**Seeing Nature through Different Lenses: Metaphors that matter**

*A lecture delivered by Karen Hodges to the Triangle Friends of Jung (Chapel Hill, North Carolina) in January of 2014*

It seemed fitting to begin this evening by bringing the natural world into the room as much as we can [SLIDE with a loop of tree images], so you’ve been looking at some trees in a cycle of seasons. And now I want to bring you a poem by Wendell Berry, that expresses a particular feeling for nature. It’s called “Woods”:

I part the out thrusting branches  
and come in beneath  
the blessed and the blessing trees.  
Though I am silent  
there is singing around me.  
Though I am dark  
there is vision around me.  
Though I am heavy  
there is flight around me.

Many people share Wendell Berry’s feeling for nature. There is pleasure in nature’s beauty and simplicity; there is healing. Much in nature is complementary to the one-sidedness of the human ego and opens up a more expansive psychic space for us. To step into the natural world can bring us into a better balance. Many people experience a real love of nature from their earliest childhood years…. But many people do not. And why is that?

This question has puzzled me and has led me on a long chase resulting in tonight’s lecture. Why do so many people lack appreciation for the natural world? There is a simple answer to that question, and there’s a complicated answer. The simple answer is that many people never have the opportunity to experience nature. Living in an urban bubble, insulated from all that is not man-made, the natural world hardly exists for them. But why havewe created this way of life in the first place? That takes us to the complicated answer. And that’s what we’ll be looking at this evening.

I’m going to be presenting you with four or five different sets of fantasies evoked by the word *nature* – root metaphors, really. These are the lenses through which we see the natural world, and it’s important to bring as much consciousness to them as we can. They matter, because they so powerfully influence our choices and behaviors, often in unexamined ways. They have an incalculable practical effect. But they also determine how we make meaning of our lives: What meaning can we find in this period of environmental crisis that we are living through?

Now I realize that, by bringing environmental crisis into the picture, I’m opening a very big can of worms. Most of us are well-aware that the natural world is moving towards cataclysmic change and that human activities play a major role in this. This realization evokes many emotions: anxiety, fear, anger, sadness…. And psychological defenses arise to protect us from these emotions - especially denial. Nevertheless, emotion remains close beneath the surface, and this makes it difficult to come to our topic in a spirit of genuine reflectiveness. What I want to do this evening is to create a small space where we can take time out from wrestling with global warming or any other aspect of the Earth’s present distress. And I’m asking for your help with this. If you find yourself wanting to sound the alarm about this or that environmental situation, please put it on the back burner, important as it may be, and know that we can all come back to it at a later time.

One final comment by way of introduction: What I’m undertaking here is to distill a very large topic down to its simplest outlines, and for some of you that means going over ground with which you’re already familiar. In my experience that can be helpful: No matter where you are in your thinking, to step back and take a bird’s-eye view brings clarity. My aim is to stimulate each of you to *own* your own place in the discussion and to inhabit it more solidly.

**Mother Earth: Nature personified**

Now, seeing nature through the lens of metaphor: There’s a good chance that the first metaphor that comes to your mind is that of the Mother. It’s “Mother Nature” or “Mother Earth”. This of course is a very old metaphor and one still prevalent among indigenous peoples. It forms the basis for great respect for nature. And it’s a position that’s given indigenous peoples around the world a strong voice in the environmental movement, something you may have witnessed firsthand. Here’s an example from the massive demonstration which took place in front of the White House on February 17th of last year, a rally to express opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline. [A video clip of Casey Camp, a Ponca tribal leader from Oklahoma, addressing a Keystone XL Pipeline protest]

You heard a lot of cheering, a lot of enthusiasm from the crowd on that very cold day in February. Many *non*-indigenous participants at this rally obviously resonated with what was being expressed by the native speakers. The tribal leaders stood out; they were featured, both during the speeches and at the head of the march itself. And we might ask why. After all, they formed only a small minority of those participating, and one outside the cultural mainstream.

I believe that such speakers catch projections that tell us something significant about ourselves. The image of Earth as Mother is part of our psychic history, if not still deeply embedded in our individual psyches. In our industrialized society, we still use the phrase, “Mother Earth.” Butif you listen carefully – or read carefully - you’ll often detect discomfort with it. It can sound trite, tossed off without genuine conviction. It may even be tinged with sarcasm. “Mother Earth”. But native peoples, those who remain connected with their cultural traditions, are able to use the term without embarrassment, as you just heard. They can do it in a way that allows the emotion behind it to come through with full force. The Native American, in full traditional dress, has become an increasingly important iconic figure in contemporary American life, and he or she – often *she* - speaks the words for us*: Mother Earth.* Many of us can reclaim the emotion behind this image by partially identifying with the indigenous person.

So what are the emotions associated with Earth as Mother? They’re the emotions that belong to personal attachment, especially gratitude. The Earth, like the personal mother, is honored as having given us life. But it goes far beyond that: We outgrow dependence upon our personal mothers, but this Mother is not to be outgrown; she is implicated in our very physical existence. Our bodies are the stuff of the Mother, and we depend upon her continuing to provide for us to the end of our days.

Paradoxically, the closer a person is living to the subsistence level, the more powerfully a sense of nature’s generosity seems to constellate. But behind the oft-expressed gratitude there is something darker in the background: an awareness of how vulnerable we are to the Mother’s potential for violence. “With merely a shrug of her shoulder, she could shake us off.” We can petition her favor. But whether or not she smiles on us, her power inspires awe. And our relationship with her must be cultivated with care.

Now Jung knew that, wherever we seek to establish a relationship, personification comes into play: We think of the other as a person. Our dream life reflects this fact, spontaneously personifying inner factors with which we need to be well-connected; they become the characters in our dreams, with whom we can interact and converse. The same holds true for factors in the natural environment: How can we interact meaningfully with a plant, or a mountain, or a storm, unless we imagine it to be, in some sense, human-like: a living personality? And Jung was struck by the way that, in pre-scientific societies, a mythologizing habit of mind constantly personified such things. It wasn’t just that one spoke of the earth as Mother, but that the natural world teemed with persons: spirits, gods, powers of various kinds. The Mother was only one force at work in a world inhabited by a host of ensouled beings, some of cosmic proportions, some more modest and local. You heard Casey Camp speak of the “Thunder Nation”, of “Father Sun”, and of the Moon and the Stars as our “relatives”. And notice that these figures are typically characterized in familial terms. Universal family relatedness is the defining principle of Native American spirituality. In such traditions, this is the context in which individual life takes on meaning. And, as in a family, ethical obligations toward one’s relatives are taken very seriously.

Jung recognized that this sense of relatedness with the natural world immeasurably enhances human life. We humans need to feel that we are participants in the great drama of life on earth - not some kind of aberration, not alien beings out of place in this world. I would add that a family feeling for surrounding nature has great practical value, in terms of sensitizing us to what is there - details, patterns, trends. It inclines us to pay attention to their immediate effect upon us, and the effect of our own actions in return.

Jung himself was a nature-lover. He seemed to feel most at home out of doors, or in his primitive dwelling at Bollingen. But he was torn: Being identified with nature was something he did and did not embrace. Like so many of his day, he believed that science puts an end to our sense of belonging in the natural world, because science invalidates the projection of soul onto nature. For that’s what personification is: a projection of soul or human-like qualities onto what is not human. It is an anthropomorphic fantasy. We once told stories of plants, mountains, and storms, sun, moon and stars, as intentional beings like ourselves. But science regards that as superstitious fantasy - at least, when taken literally. Such fantasy may be enriching, but it doesn’t tell us about objective realities.

But let’s back up a bit: Depth psychology has a particular interest in mythic projections, and the reason for this is their archetypal nature. They make visible something of the deep structure of the human psyche. Through them we can glimpse the Self, that psychic center in which the God-image is embedded. And that, as Jung understood it, is why natural phenomena can have a numinous quality. They can inspire awe. The Earth as Mother is clearly such a phenomenon: She evokes a spiritual emotion. It may be that the religions of the Great Mother were long ago displaced by Christianity, yet this same emotion arises spontaneously at times - and some of you no doubt know it. When we stand among great mountains - when our communities are ravaged by violent weather events - when we return to places in nature where we played as children…. The emotion that arises at such times has a mysterious power that doesn’t easily dissolve under rational scrutiny. We feel that we’re in the presence of something much larger than ourselves and ultimately beyond our comprehension. Wherever there is a sense of nature as Mother, then, a sense of the sacrality of nature constellates as well.

I’m talking about these ideas in the abstract, but their real value comes when grounded in experience. So let’s stop for a minute and do that: How many of you would say that, at least once in your life, you’ve felt a sense of oneness with nature? [A show of hands] And could you name a place where that occurred? To take it one step further, would you say that you experienced a sacred presence in that place - or *soul*, to use a language we often hear these days: Have you experienced soul in the natural world? [Again, a show of hands] Looking around the room, what I see is that many of you have some sense of yourself as a child of nature. You may not use the phrase “Mother Nature,” but the experience behind it is recognizable to you.

**The counter-perspective embodied in the book of *Genesis***

Now archetypal projections are notoriously difficult to withdraw, but if it were possible for us to dismantle the metaphor of earth as Mother – if it were possible – then how *are* we to see the natural world? What alternative lenses are there? To answer that question, we might go back to that point in Western history when Judaeo-Christian tradition separated itself from the old Nature-based religions, especially the religions of the Mother. What gave that authority was the concept of a single omnipotent God who stands apart from the natural world. You get a sense of that apartness in this image, which was a favorite of William Blake’s, his depiction of the Creator God. [SLIDE] With this as our image of God, we no longer look for the sacred within nature. We may admire the work of God’s hands, the wonders of Creation, but we understand everything good in the natural world as simply a reflection of God’s goodness.

To this day, there are those, especially Christian fundamentalists, who are uncomfortable with any hint of a spiritual feeling for nature because it raises the spectre of a return to paganism. You might dismiss this as a case of cultural paranoia, but there’s a certain clarity in it: The entire trajectory of Western culture has depended upon our positioning ourselves apart from nature, and this would hardly have occurred without the image of a God apart, a Father God in whose image we are formed. Such a patrimony gives us the feeling that we can successfully extract ourselvesfrom the natural world. Jung himself believed that this was a major factor in the development of consciousness: It protects us from the Great Mother who pulls the psyche back into a primitive entanglement with nature.

The dissonance between Earth as Mother and the Judaeo-Christian image of nature makes itself felt most deeply when we enter into the *Genesis* story. In *Genesis,* it’s not that Mother Earth is demoted or denigrated*:* It’s that she has no presence there whatsoever: The Garden of Eden is a lovely and nurturing place, replete with birds and animals, but there is no hint there of nature personified – the sole exception being the talking Serpent who convinces Eve to eat the apple from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Instead, this Garden has the character of an agricultural holding, a prime piece of real estate. It is property - not belonging to Adam and Eve, but tended by them, as stewards chosen by the divine Owner to represent His interests. God gives them dominion over it. In later variations on this theme, the Garden was sometimes depicted as surrounded by a wall, as if to emphasize that, here, nature has been enclosed within the kind of boundary that defines property rights. And what are some of things you see going on within that walled Garden? [SLIDE: an anonymous 15th century painting of a walled Garden of Eden] What lies within this boundary is ordered and regulated by its Owner, obedient to His will. But what lies outside? That is curiously ill-defined in *Genesis*, as if it were not part of Creation at all. We might imagine it as a kind of outer darkness. So that, even before our first parents were cast out of Eden, nature is represented in two opposite ways: what is under God’s protection and what is not, the well-ordered and the chaotic, the light and the dark.

If you accept these terms, the dark side of nature is where we actually live. The Garden of Eden is the ideal. It is not a characterization of the natural world as we know it, but rather an image of what it should be, what it was intended to be. And what it should be is peaceful and productive. It seems that God created this Paradise and everything in it as a resource for the human race. In the second chapter of *Genesis*, we’re told that God planted this Garden but then saw that “there was not a man to till the ground”, with the implication that he created Adam to fill that role. Actually, the word translated here as “to till” (“to till the ground”*)* means something a little broader in the original Hebrew: The word *‘abad* covers everything from cultivating and dressing the soil to adorning and embellishing one’s property. The first task of humanity, then, is to improve upon nature,in the sense that a farmer improves his land by clearing and cultivating it, but perhaps in other ways as well. And since God gives us vicarious ownership of the Garden, the reward for our labors is to reap the benefits. We may harvest the fruits (most of them), thereby making a good life for ourselves. So the concept of human *dominion* over the earth is inextricably linked with making use of it for ourselves. There could hardly be a more human-centered vision of the natural world.

Now *dominion* is obviously a power word, and it has justified a multitude of sins over the years. But let’s look at it more carefully and in context:

[And God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.](http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Genesis-1-28/)”

*Genesis* 1:27-8, in the King James translation

To know what the authors of *Genesis* really meant by *dominion*, it helps to go back again to the original Hebrew, the word *radah*. A Charlotte pastor active in the environmental movement likes to explain that *radah* does not imply mindless exploitation, but rather a sense of ordering and regulating. In the Hebrew scriptures, this word is used in situations where a ruler goes down to walk among his subjects, listening to what they have to say, perhaps learning from them things that he needs to know in order to govern well. In other words, this is a benevolent ruler who serves the well-being of his subjects, perhaps even to the point of setting his personal interests aside. And here you can see *Genesis* defining our position in the natural world as mirroring that of the good God in whose image we are created: regulating and creating order. We are God’s surrogates and we fulfill this role by acting as good stewards, good managers of the Garden.

But stewardship is not the whole story in *Genesis*, because before we can exercise benevolent rule, we must first subdue the earth. And in fact almost every occurrence of the word *radah* in the Hebrew scriptures makes some reference to military action or to political authority. If there were any doubt that brute force might be required, consider the Hebrew word *kavas*h, here translated as *subdue* (we are to “subdue” the earth). This word has an interesting etymology: It describes the gesture of placing one’s foot upon the neck of the conquered enemy, as a symbol of his defeat and submission. It’s a quintessential gesture of power. And it’s a gesture that recurs over and over again in Western art, not only in a Judaeo-Christian context but from classical Greek and Roman sources as well. It’s a gesture that belongs to the archetype of the Warrior and typifies his attitude toward the natural world.

So let’s take a look at some of those images: In ancient Greece, the Warrior was embodied in heroes like Hercules, who conquered by virtue of his exceptional physical strength**.**  [SLIDE] Here he is shown defeating the Nemean Lion, a top predator, the “king of beasts”. And in defeat, the lion is trampled underfoot: *kavash*. This victory, among others, led to Hercules’ being elevated to the status of a demi-god, which reminds us that one of the dangers of identifying with the archetype of the Warrior is inflation – believing one’s self to be more than human.

What Judaeo-Christian tradition added to the Warrior was a layer of sanctity. A hero like St. George fights with God on his side. [SLIDE: Raphael’s 16th century painting, “St. George and the Dragon”] Having physical strength and courage may be to his advantage, but his victory is only assured because God’s authority stands behind him. For him, not only is dominion over the earth achievable, but it has a moral and spiritual dimension as well. What’s important to see is that God didn’t just give Adam and Eve the means to subdue the earth, and the right to do so: He explicitly charged them with prevailing over nature and keeping it underfoot. This was their mandate from God.

Now add to the *Genesis* story the later concept of Heaven, that is, a new Paradise beyond earthly existence. This gave the Christian Warrior an additional advantage that dispensed with the necessity for exceptional physical strength: it brought heroism within the reach of any man or woman who possessed great faith. Soldiers of the Cross could face certain death confident that it was their gateway to “a better place.” And the saints were commonly represented subduing bestial aspects of Creation, inner and outer. To do so was evidence of how stalwart they were in their faith, like these figures from the façade of a 12th century French church. [2 SLIDES from the cathedral in Laon]

In general. how we view animals is a strong clue about our perspective on the natural world. From images like these, we might conclude that Christianity came to see wild animals as dangerous, if not morally repulsive creatures to be subdued by force – killed, if necessary. Subduing the earth meant keeping animal nature underfoot and, with it, actual animals. But where did all this animosity towards the animal come from? And how did the archetypal Warrior come to loom so large in Western fantasy about nature? In the Garden of Eden, nature is docile and fully cooperates with the plans of the divine Owner and His stewards. That’s nature as God created it - a peaceful agrarian fantasy in which there is little place for the Warrior. But we are told that, because of human sin, Paradise is lost to us forever; there is no going back. And to lose Paradise means losing the friendly cooperation of birds and animals. Once answering to the names that Adam gave them, they no longer accept our rule. Nor do they co-exist peacefully with one another. The lion no longer lies down with the lamb. It has become a harsh and chaotic realm of “dog eat dog.” You may be familiar with the phrase, “Nature, red in tooth and claw.” We associate that with 19th century attitudes, since it comes from a poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson. But Tennyson did not invent this very selective vision of the natural world: Medieval churches and monasteries were replete with images like this one of predators and prey. [SLIDE: sculpted capitals in the Kloster garden of Zurich’s Grossmunster] This is nature is at war with itselfin a way that the Creator God never intended.

We’ve seen that science dismisses the naïve projections upon which indigenous peoples base their relationship with nature. But a new kind of projection now arose, the kind of shadow projection which generates contempt, if not downright hostility towards nature. Rather than feeding careful attention to actual animal behavior – an attentiveness upon which our survival once depended - this kind of projection clouds our vision of animals. We became more interested in them as symbolic figures in the human drama than as actual living creatures. This tendency can be seen early in the *Genesis story,* where the Serpent is described as the most “subtil” of animals. The implication is that the Serpent is close to humans in intelligence. Of course this is not the actual snake as known to herpetologists; rather, it’s a way of talking about human sin as it first emerges at an instinctual level. And the Serpent is punished accordingly, exiled from Paradise along with Adam and Eve:

 “[And the LORD God said unto the serpent,](http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Genesis-3-14/) … [I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”](http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Genesis-3-15/)

*Genesis* 3:14-15, in the King James translation

The Serpent instigated Adam and Eve’s decision to disobey God. They were partners in sin, so now they are paired in enmity forever after.

In the serpent’s enmity is distilled all that vulnerability which we suffer as the result of being exiled from Paradise: Having rejected God’s original arrangement, we now find ourselves exposed to difficulty and danger, to pain and death. Remember this image? [SLIDE: Massacio’s 15th century painting, “The Expulsion from Paradise”] We once easily subdued the Serpent, but now it bites back; when we try to bring it underfoot, it bruises our heel. Imagining the natural world in this way narrows our focus to one of fear and vigilance. Words like *natural* and *wild* come to have a special negative meaning, inextricable from unsocialized aspects of the human psyche. Nature is now the enemy. As long as we dwelt in Paradise, our separateness from nature was benign, but in our exiled state, it has turned into frank alienation. We are no longer at home in our world, that is, in nature. And the anguish of this can be seen in Massacio’s depiction of Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Eden.

Of course, indigenous peoples feel vulnerable to the forces of nature as well: Remember Casey Camp’s words, “With merely a talk to her Thunder Nation, she could wash us away.” But that is not their only focus: In Native American tradition, for example, the natural world houses the spirits of departed ancestors who love us, alongside those who mean us harm. It’s a mixed picture. But *Genesis* tends to color all of the natural world beyond the walls of Paradise with the fear and resentment aroused in us by sin. Indigenous peoples compared nature to a great Family and, in those terms, aspired to maintain a certain harmony with it. But after *Genesis,* where no such family relatedness is acknowledged, our projections onto the natural world tend take on a paranoid quality, such that we’re always in battle mode. There is neither desire nor ability to relate with what is bestial: Our hope lies in keeping it safely under control, underfoot. And so conquest of nature becomes the goal.

By this point, I hope you have some feeling for what is meant by the so-called Dominion Mandate in *Genesis*. So let’s stop here for a moment and, again, try to ground what we’re talking about in personal experience. What are some of the ways in which it’s important to you, personally, to control nature, that is, to maintain some measure of *dominance*? What amenities would you be loathe to give up? What advantages over life in the wild? What resources, say, in your medicine chest? Let’s just see what immediately comes to your mind.

If you think about this long enough, the degree to which our culture protects us from nature begins to seem gargantuan - and the way it manipulates natural processes for our pleasure or convenience. It’s hard not to take all that for granted, especially arrangements that have been in place for generations. But if we don’t bring some awareness to that, we can’t form a realistic picture of how we relate to the natural world. And we can’t be completely honest about the value we attach to wielding dominion over the earth.

Now one of things you may notice is how individual your requirements are; one person may be attached to amenities that are very costly to the environment, while another is willing to make sacrifices in order to live “green”, as we say. But none of us can completely escape involvement in a culture that makes conquest of nature a primary goal. That this can be a destructive course is not surprising, because conquest requires a Warrior, and the archetypal Warrior has always been a problematical figure in human societies. So let’s take a look at some aspects of that archetype now. And you may be surprised to find how many of them play out very specifically in the current environmental crisis.

The Warrior occupies a very specialized niche, and he (perhaps she) has very specialized skills. In the critical moment, he is supposed to marshal superhuman strength, all the while suppressing the natural fear of death. And what makes this possible is primitive rage, unchecked by caution or reflection. Moderation is no virtue for the Warrior. Nor is empathy- another natural emotion which he must learn to suppress. The Warrior cannot afford a sense of relatedness with the enemy. Without dehumanizing the other, it would be very difficult for him to perform his assigned task, which is to injure or to kill. (And please bear in mind that I’m not talking about actual soldiers. Rather, I’m describing an archetype, a larger-than-life character immortalized in stories from around the world – but not only the old stories, because this figure is a particular favorite of today’s entertainment industry.) The Warrior is a character driven by fanatical determination to do whatever it takes to stop the enemy, even if that action results in his own death. In effect, the Warrior operates in a trance state, compulsively driven, focused on a very narrow objective and more or less oblivious to all else. If such Warriors were left to their own devices, the natural endpoint of any armed conflict would be the complete eradication of one side or the other. Many armies have used scorched earth policies to demoralize and defeat a human enemy. How much less concern for environmental values, if the enemy is nature itself.

Obviously, the Warrior’s very strengths, so vital to the human community when he is needed, ill suit him for wise and benevolent rule. That is why so many Warriors in the old stories seek a King or a god worthy of their service: That figure’s authority sets limits and creates safe containment for the energies of the Warrior. But even with this ideal of service, the Warrior finds it difficult to be integrated back into ordinary life after a war. The violence of combat provides his reason for being. In fact, the violence of war affects everyone in the society in a way that tends to perpetuate war: It easily sets in motion an endless cycle of paranoid action and reaction in which fear inspires by violence, violence amplifies fear.

This dynamic may go a long way towards explaining a strange fact: One might think that fear of nature should be a thing of the past. The vulnerability that humans felt even a few thousand years ago, when Hercules drove his spear into the Nemean lion, is gone. Most of us expect to go through our entire lives without finding ourselves at the mercy of a predatory animal. In fact, humans have gone so far in their conquest of nature that we can be quite self-congratulatory about it. Yet, however much control over nature we achieve, an adversarial attitude persists. Instead of returning to a peaceful agrarian way of life, to an Eden-like Garden, we are more alienated from nature than ever. Modern technology exists to extend the conquest of nature. We are apparently fascinated with what technology can do, independent of any actual practical value that it may have. And aggression against nature finds expression all around us, as in TV ads like this one. [SLIDE: a recent ad for the herbicide, Roundup, using a Cowboy gunslinger theme]. What did you see in this advertisement? Would some of you like to offer observations?

Behind such an ad iscareful research into the collective psyche and, in this case, it must be accurate, because a tremendous amount of money is made in the sale of herbicides like Round-up.

Of course, an adversarial attitude toward nature can’t be attributed solely to Judaeo-Christian tradition. But it does belong to Western culture in a special way. And it entered a new phase with the birth of modern science, when a decisive conquest of nature began to seem attainable. We’re perhaps not accustomed to think of scientists as embodiments of the archetypal Warrior. Yet from the very beginning, science owed its success to two attributes of the Warrior: first, single-minded focus on reaching a narrowly defined goal, and – more ominously - a capacity to dehumanize the enemy, to dehumanize nature. In fact, it was science which carried dehumanization of the natural world to its logical extreme. Robert Boyle, the founding father of modern chemistry, tells it better than I can: He advised that it was better to look at the natural world as a machine rather than, as some people in the past have seen it, as a goddess. Although he continued to use feminine pronouns to refer to nature, he believed that, as long as people regard the natural world as sacred, as a goddess, they do not feel licensed to do whatever they want to do with it. But if we conceive of it as a machine, then it's dead, it's insensitive, we have no obligation to it, and we can do whatever we want. Bear in mind that that perspective was put forth by Boyle over 300 years ago. Today, we may well hear something sociopathic in the proposal that we do whatever we want with the natural world. But, if we believe God charged the human race with exercising dominion over nature, what more efficient way to do it than by dehumanizing it, reducing it to a machine?

**A Jungian take on these different lenses through which to view nature**

Now let’s look back at the ground we’ve covered so far: Indigenous peoples saw the world as alive and peopled with a host of intentional beings like ourselves. At least some of them were revered as sacred powers, notably, Mother Earth herself. Nature was the great Family. But Judaeo-Christian tradition broke with that view**:** It envisioned nature as something to be subdued, to be governed by human will for human purposes. This is the perspective which has dominated collective life in the Western world.

The title I gave my lecture this evening asserts that metaphors matter. The inner worlds we inhabit are formed by root metaphors like those I’ve been describing. If you imagine nature to be a great Family, that is the world in which you live. If you conceive of nature as a Machine, that is the nature your psyche inhabits. But these metaphors have power over the outer world as well, for what a culture imagines nature to be it will replicate, to the extent that it has the power to do so. Western culture *has* replicated its root metaphors, and with incredible success: We’ve been fruitful, multiplied and colonized the entire globe. In the process, claims have been staked and a network of property lines laid down in every possible location. Meanwhile, we’ve developed an ever higher degree of control over our environment by replacing the natural with the artificial: We bend nature to our will in every way our ingenuity permits. At this point, we might claim to have fulfilled the dominion mandate. From a religious point of view, good stewardship of the earth remains a meaningful concept. But when science took the step of imagining nature as dead and insensitive, death was exactly what we began to replicate in the environment. Whether through ignorance or contempt, we’ve disregarded the dynamics of natural systems to the point of – literally at times - creating “dead zones” in industrialized areas and in waterways and oceans. This alarms us, and rightly so, because it’s an unmistakable symptom of pathology in collective thinking. We feel that something must change.

And change has been gestating for a long time now. It’s fed by an emotional attachment to nature that is very old and persists in the interstices of our culture. This is something that can be seen, for example, in the legends of St. Francis of Assisi. Love of nature, reverence for the natural world, may not be evidenced by politicians and captains of industry, but it has always been there as a potential in individual life. And it is out of this residue of feeling that a counter-cultural position has gradually been taking shape - a counter-cultural stream based on a feeling of kinship with nature and running more or less underground.

When blatant abuse of the natural environment occurs that stream tends to surface: Those are the moments in which dissent finds its voice. The industrial revolution in England created new blights on the landscape and brought forth the Romantic nature poets. Runaway growth and development in America awakened champions of its disappearing wilderness, men like Henry David Thoreau and John Muir. Half a century ago, Rachel Carson’s book, *Silent Spring*, made its readers aware of the massive scope of environmental pollution, and that new awareness was largely responsible for launching modern environmentalism. The Deep Ecology movement was born in Norway in the 1970’s, as hydroelectric development threatened beloved landscapes, including the magnificent Mardalsfossen waterfall. And Deep Ecology quickly spread to this country and beyond. With it came a new ethical sensibility with respect to nature, maintaining that nature is not for our use. Everything in nature has value in itself and deserves its life. We too have the right to protect our survival, but our place in Creation is no more important than any other.

In the Deep Ecology movement, the counter-cultural tendencies of the Romantics blossomed into full-blown rebellion. Its voices are eloquent, often angry, and sometimes bitterly misanthropic. Those who feel a greater loyalty to nature as whole than to the human species find it difficult to imagine anything good coming out of human dominance. And some conclude that evolution took a tragic wrong turn in bringing forth our species. Decisively rejecting Robert Boyle’s idea that we have no ethical obligation towards nature, its proponents are left with a heavy burden of collective guilt. One of the Norwegian founders of Deep Ecology, Peter Wessel Zapffe, proposed that our only redemption lies in removing ourselves from the equation altogether. And an American variation on this theme, the idea of Voluntary Human Extinction, proposes that we simply cease reproducing, as a final gesture of love and respect for the wider circle of life. The position of Voluntary Human Extinction is essentially non-violent (like that of most eco-terrorism, which destroys property, not lives). And, radical though it may be, it has gained some traction – in theory, if not in practice. Nothing could be further from the *Genesis* story, in which human well-being comes first. Human concerns have been displaced from the center and human beings put back on an equal footing with the rest of Creation – an idea that indigenous peoples never needed to spell out because it was taken for granted.

From a Jungian point of view, what I’m describing here is a genuine collision of opposites: two perspectives on the natural world, and on our place in it, that are irreconcilable. And this is just the sort of polarization into which Jung brought insight. Jung taught that such intransigent opposites must be held in tension until some creative third emerges, some new way of imagining that preserves the values carried by each pole. And it helps if we can find a simple way to name these conflicting values. What I see at work here is two great principles which Jung saw in every human endeavor, in every relationship: One is love; the other is the will to power - both needed, both omnipresent concerns. But they are true opposites in the sense that they pull us in incompatible directions. Jung wrote,

“Where love reigns, there is no will to power; and where the will to power is paramount, love is lacking. The one is but the shadow of the other.”

C. G. Jung, *The Psychology of the Unconscious (CW 7:78)*

The great question is this: How can love of nature and our need to maintain some modicum of control, of power, be brought into a viable balance?

Theoretically, a balance can be achieved coming from either of these perspectives. Where nature is seen as the great Family, relatedness is given primacy, and it’s within the context of properly cultivated relationships that power is gained. Power is actually a constant theme in Native American tradition, but it comes from *alliance* with nature. You heard that in Casey Camp’s words at the Washington march. “We are allied with the greatest powers that are; we are allied with the Father Sun; we are allied with the Mother Earth… And my relatives, you are winners.” In the opposite camp, in Western culture, human power is given primacy, and it is only within the context of human dominance and control that some measure of relatedness may be enjoyed: A gardener may love the beauty of a well-manicured flower garden. A farmer may love the ancestral farm which bears the mark of many generations of hands. Science may seek intimate knowledge of nature, in the spirit of the benevolent ruler who walks among his people and learns what is needed for the society to thrive. But what do we do with the archetypal Warrior who drives us farther and farther into alienation from nature by trampling it underfoot?

Science and technology have not given up on this problem, nor has Judaeo-Christian religion. As the environmental crisis deepens, there is a growing contingent of Jewish and Christian apologists calling for good stewardship of the earth. If anything, this idea *emphasizes* human responsibility for what’s happening in the natural world, since in the book of *Genesis* God charged us quite explicitly with tending and caring for the Garden. If the natural world is ours, then it’s ours to take care of. Good stewardship of the earth is said to have meaning in Islamic thinking as well. But both of these traditions foster alienation from nature; and both include an apocalyptic strain which undermines any lasting commitment to stewardship of the earth.

You may remember James Watt, Ronald Reagan’s secretary of the Interior. Watt was an evangelical Christian who favored maximum exploitation of federal lands and showed little concern for the extinction of endangered species. Speaking before Congress, Watt justified his position by saying, "I do not know how many future generations we can count on before the [Lord returns](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Coming).” If we’re not going to be here much longer, why not do whatever we will with nature? In any case, if the natural world is not our true home, why worry that damaging the web of life puts *ourselves* at risk? Some apocalyptic scenarios embrace the destruction of the earth as part of God’s plan, while even moderate religious leaders have been slow to pay attention to dangerous trends.

A sense of urgency always seems to be felt first by men and women we think of as nature mystics – outliers who have rarely been affiliated with institutional religion. In an ironic twist, it’s fallen to these individuals to call for a new realism in our approach to the natural world: ironic, because their feeling for nature is typically associated with the Romantic movement (and rightly so). The Romantics, even in their own day, were often ridiculed as sentimental and naïve about nature. Yet, in their own way, they were paying attention, even before science became concerned about the fact that damage to the environment damages *us*.

If the ideal of stewardship can’t save the Judaeo-Christian perspective on nature, we’re back at a genuine tension of opposites: Is nature for human use, or must its well-being be considered too, completely apart from human interests? Earlier, I introduced Jung’s idea that such opposites must be held in tension until some creative third emerges, some new way of imagining things that preserves the values carried by each side. This creative third must come from that deep place in our psyches where conviction is carried by emotion. It can’t be rushed or forced. It can’t be thought out, reasoned, or argued. In short, it comes from the spontaneous creativity of the imagination, working at a level which is, at least in part, unconscious. Meanwhile, the tension of the opposites tends to produce tremendous pressure and anxiety. And that is indeed the psychic atmosphere in which we live. We feel “stuck” with problems we’re not prepared to solve.

Jung observed something much like this in individual psychology, particularly in mid-life. When a successful person reaches the upper limit of what will and competence can achieve, there often comes a problem, a dysfunction, a symptom, that the conscious personality is powerless to address. An old wound may be re-opened or a new longing enflamed. Or perhaps it’s simply that spiritual aridity begins to make life seem meaningless. In any case, this can be a terrible moment, what Jung called “the defeat of the ego.” But he considered such a defeat necessary before individuation in the deepest sense can be initiated. When we’re that stuck, our only way forward is to look beyond ego and engage with - well, whatever we call it, the Self with a capital-S, God, the transpersonal reality in which ego is embedded.

Western culture as a whole may have arrived at just such a moment. And an increasing number of individuals look to nature itself as the transpersonal factor. Nature will help us work out a better way of living here on the earth where we’re planted, and, failing that, nature may give us solace – the “blessed and the blessing trees” of Wendell Berry’s poem. But it won’t be nature as imagined in the book of *Genesis*. Neither can it be nature exactly as imagined by indigenous peoples, because our intellectual life and the conditions with which we have to deal are so very different. This is a human-dominated world, and our starting point has to be here and now. Even Voluntary Human Extinction holds no solution, for it fails to take into account that simply abandoning the earth would leave it with more severe problems than if we stayed on to exercise some oversight. For example, what do we think would happen if nuclear reactors around the world were left unsupervised? They would inevitably melt down in time, contaminating air and water with massive amounts of radioactivity. Again, we’re stuck. None of the root metaphors which we’ve been examining is quite right for imagining a viable future.

**The scientific field of Ecology**

Now root metaphors like these tend to have a very long life, operating at a more or less unconscious level. Perhaps they *never* die, but only undergo processes of transformation so slow and gradual that they mirror the evolutionary processes in biological systems. But every once in awhile, something happens to produce a major mutation, as it were. And in the year 1972, something of that kind did happen:

The story is this: In the winter of 1972, NASA conducted its final manned mission to the moon. About 5 hours after the launch, the three astronauts of Apollo 17, looking out the window of their spacecraft, were treated to a rare view of the earth fully illuminated, with the winter solstice imminent and Antarctica coming into view. Previous spaceflights had reached sufficient distance from the earth to see it whole in this way, but this time, the impression was particularly dramatic. At 28,000 miles out, Eugene Cernan, the mission commander, jokingly commented to Mission Control. “We’re not the first to discover this, but we’d like to confirm… that the world is round.” And one of the astronauts (we don’t know which one) snapped this photograph with their onboard camera, a 70-millimetre [Hasselblad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasselblad). [SLIDE: the photograph known as the Big Blue Marble]. For them, it was one among many similar photos, and they had no idea at the time that it would become – perhaps - the most widely distributed photographic image in human history. But something about its remarkable beauty, so colorful, almost translucent in the full light of the sun, instantly made this image an icon for the emerging environmental movement. And from the beginning it was connected with a realization that this planet is our Home…. Home: a word that evokes “perhaps the oldest, deepest, and most powerful image of the human soul,” as Robert Romanyshyn has written. And Home in the context of the seeming emptiness and sterility of outer space.

For the first time, we could see the vulnerability of the earth, alone in an infinite expanse of blackness.

It may be difficult now to experience the power of this image now, after 40 years of over-use and trivialization, especially by the advertising industry. Yet the image is still working on us. There is something about the Big Blue Marble which caught archetypal projections and to this day awakens a spiritual feeling in many who see it. It’s the same emotion that can come at any time that we’re moved by beauty in nature. But the sheer scale of this image, its roundness, and the fact that the whole of it has now actually been seen with human eyes – not a map on paper, not a drawing, but the thing itself – brings us close to a mystery. I think that, for many nature-lovers, this image contains all the loved places that exist in all the local corners of the earth. Wordsworth’s Lake District, John Muir’s Yosemite, the great Mardalsfossen waterfall destroyed for the sake of hydroelectric power,…and perhaps also a loved place that came to mind for you earlier this evening. This image is spacious enough to contain the sum total of human attachment to nature and, in that sense, it transcends the personal.

Of course, the Apollo 17 photograph would not have ignited the popular imagination as it did had not science been busy gathering fuel for the fire. We can go all the way back to Darwin to see modern biology chipping away at the idea that we humans are somehow separate from everything else in nature: The most familiar graphic used to teach the theory of evolution is, after all, a Family Tree, and we have our own place at the end of one of its branches. But I believe that the decisive development came barely five or six decades ago, with the emerging field of ecology. And I want to end this evening by saying just a bit about this field, partly because it’s the area of science most familiar to me, and partly because the University of North Carolina and our part of the country have a special part in its history.

*Ecology* was a term coined in the 19th century, but only in our lifetime (my lifetime) did it become associated with a serious attempt to describe the natural world in terms of systems (ecosystems). This approach is more than a descriptive strategy. The founding premise of ecology is that no organism can be understood as a stand-alone unit, that all life processes are profoundly interrelated and interactive: the web of life. For that matter, all geological processes, all weather patterns, everything that goes on here on earth impacts everything else in a complex and dynamic way. So ecology is the scientific study of interactions among organisms and their environment.

Environmentalists quickly took to ecology because it supports a felt sense of kinship with nature. As a result, we’ve gotten in the habit of using the word *ecology* in a variety of non-scientific contexts, Deep Ecology being one example. And wherever the word is used, it carries with it the emotional resonance of Home. For the prefix eco- comes from the Greek word oἶκος (ecos) meaning the household, the inhabited house, the home.

That now-familiar prefix – *eco*- - pops up in another context that has special relevance to our topic, because it has to do directly with the dominion mandate: The ancient Greeks spoke of the ecumene, that is, ”the known world,” that part of the world inhabited by civilized peoples. And they calculated with remarkable accuracy that, in their day, this ecumene occupied only about a quarter of the earth’s surface. [SLIDE] Here you see it on the very first visual representation of the earth as a sphere, created by the Greek cartographer Crates in the year 150 B.C.E. By the time that the astronauts were able to hold the entire planet in one field of vision, the ecumene more or less covered its surface. The Big Blue Marble shows no evidence of this, of course, but satellite photographs of the earth in shadow are dramatically dotted with lights, evidence of human habitation.

The point is that, once the ecumene occupied the entire globe, the earth was by definition an *ecos* – an inhabited place, our home. But modern ecological science brought a second, very different meaning to the prefix *ecos*-. It saw the earth as home to the full range of living organisms. In fact, in its early days ecology had little if anything to say about human life. Instead, it looked at plants and animals in localized ecosystems referred to as *communities.* The factors which defined these local communities tended to be such things as climate and soil type – or, in the case of marine biology, salinity and currents in the ocean. But why the word *communities*? Where did this metaphor come from? It came out of a family connection between ecology and the academic discipline of sociology - a literal family connection, which traces back to Howard W. Odum, a highly respected scholar at the University of North Carolina.

Odum was interested in all aspects of Southern culture and became the leading promoter of regionalism as a holistic concept. In his thinking, this concept incorporated everything from folk music to agricultural conditions. Howard W. Odum’s two sons, Eugene and Howard T. Odum, both studied biology at UNC-Chapel Hill at one time or another, and it could be argued that these two brothers, often working collaboratively, were the founding fathers of ecology as a science in its own right. In any case, they co-authored the first textbook of ecology, published in 1953. Much influenced by their father’s holistic thinking, they often credited him as an important influence in their own understanding of emergent properties and other ecological concepts. And by the time the younger Odum was fairly out of graduate school, he was anticipating a vision of the entire earth as one vast ecosystem, a planet-wide community. What strikes me about this whole story is the close analogy between the idea of community in ecology and that of family in indigenous thinking about nature. Coming from two profoundly different cultural backgrounds, both saw the earth in terms of a similar metaphor from human life – a metaphor which made sense of our part within the whole.

The space program with its dramatic photographs reinforced this vision of the earth as one vast, over-arching system - a relatively closed system, given its position orbiting by itself in space. And you may be familiar with the Gaia hypothesis, in whose birth NASA played a part as well, in that James Lovelock was working as a consultant for NASA at the time that he developed this idea. There’s a deep irony in the part played by the space program in this story. It has often been observed that, because the scientific method requires objectivity, it situates human reason at a greater distance from nature than ever before. And this was symbolically enacted by sending human beings into space – *literally* above and apart from the earth – where we could look down and see it with their own eyes. But, in a sense, space flight brought us full circle to a realization of our earthliness. The experience of gazing at the Big Blue Marble hanging in what seemed like an infinite expanse of emptiness awakened a visceral sense of our belonging here. Perhaps, to really know a place as Home, we must venture away from it at least once.

But old perspectives on the natural world don’t fade away, simply because a new one has been born. As soon as it became possible to imagine such a thing as space travel, many became fascinated with the possibility of creating space *colonies* and leaving the earth to live in them. Modern technology has always played with the idea of outgrowing dependence on Mother Nature, and the space program suggested a way of dispensing with nature altogether. Space colonies would pre-empt every function once performed autonomously by nature - perhaps even engineer artificial means of doing it better. In any case, it fulfilled one of modern technology’s most heroic ambitions, one in which the archetype of the Warrior has a special place. The astronauts often have a military background and training; they risk their lives by venturing into space, and their courage is inspirational. As the environmental crisis deepens, our collective fantasy life is full of similar Heroes who “save the world” (as we say) by taking extraordinary action under the greatest pressures. Such a prominent scientist as Stephen Hawking is now saying that only space colonies can save our species from annihilation – the idea being that this planet will inevitably die, but we can find ways to survive without it.

A number of practical arguments can be made against this solution. But one is particularly striking for its resonance with Jung’s understanding of the human psyche: E. O. Wilson pointed out that any system as thoroughly artificial as a space colony is actually more vulnerable than natural systems. Human error is always a factor and therefore no system entirely dependent on human competence is sustainable for long. Accidents will happen and, once we’ve left this planet, there will be no recovering from them. Jung often made similar observations when describing the limits of what ego, the conscious personality, can do on its own, unaided by habit, instinct, and spontaneous creativity. These resources are nature within us. And the fact is that we rely on them to a much greater degree than most of us acknowledge. Life can’t be lived by reason and will alone. Consciousness unaided by the unconscious is simply not up to the task. By the same token, human communities without a foot in the natural world – space colonies – are unsustainable.

But what difference does it really make to color the earth as Home, to see it through this new lens with all its subjective associations and emotional overtones? What are we likely to replicate in the world as a result? That’s a question that bears long reflection, but an immediate consequence is likely to be greater commitment to caring for the natural environment – not for strategic reasons but because we feel it’s ours. In other words, out of love and family feeling. One of the posters one sees at environmental rallies these days draws on this emotion: “There is no planet B.” There is no *plan* B. The idea is that, if we make a mess of this planet, there’s really no place else to go where we can re-settle. So we’d better get serious about taking care of the home that we have. This idea gets support from science. But I think the real message is in the ugliness of the image [SLIDE: a poster often shown with the “no planet B” caption], the pain we feel at seeing our Home defiled by pollution. If there were some other place, if technology could find a way to engineer our survival elsewhere, could it possibly be as hospitable to human life as the planet we have. Could it possibly be as beautiful?

Now I’ve come to a stopping point, and I want to leave you with one final thought about what I’ve called “the creative third,” that is, a way of resolving our culture’s deeply conflicted ways of seeing nature. If this is a work of the imagination, there’s no doubt that we are still deeply in transition. There is as yet no bridging the gap between those who favor Voluntary Human Extinction and those who want to spray down everything with Round-up. But the image of earth as Home does preserve some of the deepest values held by the opposing sides. It accomplishes a certain amount of integration of those perspectives. To say that the earth is our Home is not so different from saying that the earth is our Mother, the very stuff of our bodies and the nurturing womb out of which we will not, and cannot, emerge, because we ourselves are inextricably part of nature. At the same time, Home is a kind of property; one has ownership in the home, responsibility for taking care of it. We want to shape it to ourselves in a comfortable way. And we now understand that that means fostering the health of natural systems. The way one cares for a home is by no means cold and impersonal, yet scientific knowledge is one of our best resources we have for doing it well.

Perhaps the most important thing about this image of the Big Blue Marble is the way in which it has caught archetypal projections. It’s been barely 40 years now since this photograph appeared, and the spiritual emotion it evokes has not had time to settle into mainstream religious institutions or political agendas. But it reverses several thousand years of feeling that the earth is *not* our true home, that we’re in exile here and longing for a Paradise elsewhere. And this renewed attachment to the earth is a living emotion. In that sense, it’s a force of nature. As we carry it around over time, it will change our collective thinking and change the ways in which we act upon the world.