

## LECTURE SEVEN



### Maturity's Idealism

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*For Jim Davidson, a great teacher*

Thanks for coming outside. We rescheduled to the afternoon, so we could enjoy the fall before it gets too cold, and we got lucky. The weather is warm enough. Remember, in two weeks, we will meet at the Forestry School's preserve out in the country. Your discussion leaders have the buses' departure time. Today, we're in this small amphitheater. Soon, the forest. Does anyone know: does the Drama Department perform Greek tragedies here? In two weeks, we'll be inside the preserve barn, which is an interesting place itself, historical, preserving early nineteenth century New England. Today, enjoy the trees over us with their rusts and reds.<sup>1</sup>

For the remaining lectures, we'll depart from the previous. Last week, we passed a threshold in our argument. We can now see what the world should be like if the argument holds. We will be looking at personal development and social change. What do we have to do to bring out what is best in us? We are already greener than we think, but that's not good enough. How do we intensify our connection with life on Earth? How should social change proceed so that the Earth is brought out in the politics and economy of the world?

If we have good reason to become citizens of Earth, and if doing so is a matter of common humanity, then we should change our characters and habits. Our institutions should increasingly show respect for all life. We should keep growing, because the upshot of our argument so far is that to be

authentically human is to respect life increasingly. That devotion ought to be part of our effort to live well. Being true to ourselves entails greening our culture.

Today's lecture is about maturing. Next week and following, I will focus on social change. Remember, when we were introduced to ecological justice, I argued that institutional measures are often more fitting for ecological problems than are personal deeds. The scale of ecological problems and the difficulty of being personally responsible for them are large. Thus I already suggested that citizenship, not private morality, would be a theme in these lectures. Ultimately, these lectures are part of what you might call "citizenship studies." *I don't want us to think only of morality, and I don't want us to think only of politics, but I want us to think of both together.* The main place where morality and politics join is in citizenship. By maturing, we can become better citizens. The main point of becoming a better citizen is to make our institutions better, to produce positive social change. So today we explore forming citizenship. Then, over the next two weeks, we will explore how a citizen might induce social change, what she might aim for and how she might get there.

The title of today's lecture is "maturity's idealism," because that is what I think citizens should have to be true to earthly humanity. Maturity is an idea that resonates with the language of socialization used last time, the idea of becoming mature in a society. Today, we will explore some of the features we ought to acquire to become maturely socialized, given that our sense of humanity ought to be ecological. How should ecological respect for life pervade our characters? How should we behave so as to develop an ethos of respect for all life?

I want to begin our exploration of these questions by returning to the notion of socialization from last lecture. Socialization makes us a member of society, able to live well with others. What we have now argued is that it should also include becoming a member of a society meeting the universe of life. We should be able to live well with other forms of life.

### Ecological Social Maturity

Ecological social maturity is being able to live well not only with each other, but also with other forms of life.

The key idea in socialization is the idea of *living with* others. What we have clarified is that the others with whom we live include what the ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood calls "Earth others"—the other forms of life liv-

ing on, above or in this planet among humans.<sup>2</sup> How do we improve on respecting life so that we live maturely with other life forms?

Remember, idealistic self-overcoming is authentically human. Some philosophers call such a view "perfectionist." The perfectionist school of thought holds that we are *not* perfect, and so have room to grow.<sup>3</sup> The point is made less moralistically, however. As psychoanalysts and philosophers of education have long explained, one condition of a healthy mind is that it keeps growing. "You should never stop growing" is therefore an old wise saying, because it is developmentally accurate.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, we seek a form of socialization that grows, that does not learn one lesson and quit. Socialization should not remain stagnant. What keeps us growing in our efforts to live with other forms of life? What makes a person keep greening over a lifetime? (By the way, "green" works here because it suggests growth, rejuvenation, and being ecological.)

As philosophers of education know, the heart of development is lifelong learning. Lifelong learning consists in habits and attitudes that hold us as learners throughout life and not just while we complete a degree. When we learn *how* to learn, we position ourselves to learn throughout life.<sup>5</sup> Analogously, when we learn how to develop ecologically, we learn how to live up to the ideal in socialization across changes in cultural, economic, political, and personal circumstance. That is authentic. Also, since our circumstances often change (especially in light of ecological problems), it is worth developing a habit of lifelong learning and setting it as the goal of our investigation. Such a habit would also be a characteristically American attitude, at least according to American pragmatism.<sup>6</sup>

Lifelong learning fits the idea of maturity well. After all, the key to maturity is to learn how to mature. Mature people know how to grow. The idea, then, is to find elements of our character allowing us to grow within the ecological dimensions of society. Within those dimensions, we seek habits, because habits keep patterns of action consistent. The habits we want, in turn, are habits that improve our understanding and practice of how to live with other forms of life.

How do we know what these habits are? Our contemporary economy certainly does not cultivate them. In fact, our contemporary economy erodes the very language of respect, pressuring everything toward a resource or a value. That is how powerfully the economy reworks our habits, even our speech. So we need to think. What concepts do we use to understand living with others?

One would appear to be the concept of *integration*. When we live with others, we are integrated. The first indication of a good, ecological habit might be that, through it, we can integrate with other life forms, or that the

habit directly promotes integration. Does a society of people with these habits, whatever they turn out to be, coexist with the other species on this planet? Does a society of such people allow the biosphere to support human life well, rather than causing problems? Can we find habits that allow or create a balance between human needs and the needs of other living kinds? Call this demand of maturity “the integration criterion.”

### *The Integration Criterion*

A developmental habit is ecologically mature if and only if it helps us balance, or opens us up to balance, human needs with the needs of the other life forms on Earth.

I will discuss the logic of this criterion in a moment. First, let me find others. What else would solidify our ability to live with Earth others?

We know that when we develop socially, we become more human. Of course, it is not entirely clear what it means to “become more human.” How do we judge that? Is it like a tingling in our human thalamus or the pineal gland?<sup>7</sup> Yet we commonly do speak of becoming more human, especially when we become more attuned to our collective life, true to ourselves, open minded about the shape life can take, and when we solidify our nondestructiveness. When we say someone is deeply human or some other like compliment, we mean she understands human life and what makes it meaningful across a range of life situations: death, birth, love, hatred, family, procreation, work, food, sleep, shelter, sickness, health ... Also, becoming more human, we become more faithful to who we are.

Perhaps, then, there are ways ecological maturity makes us more human? We already saw an intimation of this during our discussion of the homeless gardener, Jimmy. If ecological identification could establish his self-respect and root his being at home, we might come to ourselves and attune our respect as we shade our world in green. In this way, the second principle of good developmental habits would be that they humanize us. Call this criterion “the humanization criterion.”

### *The Humanization Criterion*

A developmental habit is ecologically mature if and only if it makes us more fully human or maintains our humanity without undermining it.

The humanization criterion may involve restraint. Given the way our economy provides powerful incentives for states, corporations, organizations, and

people to cater to economic interests, developing maturity should involve knowing when to say “enough”—or as Arabic speakers say, “cghelas”!<sup>8</sup> The exploitative tendencies of capitalism pressure the Earth’s life to give up resources for profit and pressure us, too, to work more for less. Maturity in such an environment involves drawing the line against what is dehumanizing, much as our culture drew the line against slavery, child labor, and the more-than-eight-hour workday. The humanization criterion selects habits that maintain the categorical nature of respect for life. It selects habits that do not let our identity erode through capitalist pressure, including ideological pressure to change the very language of our lives toward a resource- and value-centered life.

Are there other criteria of ecological maturity? As we saw in our second week’s lecture on justice, moral attention in many environmental matters calls for an expanded sense of human agency in context. We saw this with reference to expanded temporal, spatial, and biological frames of reference. To take one example, global warming is likely to affect many future generations and to build over more than a lifetime. Moreover, it seems to be affected by actions patterned across the globe. Finally, it makes us realize that our health is dependent on our ecosystems and the overall stability of the biosphere. This point about interdependencies is one we haven’t emphasized enough. But the great environmentalist Aldo Leopold did. He even made the point into something he called “the land ethic.”

In his classic book from 1949, Leopold urged his readers to “think like a mountain.”<sup>9</sup> What this meant is that we should think of our existence in a natural order where there are many checks and balances—that is, antagonisms and symbioses. Drawing on an example from American history, Leopold noted that you can shoot all the wolves in Yosemite Valley, and this might seem a good thing not only for tourists and campers, but also for ranchers. Yet when the wolves go, the elk and deer proliferate without any major predator against them. The check has been lifted, and the imbalance starts. Soon the trees are grazed at an alarming rate and the saplings torn to shreds. If things go badly, other ground-grazing animals start to have a hard time, especially when they depend on the first six feet of trees. If things go very badly, fewer trees can mean fewer seeds and bugs to eat, a problem for birds, and much erosion due to decreased root mass in the area. Then topsoil drains away, and this decreases the fertility of the mountainside. By contrast, to think like a mountain is to contextualize human flourishing within its ecology and to be aware of interdependencies ahead of time. That requires a broad frame of mind and ecological knowledge.

Urged, then, by our discussion of ecological justice and also by Leopold’s famous imperative, it seems to me that a good habit in green development

will be one that sustains our “thinking like a mountain” (or “like the atmosphere” for that matter). We seek a habit cultivating our sensitivity to ecological interdependences and our ecology, so that we conceive of ourselves as part of what Leopold called a “land community.” We want a habit of opening our minds so that we comprehend how our good is bound up with the good of other living beings. For brevity’s sake, I will call this criterion “the Leopoldian criterion,” in honor of the environmentalist from the twentieth century who first developed a new, moral picture for our ecological future.

### *The Leopoldian Criterion*

A developmental habit is ecologically mature if and only if it cultivates, maintains, or allows our sensitivity to ecological interdependence and to our ecology.

There is one last criterion that seems obvious. So far we have looked to how developmental habits might balance our lives with Earth life, how these habits should deepen our sense of humanity, and how they should relocate agency within a broad, ecological order. What, though, about the other lives themselves? Should respect for them call us to think of their good all on its own? It might seem we have a self-defensive view of ecological development at the moment, not the kind of expansive maturity for which our rhetoric seems to call, and as does our location today under the rusts and reds. How directed toward others should our habits be?

The answer, it would seem, is *very*. The entire sense of the respect for life in our socialization is to respect *that life*—whatever it may be. Society is not made solely of a self-regarding respect, a self-vigilance clearing space for others. Rather, society is also composed of our looking out for each other’s good.<sup>10</sup> Just so, we have duties, born of respect we owe each other.<sup>11</sup> Where is our equivalent in ecological matters? Genuine society shows people attending thoughtfully to each other’s good. We need something analogous for environmental matters. I propose it will be found in habits thoughtful of the good of other living beings. Thus we search for developmental habits thoughtful of other forms of life. Call this “the thoughtfulness criterion.”

### *The Thoughtfulness Criterion*

A developmental habit is ecologically mature if and only if it keeps us attentive to the good of other life forms, or does not interfere with our background commitment to respect life as a socialized human.

The way I’ve framed this last criterion deserves comment. Remember that we established respect for life as a background commitment of proper socialization. This commitment was part of the background idealism of being human. Given these conclusions, we should remember that the picture I’ve presented is one in which idealism and morality are authentically human. Out of the drive to be true to what is worthy of our time, human life exists within a background pressure to evolve in respect for life. I count on this pressure as one counts on human spirit. Human kindness is authentic, unless we are trained to be unkind, as children often are by the institutions into which we grow.<sup>12</sup>

Let’s summarize and reflect on these criteria now.

### *Four Criteria for Habits That Help Us Mature Ecologically*

1. The integration criterion
2. The humanization criterion
3. The Leopoldian criterion
4. The thoughtfulness criterion

First, about the logic. We should note that each of the criteria poses necessary and sufficient conditions on green developmental habits. Each one states a habit is green “if and only if” some condition. The “only if” signifies a necessary condition, and the “if” signifies a sufficient condition. Since each criterion is a necessary condition, each must be satisfied to make a developmental habit green. Since, too, each criterion is sufficient, *any* of the four satisfied makes a developmental habit green. Does this pose a contradiction? On the one hand, we are saying each of the four criteria must be in place, and on the other hand we are saying that any one of them will do. What is taking shape?

The answer is simple. Any one of the criteria implies the others. For instance, being thoughtful of other life forms makes us more human, balances our needs with those of other living beings and leads us to knowing our ecology. Or consider the Leopoldian criterion. Coming to know that our good is bound up with the good of other living beings makes us conceptualize integration, and so in turn thoughtfulness, and it makes us more human because it highlights our human condition. As a thought experiment, you might try seeing how the other two criteria imply the rest, practically speaking (go ahead; try it).

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Also, the above criteria do not exclude the human good from being an ecological matter. That’s what’s cool about them. After all, according to the view

presented here, what humanizes us should help us balance our needs with those of other beings; maintain, cultivate or at least allow a sense of our interdependence with those others; and keep us, or at least not hinder us from being, attentive to the good of those others. All this might seem strange, because I'm claiming when we are humanized—even if not in a directly ecological way—that humanization is nonetheless ecological. In other words, I'm conceptualizing our development as essentially ecological. Can I do that? I mean, it would seem some things that humanize us don't have ecological implications.

Let me give some examples. Take love for each other, which humanizes us. It helps us know our needs, a condition on balancing needs. It should produce more of a capacity for care in us, and it should support a grasp of the human condition of the loved one, which is ecological. Finally, because we learn to attend to each other's good, we are better able to identify analogously with the good of other kinds. So love for each other is indirectly ecological.

Or take humor, which humanizes us. When does humor humanize us? Or rather, when does it not? It certainly does not when it excludes members of the human community, or when it detaches us from the human good. Rather, what is humanizing about humor—as Bergson saw—is that it maintains our connection with our mortal and imperfect condition.<sup>13</sup> In that sense, it enables us, even if indirectly, to be thoughtful of the good of other kinds, of our interdependence with them, and of our mutual and often competing needs on Earth. This really isn't hyperbole. A sense of humor helps one relate to nature. Eric, Maclean's story that you love so much, *A River Runs Through It*, demonstrates that point. Because the brothers in the story can laugh at their own and others' clumsy attempts to live, they are freed up to see how much nature involves pragmatic innovation and a determination to survive. Having a good sense of humor does not hinder us from being ecological, but frees us up to see ourselves and our relation to the Earth, even if that is not its intent. In this sense, a habit of laughing could be ecological. I'm not saying that all good jokes are about nature, but that all humanizing jokes leave us be and at the least do not interfere with our understanding of the human condition. In that way, they support our being part of the natural world. We need to learn to hear how the dimensions of our humanity are saturated with ecological implications.

If we weren't so used to thinking humans are antiecollogical, what I'm saying would be common sense. We are part of nature, and we are ecological. Our human good is a part of ecological considerations, just as we are a part of the world's systems of life. Thus, humanizing ourselves is not antiecollogical.

On the contrary, it is necessary for being ecological, and to humanize ourselves is itself an ecological act. We are a species among many, after all, a specific kind of life. What the criteria underline yet again is that it is antiecollogical to respect life without including humans in that respect for life, and alternately it is antiecollogical to conceptualize human life as if it existed in a vacuum.

We seek habits, then, that keep us developing in ways that improve, or at least enable, our thoughtfulness with other forms of life, our open-mindedness about interdependency, our sense of meaningful and resistant humanity, and our integration with Earth life. What are some of those habits?

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One way to look at determining these habits is to think about the obstacles we face against becoming ecologically mature. Then we can think about how the above developmental qualities gel with the problems with which we're faced. There are a number of major obstacles to ecological maturity. Here are four:

#### *Four Obstacles to Ecological Maturity*

1. Moral invisibility
2. Ecological illiteracy
3. Lifestyle rigidity
4. The political block

Let me explain them:

1. *Moral invisibility*. How can people be respectful if they are ignorant of what deserves respect? When you are ignorant of something, you have no idea how it exists. Much thoughtlessness is the by-catch of ignorance. The moral invisibility of life forms and of ecological destruction is a serious problem. As we've already indicated, this invisibility is perpetuated at the level of our language, much as the expression "collateral damage" masks the reality of civilians killed by bombs. Fish are living beings, not "resources."

Have we remembered the concerns of Dr. Earle when we have eaten aquatic life (for instance, at the recent dinner to honor philosophy majors)? We do not stop to consider what cost bringing those filets to us had. The workings of the industrial fishing industry are invisible to us unless we make a special effort to discover them. The question of by-catch and habitat destruction from industrial fishing nets is not even a passing thought in our minds. Abuse of life goes on for our suppers, and we don't blink.<sup>14</sup> A person

who is ecologically mature should be in the habit of knowing the general conditions of industries like the fishing industry, so as to remove the moral invisibility of nonhuman forms of life. One of the ways she might start is by making sure she thinks of fish as living beings, not just resources. What kind of habit will help her do that?

2. *Ecological illiteracy.* Remember Leopold's example of culling wolves in Yosemite? One of the ways to understand what went wrong in that example is that people who culled wolves in Yosemite were ecologically illiterate. They didn't know how to read ecosystems and understand the indirect effects of their actions. Much the same could be said of the example concerning global warming from our lecture on justice. There we met up with an everyday American woman, well meaning and industrious, who like most other Americans unwittingly contributes to an ecological process that could have massive and severe consequences for future generations. A large reason such a pattern of action can seem tolerable to everyday people is that most people are ecologically illiterate about the risks associated with the plausibility of global warming. In these cases and so many others, not understanding how our actions affect ourselves and other forms of life makes for an obstacle to ecological citizenship.

3. *Lifestyle rigidity.* A further problem with developing ecological maturity is having a rigid style of life. There are many people aware of how their lifestyle contributes to ecological destruction, but who are fixed in their habits. Too much about our lives seems either comfortable or necessary as is. For example, a good many Americans do not see how they could manage to ride public transportation instead of driving, let alone work politically to ensure swift, clean, and reliable public transportation is available. Or how might we begin to ensure that the packaging for food we eat (especially at restaurants and take-out joints) is biodegradable? How about greening the standard detergents we use so that they biodegrade nontoxically? Or weaning ourselves of large quantities of meat? In a world that is quickly becoming ecologically aware, there are a myriad of ways in which our lifestyles come under pressure to change. But change is often overwhelming to people. Lifestyles can harden against it. This is especially so in a highly competitive economy globally restructuring at an alarming rate since the 1970s.<sup>15</sup> Who has the time, energy, financial means, or job freedom to change one's ways within an economy such as ours?

4. *The political block.* How do you become greener when you are more oppressed than you think? Saints will rise to ideals even by dying. But societies cannot be made of saints, because, to say the least, saints die or sacrifice their family life, thereby making generation impossible. Saints are exceptions in a

society, a dead-end street that gloriously reminds the society what it holds ideal (unless they are violent martyrs, who should remind a society of where its criticism should be focused). For an idealism of everyday life, we need situations that can be handled by people with families to raise and rough trade to keep. That is, we need political situations that are not so oppressive that changing ecologically is possible only for the saints. Let me give three examples:

- i. *Stalinism.* Remember our example of the Tarkovsky film about "the zone"? We discussed it when discussing sacred places, and I showed you some slides of that shelled-out room with rain pouring through the roof where people come to bare their hearts. Tarkovsky's films are retrospective analyses of the psychology of living under totalitarianism, and Stalinism in particular. Tarkovsky's early life was lived under Stalin, and he never forgot how oppressive that was.<sup>16</sup> Imagine, then, that you live in Russia under Stalin, and like Tarkovsky did in *Searcher*, awaken to the fact that the Soviet production process and nuclear science program are ecologically destructive on an unimaginable scale. This was true, by the way. Soviet ecological damage was even more massive than that which occurs routinely under capitalism in the democratic West. And *that* is massive. Imagine you envision a disaster like that which happened at Chernobyl<sup>17</sup> in the near future and want to do something about it. Well, that would have been no easy thing to do under Stalin. He regularly killed people merely because a rumor had been circulated about them with no evidence the person was critical of the government at all.<sup>18</sup> Would you want to be critical of Stalin's productivity program?
- ii. *Neo-colonial Corporate Cronyism.* Imagine you live in a country—such as Nigeria—that has been violently colonized in the not too distant past and exists in a vulnerable economic situation vis-à-vis the powerful transnational corporations that power the world's economy. Imagine your country is a source of resources, such as oil, for those corporations. Let's say the corporations smell billions to be made and start controlling the government through bribes, mercenary violence, and powerful economic incentives. As a result, where you live, oil is king. Perhaps even, as happened in Burma in the 1990s, your government forcibly enslaves citizens to work the oil industry (in the case of Burma, it was pipeline building). How much freedom do you have to protest the iron grip of the oil economy on your society? You have some, but you also have a high chance of being killed for speaking out.



iii. *The Multi-job Grind.* States also engage in less high-profile economic badness. They serve as regulatory conduits for the accumulation of capital within their borders and internationally, depending on the specific interests they serve. Within their borders, too, they strategically serve certain elements of society over others.<sup>19</sup> Sociologists call this situation "uneven development," and the idea is that state regulations—including tax breaks, investment opportunities, loopholes in labor law (or lack of labor laws), and so on—end up privileging specific regions and sectors of society and sometimes specific corporate interests, such as the corn-growing industry or the military-industrial complex. These sectors of society experience greater development than others, with ripple effects that extend into civil society, for instance, in the quality of schools available to some sectors of the citizenry. Meanwhile, other sectors of society experience little development or even economic depression.

If you happen to be caught in one of the more depressed areas of society, it is hard to make a living. For example, in America today, it is increasingly common to find people who have to work multiple jobs to make ends meet (by the way, graduate students are among these). Such jobs do not often come with benefits such as medical insurance. If you are in such an economic situation, life is hard to change in radical ways, although people (and often the most oppressed people) are inventive. It takes something of a superhuman effort for someone working more than one job, with kids (and sometimes as a single parent), to have the time and opportunity—including the financial flexibility—to change one's life. You may not be threatened by deportation to a gulag if you criticize the government, but in reality, it is hard to become active as an effective political voice and catalyst for social change. And the point is, political regulations make this inactivity a likelihood. The state *could* ensure, or seriously work to ensure, that every citizen has the minimum standards of humanity in their lives, as required by human rights, but the state instead (pressured to provide a fix for capitalist interests) makes whole areas of its citizens' lives practically desperate. Take an elementary sociology course on America today. Or, for a jolt of reality, go to Mexico City.

In all three cases, a political block makes it hard to exercise one's moral creativity in a way that is sufficient for the ecological development we should practice. A political block poses a problem for maturing. I want to reiterate: there are such blocks even in democratic countries. Put yourself in

either a typical working class home in the Bronx, New York City; or a shanty suburb of Mexico City, Calcutta, or any of the major democratic population hubs of the world economy. You live under democracy and have liberties of life, some ability to critique your government, and your country pays at least lip-service to human rights. There is no Stalinist KGB, and your government doesn't send a death squad to kill you if you seriously protest the oil industry. Your country is probably even signed onto some international environmental accords such as the Rio Declaration we discussed in our third lecture on an ecological orientation. Yet how much real freedom do you have to change your lifestyle and become consistent with whatever ecological beliefs you have? When you have to look after your kids, put food on the table, and try to get an education, you do not have much freedom to buy expensive ecologically aware products, spend days lobbying governments to change, or buy expensive access to media. You work—or search for work—eat, and sleep. When you have time off—please, just a little fun! A cool walk on a hot night. Some time with your loved ones. Some loving some of the time.

These and situations like these are the real conditions with which ecological maturity has to deal. Real idealism will have to, as well.

How about a break? People brought food to share, and it's here along the stage. We'll regroup in about . . . twenty minutes?

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Listen up! Let's start again. A bunch of you were up here during break—Judy, Eliot, Malcolm, Omer, Elizabeth, Maureen, Kate, Joel, Saleem, Andy, Nashwa, Nisreen, Alex, Eric, Ahmad, (did I get everyone?) . . . Ayla and Abdullah. They were just telling me about their field-class experience with people opposing the destruction of the rainforests for cattle-grazing land. They explained how hard it is to protest when the companies doing the bulldozing of the forests have powerful allies in government. They left a discussion of the problem up here to the left of you on the stage, along with ways you can get involved in making the international community monitor human rights abuses. If you are interested, please come up and take a look in about half an hour when class is through.

Let's pick up from where we were. We have practical blocks to green maturity. We also know what has to go into a developmental habit to make it green. Can we articulate ecological habits that handle the problems we detailed before break?

Here are four habits I came up with. Each corresponds to a problem we posed. I mean these habits to stimulate your thoughts in case you encounter

other problems calling for different habits. I'm reflecting pragmatically from problems.

### Four Habits of Ecological Maturity

1. Moral perception
2. Ecological literacy
3. Moral creativity
4. Political-economic liberty

As we explain these, it's important to remember that each habit assumes our commitment to respect life as a background pressure within which the habit takes shape and acquires direction. Given that we are to develop in our respect for life, these habits interact with that assumption to produce green developmental habits that satisfy our criteria. Let's go through each proposed habit:

1. *Moral perception.* Moral perception is a developmental habit of learning to see the morally invisible. The morally invisible are those who deserve some respect but are not receiving any, enough, or the appropriate form; and those too whose use or abuse is unjustified. People who are in the practice of dissolving moral invisibility fulfill all of our criteria for a green developmental habit. First, seeing what is respect-worthy but has been occluded is the beginning of integration. Second, recognition of the unseen also shows a deeper attention to life and so makes us more human. Third, because moral invisibility is about what slips our mind because of our narrow frame of action, a habit of discovering the invisible must produce broad-mindedness (For example: Earle urges us to find out what is going on in ocean valleys; she wants us to "think like a sea-floor"). Finally, recognition of the unseen shows the essence of thoughtfulness. Perhaps, then, a habit of self-critically searching for moral invisibility is one developmental habit of ecological maturity? Perhaps the beginning of wisdom is to recognize the limits of our minds?

2. *Ecological literacy.* Ecological literacy is a habit of learning to read one's environment and consider its ecological nature. In response to being ignorant about the environment, we seek a practice of learning about how the ecosystems work where we live and when we affect them. This might start, to echo the words of a forest ranger turned environmental philosopher, with "a basic appreciation and interest in a wide variety of natural phenomena."<sup>20</sup> After all, how can we learn our ecological context if we don't look outward and consider the other forms of life and the biotic conditions in which we live? Of course, such appreciation should also be joined with scientific un-

derstanding so that we have further methods for knowing what our actions cause indirectly. Ecological literacy, then, combines a genuine receptivity to the wider universe of life with specific learning about how the environment works.

It also meets, in some form, our criteria for habits that would seem to be good developmental elements of green maturity. For one, a habit of keeping ecologically well-read handles our Leopoldian criterion. It allows us to stay informed of ecological interdependencies. It also appears to meet our integrationist criterion, as ecological literacy opens us up to know how to balance the diverse needs of other beings within a flourishing ecological order. As to thoughtfulness, it is clear that no respect for other forms of life can be effective without understanding that form of life, and so ecological literacy, because it helps us know another form of life, enables our thoughtfulness. The question that remains, then, is whether a practice of being ecologically well-read humanizes us. Yet if what we said about analogical implication several weeks ago is true, then we should learn about our humanity by becoming more ecologically literate. Ecological literacy opens us up to the human condition.

3. *Moral creativity.* To see lifestyle rigidity as a serious obstacle to ecological maturity is to advocate, by contrast, an aptitude for modifying one's life to fit moral demands. What is such an aptitude called? It is not simply conformity to moral law, but is rather an ability to be both deliberate and creative enough to change how one is living in order to catch up with new moral demands. This is no easy task, even to be deliberate. One has to feel in control of one's life, have time and space to think, have options (economic and political ones most of all!), and follow through on new courses of action often involving the creation of anything from new ways to go to work to new laws for one's city. No one says any of this is easy. It involves a new style of life, since our culture is lacking an ecological orientation.

When we change our style of life, we aren't simply switching one color of shoe for another. We alter patterns of action, advocacy, and economics, and these go along with many consequences. How will we make sure we don't disturb things we want to keep, such as relationships with people who are uncomfortable with our changes or the ability to have a job we want (or any job at all)? We will have to be creative at times, articulating compromises, shortcuts, and new forms of options. An aptitude for this sort of change might be called *moral creativity*. How would that fend as a habit?

Moral creativity is a habit of innovating our socialized respect in ways that allow us to meet new demands. It seems, on the surface, to be a good candidate for developing ecological maturity. After all, moral creativity



would make sense in any situation where moral demands call us to change our lives in innovative ways, and many of those are ecological demands. Accordingly, ecological literacy and moral perception are pointless without moral creativity, because without moral creativity, all the ecological literacy and moral perception in the world won't add up to a better style of life. Moral creativity would also seem to help us integrate better with nonhuman life, since integration requires careful and often novel balancing of interests. In a similar vein, moral creativity would appear to help us handle the complicated causal chains of the Leopoldian criterion, which should often make us realize we have not conceptualized an institution in a sufficiently ecological manner. Moral creativity should also give more room for a thoughtful style of life by giving us the habit of positioning ourselves to be thoughtful. Finally, moral creativity would appear to make us more human. Becoming more in line with what we think is humanizing. We are deliberate animals, and self-control and moral integrity are not optional for our well-being. Moral creativity thus passes our test for being an ecologically mature habit.

4. *Political-economic liberty.* This is our last habit. Recall the problem: political blocks are hard to overcome. Yet it is possible to overcome them. Think of the homeless gardeners and how they manage to create ecologically advanced gardens of recycled goods even while being among the most oppressed members of American society. Many examples of ecological creativity come not from rich, modern Americans but from poor members of the world. Poverty does not prohibit becoming ecologically creative. In fact, as someone who grew up for a period on food stamps and many hand-created toys, I can tell you that poverty is often a scene of great inventiveness. This doesn't make it good, especially when it goes along with stunted educational and medical opportunities, but it helps explain why so many philosophers and religious figures from many world traditions have seen poverty as having moral advantages. There is room for being ecological in poverty. Still, economic conditions are a real block to ecological maturity for most people, and those economic conditions are possible only in the space of political regulations that enable—and even promote—them.

Thus, the political block to ecological maturity seems to me to remain one we must handle in our developmental habit. What kind of developmental habit could handle it? Some kind of habit of political-economic liberty? We should find out, because without the political-economic freedom needed for moral creativity, it will be hard to effectively balance our needs with the needs of other living beings in a way that is thoughtful. We also know that since humans are social animals, a habit that makes our political-economic

order better suited to our moral core will humanize us—at the least, by keeping us free of oppression. Furthermore, making our governments reflect, or at least allow, what is ecologically mature will be one of the greatest enablers of the Leopoldian criterion we can discover. The single biggest block on recognizing the interdependence of our actions with complicated Earth biospheric processes currently in the world is a political one—for instance, the U.S. government's refusal to sign onto the Kyoto Accord, or the systematic avoidance of state and interstate regulations on economic transactions involving thoughtless use of the Earth's living beings.<sup>21</sup> Finally, political-economic liberty should also help us be thoughtful of other forms of life, because it will give us the freedom to identify with them as having a dignity analogous to our freedom.

Thus a habit of removing political-economic blocks is needed, and it is this I call "political-economic liberty." Think of "liberty" as freedom. We sometimes speak of a free way of living or even a habit of freedom. That is the sense in which to hear this last shade of green maturity. Political-economic liberty is a habit, even a fierce one, of dealing with political and economic blocks to our freedom to solve the problems that dehumanize us or keep us from doing what we should do. If the previous three habits are the moral genius's, the ecologist's, and the moral artist's habits, this last is the political activist's habit. As I said, we are after the point where the moral and the political join: citizenship.

There is a moral genius we might all develop. It is a habit of moral perception, including being self-critical about moral invisibility. There is also an ecologist we might become, found when we develop a habit of ecological literacy. Nor is the moral artist, the artist of living idealistically, far behind. She is there in a habit of moral creativity. Finally, as Rachel Carson found out when it was her 1960s housewife readers who forced the American chemical industry to clean up its toxic act, there is a political activist in many a housewife even from a gender-conservative age: she is there in a habit of liberty, when she realizes the ecological injustice at hand.<sup>22</sup>

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Let me take matters a step further now, so that we can organize our grasp of green maturity. I will be looking for a master habit, that is, an overarching developmental habit that organizes the more particular ones responding to the problems we imagined. After all, there are probably more problems out there, no? Even though we've explored how to think in support of growing ecologically, it would help to have a key for the unseen problems we will face when we depart from this idyllic spot and disperse into our lives.

The four particular habits mentioned so far are unified around a simple idea. To keep developing ecologically, we should keep learning about our ecological interdependence with other forms of life and about Earth biotic conditions, keeping aware of how our actions affect other forms of life that are morally invisible. In the process, we should be creative enough to modify our lives according to our moral and practical insights, and we should have the political-economic freedom to act on that creativity in a society free of oppression. Thus, the above habits center on a complex but relatively clear idea. We should keep aware of our interrelatedness with other forms of life and with biotic conditions (note that we assume by now a relationship with another life form involves respect!), and we should be able to practice what we envision. Let me write out the idea this way:

### *The Basic Constituents of Ecological Maturity?*

1. Being aware of our interrelatedness with other forms of life and their biotic conditions  
(theory)
2. Being able to do what we think should be done  
(practice)

I am using “theory” in an archaic sense. The Greek root of “theory” originally meant “to see.” Thus we might say that we are after a master habit that makes sure we join theory and practice. The point is, we seek a habit of conceptualizing our situation that involves moral self-vigilance and knowledge of the environment. And we seek a practice of living out our best, conceptually-attuned judgment in a creative and politically enabled way.

Finally, not only should we articulate better what such habits of developing citizenship are, but we should also reassure ourselves that they do meet our criteria for development. For instance, does each of them truly humanize us, or have I been bending reasons to fit the case? How do we argue with the astute critic who thinks that the notion of something making us more human is vague and that almost anything could make us more human? At some point, we should argue convincingly that becoming ecological does make us more human, where the use of that category is conceptually rigorous and well justified.

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The way I’ll take up these demands proceeds through a comparison with one of the original philosophers of character ethics, Aristotle. In his *Nicomachean*

*Ethics*, Aristotle describes the major habits of action and judgment that make an excellent person.<sup>23</sup> These include temperance, courage, generosity, and justice. He also articulates the kind of good judgment that guides our understanding of when courage, temperance, or justice are demanded. This judgment is a kind of master habit. Translators often call this judgment “prudence,” but I choose to call it “moral wisdom,” after the translation my father gave me while I taught a class long ago.<sup>24</sup> Moral wisdom involves an overall sense of the goals and meaning of human life. It also includes a good grasp of our life’s conditions and the contexts wherein courage, temperance, or generosity are needed. No person can exercise her habits well without the moral wisdom of how a flourishing human life fits together. She must know when to act, when not to act, how to remain committed to one’s ideals, and how to be creative in the right ways when creativity is most helpful. On this point, Aristotle is surely correct. There has to be a street-wise brain and a solidly good heart behind someone mature.

In this Aristotelian spirit, then, I propose that the master habit which will give us the ability to keep learning how to live with the universe of life is *ecological idealism*. Ecological idealism is not moral wisdom, because I do not assume—as does Aristotle—that an ecological idealist is perfectly wise. Remember, I’m after a developmental habit here. It assumes we have much to learn, not that we are done learning. However, since ecological idealism does include human flourishing under its purview, its domain is as overarching as moral wisdom. In fact, it inscribes a grasp of the human good within a grasp of our ecological good (much as, in two weeks, I’ll argue human rights are a species of ecological law). And since our ecological good involves respect for life, ecological idealism is broader than anything Aristotle envisioned. For instance, it includes justice to other animals and temperance with the use of the Earth.

Ecological idealism is also like moral wisdom in that it frames the discussion and exercises of more specific ecological habits. It is the general spokesperson for developing our habits in matters ecological—the brains and heart of ecological maturity. Let me say how:

### *Our Overarching Developmental Habit*

*Ecological idealism* is a habit of conceptualizing our ecological situation and acting on what we think is best in the service of respect for life.

Ecological idealism is a habit of conceptualizing our ecological situation in rigorous and critical moral terms and in well-informed and extensive scientific

would appear to work and play in the spirit of Dewey and progressive education. That is, it encourages us to learn as we go.

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So that's the spirit these lectures advocate. We should next approach some of the details, how maturity appears in practice. Thus, next week, I want us to face the difficult issue of how we consider—or *fail* to consider—animals. We'll do theory work on moral invisibility. I hope that way we'll clear our minds some.

Then two weeks from now, we'll discuss how to green our culture. We'll try to be pragmatic about how to face a contemporary capitalism that is thoughtless with the Earth's life and so massively powerful as to exceed our imagination and personal powers. *That* should exercise our creativity.

In this way, after we have gone through the next weeks, we'll have had examples of ecological idealism in theory and in practice. We will have experimented with reconceptualizing our moral universe and reconfiguring our culture. I wish I could offer you more than a glimpse, yet you are amazing people—go and pursue what your consciences point out to you. It's better than what some professor professes, anyway. It's yours. Then you can teach us, because you've followed your mind and worked out answers through creative and hard commitment.<sup>25</sup>

## Notes

1. Stage directions: The professor is smiling here.
2. Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*, New York: Routledge, 2002.
3. See Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
4. See Jonathan Lear, *Therapeutic Action, an Earnest Plea for Irony*, New York: Other Press, 2003 and his *Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001, or Gandini et al., *The Hundred Languages of Children*, Englewood: Axel Publishing, 1999.
5. This notion is first articulated in modern philosophy of education by Rousseau in *Emile*. It is central to a justification of liberal arts education over exclusively pre-professional or exclusively technical education.
6. See Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001.
7. Descartes famously claimed that there was a gland, the pineal gland, through which body and immaterial soul interacted. His view is often cited as a famous brain-fart by a great philosopher.

8. See Bill McKibben's book, *Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age*, New York: Times Books, 2003, although there are voices that question whether McKibben has a view of our nature that is too static and not developmental *enough*.

9. In this paragraph, I am discussing Leopold from his *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches from Here and There*.

10. Attention to others is a constitutive feature of genuine, human meaning and identity. This point is made by Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999, who inaugurated one of the most significant developments of Western moral thinking in the twentieth century.

11. On rights within intersubjective relations of respect, see Diamond, "Injustice and Animals," lecture given at the University of Chicago, March, 2001, and also my "Common Humanity and Human Rights," *Religion and Human Rights (Social Philosophy Today*, v. 21), Philosophy Documentation Center, 2005.

12. This point is made very well by Diamond in "Eating Meat and Eating People," in *The Realistic Spirit*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995; and by Vivian Paley in *The Kindness of Children*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999. Children can be cruel to animals, but they have a strong tendency to respect life and to have empathy and wonder for it. Perhaps this is why some ecopsychologists speak of a "biophilic" tendency in people (a point on which I am unable to comment, since it is outside my field of study). On "biophilia," see Peter Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought*, New South Wales: the University of New South Wales Press, 2001, chap. 1.

13. Henri Bergson, *Le rire [The Laugh]*, Paris: Editions de Christine, 1991.

14. "Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer give birth to a star. Alas, the time of the most despicable man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise himself. Behold, I show you *the last man*. / 'What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?' Thus asks the last man, and he blinks. / The Earth has become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small." Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "Zarathustra's Prologue," section 5 (New York: Penguin Classics, 1978).

Consider also these lines: "Let your will say, 'the [self-overcoming human] will be the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, *remain faithful to the earth* . . . ! . . . To sin against the earth is now the most dreadful thing. . . ." *Ibid.*, section 2, my modified translation.

I am providing ecological connotations that Nietzsche did not appear to intend. Still within *my* Nietzsche, they work. And what is Nietzsche if not *your own* Nietzsche? (Nietzsche is famous for advocating our subjectivity and articulating how perspective shapes truth.)

15. On this point, see Neil Brenner, *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

16. This time and memory is a major part of Tarkovsky's most personal film, *Mirror*.

17. On April 26, 1986, the nuclear reactor at Chernobyl, Ukraine experienced a meltdown during a failed, routine test. There are disagreements about how much

and experiential terms. It is likewise a habit of acting on what we think is best: true, good, and beautiful within a background pressure to respect life. Idealism is a two-faceted dimension of personality. It involves thought—ideas—and it involves living up to what one thinks. It is reason in action. An idealist doesn't just act thoughtlessly. She has ideas. She conceptualizes her situation and how to live well. An idealist also does not just speculate and think. She acts. She makes ideas happen.

Ecological idealism is the habit that handles both theory and practice, both the demand for ecological awareness and the demand for free creativity. When we looked at obvious obstacles to environmental maturity, we saw that we should be self-critical about moral invisibility and continue learning about our environment. The idealistic counterpart to these obstacles allows us to be ecological in both senses: respectful of life and informed about our ecosystems. That is the conceptual part of the *idealism*. Thinking about the obstacles to ecological maturity also made us aware of how we should be creative with our lives in a society free of oppression. These obstacles called for us pushing the beat on our political systems and our calcified habits so that they enable us to live what we think is good, true, and beautiful. That is the practical part of the *idealism*.

Putting theory and practice together, we should be in a lifelong habit of living an idealistic life. The way to be mature is to be idealistic, and not anything else that imperils that. How else can we remain conscientious about our situation on this planet and then live in accordance with that conscience, if we are not idealistic, if we do not put thoughtfulness and knowledge into the skeleton, blood, and guts of our lives?

Here, then, is what I want to conclude about ecological maturity. First, without being ecologically idealistic, we cannot be ecologically mature. Ecological idealism is a necessary condition on maturity. Second, being ecologically idealistic is sufficient to make us ecologically maturing, if not mature. At the same time, are we ever done being mature? Or is maturity, like citizenship, a matter of becoming? The people who are adult are the ones who keep growing (people who don't grow begin to regress). In this way, then, idealism—in the activist, pragmatic sense I've advocated—is a necessary and sufficient condition on maturity. That's my conclusion.

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One reason I point to ecological idealism as a unified answer to our call for habits is that it keeps the big picture of what we should have in view and gives room for complexity within that big picture. What the habit of ecological idealism gives us is an *ongoing practice of informing ourselves, being self-critical about*

*our moral complacency and limits, and making our lives express the best judgment at which we arrive.* It has many dimensions, as we've seen while focusing on the four habits we sought to meet four obstacles. At heart, though, these four specific habits are all part of a seamless organic activity for creatures of reason and conscience such as we are.

The idealism is a healthy activity, too, because it is not desperate. It does not let our humanity remain stagnant. No matter how much one might cynically bemoan the conscienceless world of power, violence, and greed, the fact is we are creatures with an idealistic and moral being. The critique of the moral in a cynical awareness of human corruption is itself a conscientious act. The point is to remember that it, too, is motivated by idealism. Moreover, such a critique is good when used to establish a goal for making our lives more humane. Then even desperation becomes hopeful, because we see a way to grow up. And this is what the dynamic character of idealism drives us to do: to see how the negative can be made positive.

We can see better, too, why the habit of ecological idealism should humanize us, a doubt I left hanging ten minutes ago. To become thoughtful, to learn, to establish a more moral and informed relationship with the world, to be creative and bring one's life in line with one's judgment, to be free to do so: these *are* humanizing, and experience shows they are. They make us more alive and responsible. We also develop a better grasp of the human condition, a better sense and ability to live for what is good within our condition and a richer expression of what we find meaningful when we are thoughtful and creative, informed, and free to live our lives accordingly. I think you know all this better than I do, because young adults have this kind of energy in them that *wants* responsibility and creativity. The cynicism so many of you feel at times is the reflection of the wish you see let down by us, the older ones. It's there, because you sense what would help you grow and become free as humans, yet it seems forgotten by the preexisting society.

Of course, talking about transforming one's life and doing it are different matters. Speculating on moral invisibility and confronting one's *own* moral limits are different affairs. But this is why we are after a habit of idealism, and why the habit is itself a developmental one. We should learn how to discover our moral limits and innovative ways to make our lives reflect insight. Learning to face difficulty, solve problems, and reflect on the lesson is the goal.

Ecological idealism would appear to be experimental, therefore, informed by the insight it can gather. It would appear to be benefited by soaking up all the possibilities for enlightenment and know-how it can obtain. It would appear to be benefited by being politically active, especially in the face of our world's main economy whenever it exploits life. Throughout, the idealism

damage was caused by the massive plume of radioactive steam released into the atmosphere to spread over Europe. A conservative estimate is that some fifty people died with many more radiated to unknown consequence. For the conservative estimate, see the Uranium Information Center, *Nuclear Issues Briefing Paper*, n. 22, Melbourne Australia, August 2004, at [www.uic.com.au/index.htm](http://www.uic.com.au/index.htm) (accessed May 23, 2005). "Chernobyl" is often a catchword for a potentially massive ecological disaster, such as the Bhopal, India Union Carbide / Dow Chemical plant disaster which killed up to twenty-thousand people from toxic fallout in 1984. See Greenpeace's recent campaigns against "Toxic Hotspots," at [www.greenpeace.org/international/campaigns/toxics/toxic-hotspots](http://www.greenpeace.org/international/campaigns/toxics/toxic-hotspots) (accessed May 23, 2005).

18. On this point, see Glover's *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, chapter 5.

19. See Brenner, *New State Spaces*, again.

20. Phil Cafaro, *Thoreau's Living Ethics: Walden and the Pursuit of Virtue*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004, 31.

21. In *One World: The Ethics of Globalization*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003, Singer has a good critique of the WTO's avoidance of regulating ecologically destructive practices. See "One Economy," *passim*.

22. This was the case with the reception of *Silent Spring*. Moreover, Carson wrote the book to activate such a potential in her middle-class housewife peers, at the time emerging out of the conservative 1950s. Though they were gendered to keep private, they went public.

23. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terrance Irwin, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1985.

24. Thanks to David Keymer for the translation. After teaching Aristotle's *Ethics* many times, I feel the translation captures best the relationship to the human good I seek to articulate. However, it could be confused with the use of "wisdom" in Aristotle's sixth book. This is not a point into which I can go here.

25. In Arabic and in Islam, "Aql" is the Arabic and Qur'anic word for "heart-mind," or "intelligence with conscience." Thus, we might say ecological idealism is a form of *aql*. I thank Professor Kareem Douglas Crow for teaching me this word in his talk, "Belief: Heart or Mind?" (American University of Sharjah, March 2005).

## LECTURE EIGHT



### A Circle of Life<sup>1</sup>

Good afternoon. This is Osool. She is a goat, as you can tell. She's used to being near humans and in new places. The school wasn't happy we brought in the straw and pen. But I promised to help clean up. I told them Osool is the muse of our lecture today. She has to be. Her eyes are so silent. Goats, especially, are known for silent eyes. They are mirrors of a world without thoughts, or anything like what we know thoughts to be. To accept that creatures like Osool are "truthful signs of our life," to quote a phrase by Alain de Lille, is already to make a step to maturity. How does our life affect them? Even though Osool cannot speak, cannot think in any way we know as thought, and does not articulate joy or agony (although she does express both), she is a fellow living creature and we share the world with her.

"Osool" is an Arabic word that does not have a simple translation, because its meaning varies with the context of use. It means *roots* when applied to vegetation, *origins*, *tradition*, *ethics*, *custom*, *right*, *principles*, and sometimes *law* when applied to human life, and it also has a religious connotation for scholars of Islam that denotes a branch of theological study. In addition, Al Jazeera has spoken of "usulis," an Arabic media expression for fundamentalists. However, "fundamentalism" is not a term scholars of Islam apply to themselves. It is a Western term, created in the early twentieth century to apply to a form of Protestantism, and is used by extension to categorize extremist Islamic sects. Moreover, if "usulis" applies to people who take the right to kill innocent humans, then it is anti-Islamic, for Islam strictly prohibits the killing of innocents.<sup>2</sup> I first saw "Osool" on a sign for a financial company in the United Arab Emirates, and loved simply the sound of the