant others. The consequences of past decisions should be our guide.[42]

(3) A prototypical western – and particularly American – concept of harm as immediate, localized, intentional, and directed toward individuals is alarmingly out of step with the actual conditions of our lives. Take global climate change as an example. We are increasingly aware that simple acts like heating or cooling a home, fueling a car, or turning on a light switch cause harm. The IPCC and international relief organizations project that the harm will be worst for future generations, impoverished citizens of developing nations, poor and disenfranchised citizens of industrialized nations, other species, and non-human nature more generally. That is, the greatest harm caused by local greenhouse gas emissions is long-term, widely distributed, unintentional, and not directed toward individuals.[43] In *Eaarth*, Bill McKibben imagines impoverished citizens in the tropics running on a treadmill that steepens as climate change intensifies. Meanwhile, citizens of rich nations are unintentionally pushing the treadmill's "fast" button through investment in the massive economic infrastructure of fossil fuel.[44]

In tandem with expanding the perception of harm, moral education should help youths understand that, although it is easier to think atomistically than systemically, the causes of harms are frequently systemic and institutional. More refined relational and ecological imaginations will better equip the coming generation to make individual choices *and* systemic policies to squeeze through the bottlenecks they are inheriting.

(4) Moral principles and rules must be analyzed and justified without assuming an autonomous, detached, dispassionate individual consciousness that reduces ethical decision-making to applying timeless rational principles.

Principles and rules can help us to feel and think our way through relational webs, but the standpoint of being situated or placed should be the primary standpoint of moral education rather than standpoints steeped in conceptions of form as timeless being.[45]

(5) We cannot respond to everything that makes a legitimate demand upon us. Hence, moral experience is irreducibly tragic, in the classical sense: in any moral situation there are more things to which we *ought* to respond than we *can* respond. Moral education should help youths beyond the usual attitudes we learn to cope with the burden of inexhaustible oughts: resignation, guilt (especially in western cultures), or shame (especially in eastern cultures). Instead, moral education should cultivate the courage to respond to moral problems without cowering from the truth in James's defense of pluralism: "The word 'and' trails after every sentence. Something always escapes. 'Ever not quite' has to be said of the best attempts made anywhere in the universe at attaining all-inclusiveness."[46]

The foremost need in moral life is for what Ames calls "relational virtuosity." Youths should, however, also learn to use and develop principles and rules, which in Confucian-steeped societies of East Asia may compensate for partiality in family or group-based relational moralities, and it may also help to compensate for narrowly anthropocentric tendencies.[47] But these principles should be conceived as tools to be evaluated by the work they do, not as ahistorical, a-contextual, and placeless verities. The principles and procedures of mainstream western moral philosophies have often made people *confident* that that they are acting within precise moral limits. Yet no matter how rigorous the rational demonstrations of our ethical theories may be, confidence does not entail responsibility.[48]

(6) We must nonetheless believe and act with patience and courage amid ambiguity, and ethical reflection is born of this need. Unfortunately moral theorizing has quested for convictions even greater than the moral convictions of those parrots of reactive mores who philosophers rightly distrust. Most western ethicists still want three things from a theory: a right way to reason about morals based on principle-driven moral agency, a clear procedure for definitely resolving moral quandaries, and a single right thing to do. This would be fine if moral problems could be solved by hitting upon a coherent and compelling arrangement of ideas, but the locus of moral problems is situational and interactive.

As with many of the moral images and conceptual models we construct to organize our moral experiences, traditional ethical theories can help us to be more perceptive and responsive. Philosophical ethics can proffer hypotheses that enlarge perceptions and "render men's minds more sensitive to life about them."[49] It is valuable only insofar as it renders this service, so the quest for finality and completeness has been a distraction save as it has unconsciously enlarged perceptions and made us more sensitive to the world about us.

There is a Chinese idiom for tunnel-vision: "like looking at the sky from the bottom of a well." As McDermott writes of James's philosophy of relations:

"Everything we perceive teems with relational leads, many of them novel, and therefore often blocked from our experience by the narrowness and self-defining, circular character of our inherited conceptual schema."[50] Thus James's pluralism, as Dewey explains it, "accepts unity where it finds it, but it does not attempt to force the vast diversity of events and things into a single rational mold."[51] Swimming against the current of powerful cultural habits, moral education should aim to help youths be patient with the inevitable suspense of moral inquiry, distrustful of ego attachments that breed moral zealotry and single vision, aware of the fallibility and incompleteness of any moral deliberation, and imaginative in pursuing relational leads. There is need for fallibilistic confidence without sanctimoniousness and puritanical fervor, boldness and courage in mediating troubled situations without need or expectation of certainty, and ameliorative action without fatalistic resignation or paralyzing guilt and shame.

(7) Minimize metaphysical assumptions. When in pain, near death, Einstein was asked "Is everything all right?" "Everything is all right," he replied, "but I am not."[52] Most believe, with Einstein, that there must be a relational attunement that can ultimately be affirmed as good and beautiful and worthy of our greatest contemplative moments. Perhaps the world's fabric(s) is congenial to being grasped as a unity by our minds and warmly appraised by our judgments, as rationalists and monists suppose. But moral education must proceed independent of such faith.

(8) It is a general truth that we *cannot* respond to what we do not perceive, and we *will* not respond to perceptions unless they are immediately felt. This suggests an aesthetic dimension to environmental ethics and ecological moral education. In the vocabulary of Dewey's aesthetic theory, all active *artistry* in life (scientific, aesthetic, or moral) is funded by *aesthetic* perceptiveness. Or in Nishida's own artistic-aesthetic vocabulary of "active intuition" (his mature development of the Jamesian concept of pure experience[53]), both moral action and artistic creativity are simultaneously active and intuitive, transformative and receptive. Along these lines traced by Dewey and Nishida, by situating us within relational fields of dizzying complexity the ecologies can dilate aesthetic perception and open us to enjoyments and bereavements on a wider scale. Connections are immediately felt as we simulate them in imagination, and the resulting qualitative field marks an experience with its distinctive character.

This immediately felt qualitative field gives an experience its identity and meaning and funds concerted moral action. As Watsuji implies of the Japanese tradition of *renga* "linked" poetry and we may observe of jazz improvisation, we must respond empathetically to each other instead of imposing insular designs, and we must rigorously imagine how others will respond to our actions.[54] Watsuji explains *renga*: "[I]f there are self-centered persons in the company, a certain 'distortion' will be felt and group spirit itself will not be produced. When there are people who, lacking individuality, are influenced only by others' suggestions, a certain 'lack of power' will be felt, and a creative enthusiasm will

not appear."[55] Moral education should help youths to cultivate such improvisational moral artistry.

(9) Finally, moral education should aim to cultivate ecological imagination, both to help youths deal more intelligently with the global scene of human impact on the natural environment *and* to help them aesthetically reconnect. Consider as a case study the Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School in Berkeley, California, where children are planting, nurturing, and harvesting food in a schoolyard garden, cooking it in the school kitchen, and consuming it in the dining hall. This is not superadded onto "real" curricular work; it is thoroughly interwoven. Through an ongoing rhythm of doing and reflection they learn about the recycling loop of growth, maturity, decline, death, and decay. They explore how food cycles in the garden intersect larger natural systems: the water cycle, the cycle of seasons, and the like. This sets conditions for children to learn that every action has systemic consequences so they are more likely to become the kinds of people who habitually take a measure of responsibility for these consequences.[56] These children are motivated to learn by sheer enjoyment of the activities, but in some sense they are "preparing for success," to invoke the overused catch-phrase – not success in their ability to out-consume others, but success in their ability to perceive and respond to a relational world.

Ecological imagination is both a tool of awareness-through-mental cultivation, as Buddhist thinkers might emphasize, and simultaneously a tool of responsibility-through-action, as classical pragmatists would highlight. Through active exercise of ecological imagination we are already healing ourselves and our environments. Naming this capacity simply discloses its contours so that we can avoid a situation that is both hopeless and meaningless.

Infinite relationships between ourselves and our "fellows and with nature *already* exist," Dewey observed.[57] The chief end of moral education is to wisely attend and respond to these relationships. A fine-tuned ecological imagination is not a panacea for the sort of aesthetic insensitivity that leads us, in George Eliot's words, to "walk about well wadded with stupidity."[58] But married to virtues of patience, courage, and responsibility, and enriched through cross-cultural dialogue, a finely aware ecological imagination can make the deliberations of the coming generation more trustworthy than that of their forebears as they appraise possible avenues for acting with an eye to systemic effects.

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NOTES

1. Yunte Huang, *Transpacific Imaginations: History, Literature, Counterpoetics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 156.

2. James's influence is most pronounced in Nishida's early work, *An Inquiry Into the Good* [1911] (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990). See, e.g., pp. 4ff. for Nishida's explicit use of James's concept of the "fringe."

3. This paper follows Japanese naming conventions for all Japanese authors, with family name followed by given name. However, all Japanese names and words are given in Romanized characters.

4. This is a central thesis of James Heisig's *Philosophers of Nothingness* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001). Heisig's is one of the best introductions to the Kyoto School available in English.

5. Nishitani Keiji, "Encounter with Emptiness: A Message from Nishitani Keiji," in *The Religious Philosophy of Nishitani Keiji* (Berkeley, Cal.: Asian Humanities Press, 1989), pp. 1, 4. Nishitani, far more than Nishida, explicitly understood his project in relation to Buddhist religion.

6. Thomas Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature: The Horizons of Feeling* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 109.

7. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Free Press, 1925), pp. 48ff.

8. John J. McDermott, *Streams of Experience* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), pp. 128–131.

9. James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover), vol. 1, p. 254.

10. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, LW 1: 392. All references to Dewey are to *The Collected Works of John Dewey*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, 37 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969–1991). Citations are to EW, MW, or LW (Early Works, Middle Works, or Later Works), followed by volume number and page number. Despite a common mistake, Heidegger's critique of overreaching "calculative" philosophies does *not* directly apply to Dewey's pragmatism.

11. McDermott, "A Relational World," in *The Drama of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), pp. 147–148.

12. See, for example, Steve Odin, *The Social Self in Zen and American Pragmatism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 381.

13. Nishitani Keiji, *Religion and Nothingness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 149.

14. In Yuasa Yasuo, *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory*, trans. Nagatomo Shigenori and Thomas Kasulis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 21.

15. Matsuo Basho, *Basho: The Complete Haiku*, trans. Jane Reichhold (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2008), p. 59. I am grateful to Thomas Alexander for an unpublished essay titled "Form, Emptiness, and Nature" that uses Bashō's poem as a way to explain eastern and western conceptions of form.

16. On the Kyoto School and wartime nationalism, see James Heisig and John Maraldo, *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994). In "The Development of American Pragmatism," Dewey insightfully writes: "In considering a system of philosophy in its relation to national factors it is necessary to keep in mind not only the aspects of life which are incorporated in the system, but also the aspects against which the system is a

protest. There never was a philosopher who has merited the name for the simple reason that he glorified the tendencies and characteristics of his social environment; just as it is also true that there never has been a philosopher who has not seized upon certain aspects of the life of his time and idealized them" (LW 2: 6).

17. James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (New York: Henry Holt, 1912), p. xii.

18. Douglas Snyder argues that James's theory of relations eventually played some role in rethinking the nature of matter and energy at the quantum level as grainy and indeterminate, which in turn influenced Dewey's idea that scientific objects are ultimately relational and statistical. See Dewey, "Time and Individuality," LW 14: 98–114 and *The Quest for Certainty*, LW 4: 156–177. On the influence of James's radical empiricism on Niels Bohr, see Douglas Snyder, "On Complementarity and William James," *American Psychologist* 49(October 1994): 891–892.

19. In constitutive relations, as Ames explains, "the dissolution of relationships is surgical, diminishing both parties to the degree that this particular relationship has been important to their continuing identity." Roger Ames, "'The Way is Made in the Walking': Responsibility as Relational Virtuousity," in *Responsibility*, ed. Barbara Darling-Smith (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2007), p. 55.

20. William James, *Pragmatism and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin, 2000), p. 42. See Roger Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012).

21. In Carl Becker, "Language and Logic in Modern Japan." *Communication & Cognition* 24 (1991): 169.

22. Becker, "Language and Logic in Modern Japan," p. 167.

23. Watsuji Tetsuro, *Watsuji Tetsurō's Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan*, trans. Yamamoto Seisaku and Robert E. Carter (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 13, 10. In *Fūdo* (translated as *Climate and Culture*) Watsuji makes clear that his ethics extends to the in-betweeness of persons and nature, offering at least implicitly a resource for environmental ethics. Steve Odin defends this position in *The Social Self in Zen and American Pragmatism*, chap. 13.

24. Yuasa Yasuo, Appendix to Watsuji, *Rinrigaku*, p. 315.

25. See Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, MW 9, chap. 7.

26. Biographically, both Dewey and Watsuji at least tacitly supported disastrous wars for the sake of a national ideal: America making the world safe for democracy (WWI, for Dewey), and Japan liberating Asia from Western colonial hegemony (WWII, for Watsuji).

27. Bret Davis, "Letting Go of God for Nothing: Ueda Shizuteru's Non-Mysticism and the Question of Ethics in Zen Buddhism," in *Neglected Themes & Hidden Variations*, ed. Victor Hori and Melissa Curley (Nagoya, Japan: Nanzan Institute, 2008), pp. 242–243.

28. In Davis, "Letting Go of God for Nothing," p. 243.

29. A more complete analysis of imagination, especially as it relates to Dewey, can be found in my *John Dewey and Moral Imagination: Pragmatism in Ethics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

30. George Lakoff, *The Political Mind* (New York: Viking Press, 2008), p. 241. For a bibliography of research on imagination in cognitive science, see Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh* (New York: Basic Books, 1998).

31. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, LW 10: 348.

32. Dewey, *How We Think*, LW 8: 225.

33. Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 265.

34. The adjective ecological is preferred here because, like the Japanese word *kankyō*, "environmental" dualistically connotes external surroundings. The term ecological accommodates the concept of a live creature stretching to notice the very relationships that synergistically constitute it. It is also far richer metaphorically.

35. Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food* (New York: Penguin, 2008), p. 28.

36. See Roger Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary*.

37. Ecology has become more than the science of the relationships between organisms and their environments. Its meaning far exceeds what Ernst Haeckel had in mind when he coined the word in 1866 (a word that had been casually tossed off by Thoreau earlier) or Arthur Tansley when he coined the word ecosystem in 1935 (to substitute quantifiable energy fields for fuzzy, quasi-mystical eulogies to universal connectedness). See J. Baird Callicott, "The Metaphysical Implications of Ecology," in J. ed. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames, *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

38. For an analysis of the metaphorical structuring of ecological imagination, see my "Ecological Imagination," *Environmental Ethics* 32 (Summer 2010): 183–203.

39. On object vs. field ontology, see Roger Ames, "The Way is Made in the Walking."

40. "Aims" are here understood in Dewey's sense: "The educational process has no end beyond itself; it is its own end; the educational process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming" (*Democracy and Education*, MW 9: 54).

41. David Jardine, *To Dwell With a Boundless Heart* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 71.

42. Cf. McDermott, "A Relational World," p. 152.

43. See Dale Jamieson, "The Moral and Political Challenges of Climate Change," in *Creating a Climate for Change*, ed. Susanne Moser and Lisa Dilling (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

44. Bill McKibben, *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet* (New York: Times Books, 2010).

45. For a book-length criticism of my situational and instrumental theory of the role of principles in moral inquiry, see Mark Coeckelbergh, *Imagination and Principles: An Essay on the Role of Imagination in Moral Reasoning* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Coeckelbergh argues that I have gone too far in the direction of particularism. Instead, I reject the standpoint of the universalist-particularist debate, which fails to appreciate either the profound instrumental value or the myopic limitations of principle-based reasoning.

46. William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), 145.

47. On this theme, see David Hall and Roger Ames, *The Democracy of the Dead: Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope for Democracy in China* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999).

48. This is a central theme of Dewey's *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. E.g., see MW 12: 91.

49. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, MW 12: 91–92.

50. McDermott, *The Drama of Possibility*, p. 147.

51. Dewey, "The Development of American Pragmatism," LW 2: 9.

52. Walter Isaacson, *Einstein* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), p. 541.

53. In 1936, Nishida wrote in the Preface to an edition of *An Inquiry into the Good*: "That which I called in the present book the world of direct or pure experience I have now come to think of as the world of historical reality. The world of action-intuition – the world of poiesis – is none other than the world of pure experience" (p. xxxiii).

54. On improvisational moral intelligence and moral artistry, cf. my *John Dewey and Moral Imagination*, chaps. 6–7.

55. Robert Carter, "Watsuji Tetsurō," (2004) in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, at plato.stanford.edu/entries/watsuji-tetsuro/. Accessed 1 July 2008.

56. The Edible Schoolyard Project is discussed by Fritjof Capra in *Ecological Literacy*, ed. Michael K. Stone and Zenobia Barlow (San Francisco, Cal.: Sierra Club Books, 2005). See also www.edibleschoolyard.org/cla_eco.html. On ecological education, see David Orr, *Ecological Literacy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

57. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, MW 14: 226.

58. George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 226.

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