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**Applying Stories of the Environment to Business: What Business People Can**

**Learn From the Virtues in Environmental Narratives**

**David Dawson**

**The Business School**

**University of Gloucestershire**

**The Park Campus**

**PO Box 220**

**Cheltenham GL50 2QF**

**Applying Stories of the Environment to Business: What Business People Can  
Learn From the Virtues in Environmental Narratives**

David Dawson is a Senior Lecturer in Human Resource Management at The Business School, University of Gloucestershire, UK. His research interests include Virtue Ethics, ethical issues in HRM and decision-making in recruitment and selection.

# **Applying Stories of the Environment to Business: What Business People Can Learn From the Virtues in Environmental Narratives**

## **Abstract**

The use of narrative to communicate and convey particular points of view in society has increasingly become the focus of academic attention in recent years. In particular, Alisdair MacIntyre (1985, 1988, 1990 and 1999) has paid attention to the role of narrative in the conflict between different traditions when developing his virtue approach to ethics. Whilst there has been continued debate about the application of virtue approaches, some arguing that it is incompatible with business, I disagree and have already argued for a form of virtue that will focus business on society's needs rather than better business itself (Dawson and Bartholomew 2003). Here I continue to develop the argument in two ways.

First, I will explore the predominant business narrative and offer some comment on the 'virtues' that it promotes. However, rather than accepting this narrative I want to challenge it by examining a narrative from the environmental tradition, and consider how adopting the virtues promoted by it would shape business practices and challenge current business conventions. As a second step, I will focus on how we can change managers' perceptions of business to reflect these environmentally based virtues.

# **Applying Stories of the Environment to Business: What Business People Can Learn From the Virtues in Environmental Narratives**

## **Introduction**

The use of narrative to communicate and convey particular points of view in society has received considerable attention from academics in recent years. In the context of philosophical study, authors including Alisdair MacIntyre (1985, 1988 and 1990) and Martha Nussbaum (2001) have paid particular attention to the role of narrative in the conflict between different traditions. These authors and others (Foot 1978 and 2001, Slote 1996 and 2001, and Swanton 2003) have also played a significant role in renewing interest in Virtue Ethics. This renewed interest in the role of virtue has been felt well beyond the limits of philosophy. Indeed, it has influenced authors in disciplines as diverse as Environmentalism (e.g. Cafaro 2001, Preston 2001 and Shaw 1997a), the Medical professions (Oakley and Cocking, 2001), Business (Morse 1999, Randels 1998 and Solomon 1992, 2000 and 2003) and Theology (Hauerwas and Pinches 1997 and Meilander 1984).

Against the background of this renewed interest in the contribution of tradition and virtue to ethics, there has been continued debate about its application in practice. For example, some have understood virtue approaches to be incompatible with business. I disagree and have already argued for a form of virtue that will focus business on society's needs with profit as an equal or subordinate end. Moreover, my argument is

that business people are in the position to shape change towards virtuous action in society (Dawson and Bartholomew 2003).

Here I continue to develop the argument by restating that tradition has an essential role in influencing what will be understood as human good and virtue. Indeed, there will be many traditions waiting in the wings to challenge the current business orthodoxy with all their stories and, in turn, their acknowledgement of particular virtues. However, in this paper I will develop this project in two ways.

First, I want to explore the predominant business narrative and offer some comment on the 'virtues' that it promotes. However, rather than accepting this narrative I want to challenge it. If we follow Gare (1998), to challenge a particular tradition we need to develop and introduce narratives and stories to society. Here, then, we will present a narrative from the environmental tradition and examine the virtues associated with it.

Second, I will explore how adopting these environmental virtues would shape business practices and challenge current business conventions. In particular, I want to focus on how we might reorient organisational policy to embody these environmentally based virtues. How exactly would organisations need to change their behaviour to reflect an environmental virtue based approach? However, before we begin to tackle these tasks it is important to understand the importance of virtue, tradition and narrative.

## **The Importance of Virtue and Tradition**

Virtue approaches to ethics emphasise people's character. They stress how the good habits, or virtues, inherent in a person's character give them the propensity to act in ways that promote human flourishing. Human flourishing is seen as the ultimate end of humans and incorporates those things that help ensure our well being. Here, when people think about what to do they take into account the available facts and, using the practical wisdom given to them by the virtues, come to a decision (Whetstone 2001). People will consider the consequences of acts for their ability to think about and perform future acts (Koehn 1995) and also whether this leads to the human good. As Shaw (1997b:36) notes this requires "... a balanced and coherent notion of the good". This balanced view needs to go beyond the economic and may need to incorporate environmental, social, religious and maybe professional based concepts of well being.

People develop the good habits and, in turn, the virtues essential to action by witnessing, imitating and learning from the other people around them (Murphy 1999). As such the virtue approach relies on communities (MacIntyre 1999, Marchese et al. 2002) and their traditions to support and perpetuate virtues. A tradition has an essential historical element. People in a particular tradition refer to those who come before them for guidance. They develop their own ideas and, in turn, people who come after them build on them further. This leads groups of people who belong to a particular tradition, which may be concerned with a particular practice, to inherit a common history and memory of events. As I see it, this shared memory provides the



framework of thought that underpins particular ways of thinking and ways of acting or doing things.

The framework a particular tradition follows will have its own, maybe unique, focus. It will emphasise certain aspects of the way we live as being problematic and hence, certain ways of acting as solutions to these problems. Moreover, people will discuss those problems and not others. This means that when we are examining a tradition, and trying to understand it, we should focus not only on what it is saying but also on what it avoids saying. Only by understanding both what is and what is not discussed can we have a full appreciation of the tradition's influence on the way we live, our attitude towards virtue and the content of any approach to virtue that is adopted. Indeed, these are ideas that MacIntyre (1988) leads us to and he also considers how different traditions compete.

For example, in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, MacIntyre argues at length that the Genealogist superseded the Encyclopaedist tradition and that again Thomism has the potential to challenge this tradition. In terms of our discussion here, and dominant environmental thought, we might accept that the Christian concept of stewardship was superseded by a more scientifically rational mode of thought based in modernity that was, in turn, challenged by more atomistic thought based in post-modern 'traditions'. But how do these changes come about?

MacIntyre (1988) starts with the proposition that people from a particular tradition will often fail to recognise the legitimacy of another tradition's point of view. Two

sets of circumstances might lead to this. First, the traditions may not share common concepts and therefore they will not recognise common issues. In addition, they may not have a common language of concepts and therefore, they will not be able to understand the other's discourse. Put simply, people from one tradition are blind to the other. The second reason relates to the standards held by those who adhere to each of the traditions. Those who adhere to competing traditions may understand common concepts and may share a common language to discuss them. Still, they may hold standards that conflict with one another and this will lead them to dispute the view contained in the other's discourse. In the short term, these disputes may leave the traditions in opposition.

In the longer term there is more opportunity for a predominant tradition to falter or fail and other traditions to gain ascendancy. Where a tradition faces a lack of progression – in the terms of progress as it is seen in the context of the tradition – its adherents will begin to question its ability to sustain itself. This questioning is the basis of an epistemological crisis. The tradition will need to rewrite itself by drawing on new resources that solve the crisis by giving the tradition a new focus or face internal dissolution. Internal dissolution may lead to encounters with rival traditions as people look for new resources or alternative traditions and, ultimately, submission or merger. Of course, the other alternative is that the tradition faces complete failure on its own terms or defeat by another tradition.

What is important in MacIntyre's (1988) argument for our examination of tradition, narrative and virtue is that he argues that for traditions to understand each other they

must understand each other's language. They must understand not just at the level of rote learning, but as if it was their first language and this entails that they have a full appreciation of the culture, way of life and way of thinking in the other tradition. This inevitably means that, to some extent, they have to belong to the other tradition. Is it then not inevitable that one tradition that understands another tradition has the potential – even unknowingly – to adopt another tradition's perspectives on at least some issues? Put another way, it seems that through language, and thereby storytelling, we have the potential to change traditions.

### **Tradition, Narrative and the Environment**

So, what is the role of narrative? We have already said that narrative, or stories, have a role in underpinning traditions. But how do they do this? It is my view that narratives communicate a particular tradition's view of the world. By that I mean that narratives and the stories that support them tell us about things that a particular tradition finds important. We are told who or what is good or evil from that tradition's perspective. In understanding this we need to be clear that, as Kearney (2001) says, narratives are created using events. Initially, each event may be seen as an individual fragmented element. Only when a number of events are linked together are they constructed into a narrative. And here is the point. Which events are included in the narrative (are supportive of a particular point of view), how they are structured (the order the events are put in) and the way the events are presented (the view that is put

forward about the event) will depend, to a large extent, on the tradition to which it belongs.

Gare (1998) has used MacIntyre's (1985) ideas in the Environmental Ethics arena. He argues that people's values are led by the prevailing meta-narrative. The importance of this is made clear when he says,

"the beliefs that matter for how people choose to live and act are those embodied in the narrative they are living out... [If people] really are to live in a way that is ecologically sound, then their lives and the institutions and traditions of which they are part must be constituted by different narratives than they are at present. These narratives will be associated with different practices, different virtues, and, ultimately, different ideas..." (Gare 1998:7).

Gare continues to argue that the prevailing meta-narrative promotes a mechanistic worldview that emphasises progress through science, technology and economic development. Countering this meta-narrative will mean drawing on opposing narratives and bringing them to the fore. If we are to challenge a particular tradition we need to develop and introduce narratives and stories to society that challenge the predominant narrative.

This point is of vital importance when we consider the influence of narrative on the way we think and act toward the environment. Glotfelty (2001) shows how stories about places influence our attitudes and in turn our actions towards those places. She

uses the many examples of literature that deride Nevada to explain why people are willing to allow nuclear testing and waste storage in that state. Her argument makes it clear that stories can have very real consequences for peoples' actions. True, this is not to say that stories always lead to actions or that it is inevitable that people accept the stories. Glotfelty (2001) recognises that there may be a number of reactions to narratives that include trying to undermine them by pointing out inaccuracies or countering them with opposing narratives. For example, Harper (2001) shows how the Chernobyl nuclear accident challenged both socialist and western narratives of the environment that were based in the rhetoric of science and technical expertise. But highlighting these tactics only goes to show how people value and utilise the power of stories to promote action.

A number of perspectives can be taken on how stories can best be used to influence people's views of the environment. Raglan and Scholtmeijer (2001) put the case that stories of outstanding quality will be able to show the environment on its own terms. Nature will form our thought rather than our thought and language forming the way we think about nature. And these stories, the ones that help us learn (Taylor, Fisher and Dufresne 2002) by shocking us into thinking in a different way, are the ones that make a real contribution to the grand narrative of the environment. Moreover, in the context of our virtue approach we need to appropriate these stories and present them in a way that draws in a point of view, a point of view that emphasises virtue. Whilst shocking people into change may be important, King (1999) focuses us on the importance of making our message comprehensible to the audience. He argues that we need to ground the stories in the context in which people actually live if they are to

understand them. This will increase the likelihood that they will adopt the ideas. In effect, King (1999) is stipulating that we use the language of those we need to influence to achieve our ends and this raises difficulties as using language that is not based in the environment or virtues may dilute the message. Whilst this raises challenges it does not detract from the role of narrative in creating change.

In arguing that narratives have a central role in communicating, sustaining and challenging traditions, and have very real implications for action, I have acknowledged the importance of analysing narratives. Hence my task here is to identify the predominant business narrative and its implications for virtue. I can then go on to identify the narratives and stories that are there in the background with the potential to resist the dominant narrative. These are the very stories that we need to promote if things are going to change and the virtues they promote are going to take hold. In taking this position I am already shaping a particular approach to my analysis, but it is an approach that nevertheless meets two requirements that are very important to this project.

The first requirement is for any analytical approach to fit with the framework that has been adopted from MacIntyre. In this, it must allow exploration of what a narrative is not saying (the subtext) as well as what it is saying, not so much as a tool for deconstruction, but as a route to deeper understanding. It is also important that the approach is not hostile to tradition itself. Indeed, it must recognise the value of the historicity of narrative and that the teleological nature of a story needs to be brought to the fore in the analysis. Of course this leads us to the second requirement, that the

analysis must allow a focus on the ideas of virtue and the teleological ends embedded in the narrative and associated stories.

Thus, the first step in the analysis is to identify the dominant stories in business and the virtues implicit in them. These stories will combine to create the grand narrative of business. Once the grand narrative has been identified the second step is to identify the stories of other traditions. These stories help us to generate alternatives to, and in this develop a critical analysis of, the grand narrative. The juxtaposition of the grand narrative and the stories gives us a resource for a deeper understanding of both the business and environmental stories. Indeed, it helps ascertain which virtues are important in the stories and, in turn, reveals potential resources for the resistance of the grand narrative.

### **A Predominant Business Narrative**

Randels (1998) makes the point that there are many narratives that influence us. He presents us with five groups of narratives that relate to business in particular. Homo-economicus narratives present a picture where people act on the basis of self-interest, either in general or in particular spheres like business. Here, stories support an ethic of survival of the fittest rather than an ethic with a role in supporting wider society. Libertarian narratives of business centre on communities and groups that are formed by individuals. Individuals' freedoms are nevertheless paramount and government is seen as secondary to the markets in regulating society. Conservative

narratives focus on the role of private institutions in supporting the good of society, a good that is reflected in standards that all actions, including business' actions, need to reflect. Liberal narratives focus on tolerance and individual liberty and the championing of positive action towards the less well off. This stance leads to a suspicion of business motives where clear links to social good cannot be seen. Religio-philosophical narratives are broad in scope. Here there is a place for business as far as it supports what are seen as appropriate behaviours or ends.

The existence of these competing narratives makes identifying the predominant business narrative more difficult. As narratives cannot be neutral, the particular ethical or political standpoint you take may influence the narrative you portray as dominant. This point would be significant if I wanted people to accept our narrative as objective truth. However, my aims are more limited than showing a true account. Instead of showing a 'true' account, I want to present a grand narrative of business that would be familiar to many and accepted by most people. I want to portray business as people understand it.

Therefore, for now it is suffice to say that Libertarian, Conservative, Liberal and Religio-philosophical narratives are not what I would consider to be the predominant business narrative. As Randels (1998:1304) notes the Homo-economicus perspective “supplies the narratives most commonly associated with business.” I would agree and, albeit with notable departures from Randels' (1998) characterisation, use this perspective as the source of my predominant business narrative. Here, I present a story where business is ethically neutral, is in partnership with science, promotes



competition, supports progress, and distributes the fruits of that progress to society to be consumed. Large parts of this story focus on consumer oriented capitalist markets where individuals are the focus for competition and profit.

Business, as it is presented in the dominant narrative, is a neutral and technical tool.

A business cannot be ethical, and even if it could, it would not be its place to be.

Business is a servant of society, a set of tools or mechanisms, to use technical metaphors, which are based on markets. They can be used by individuals - whatever their faith, philosophy or values - and as such they are neutral. Any individual is free to use business, as they will. Of course, this raises the risk that people may use the business towards unethical ends, but this is not business itself being unethical, that is about the individuals that use business. And in any case, if there were any place for business to be concerned with morality it would only be to make sure that it meets its dominant objective, to help individuals to generate wealth through developing, producing and distributing goods and services. This wealth is what benefits society as a whole and is the right end of business.

We can see that because business is neutral towards individuals this does not make it neutral towards the generation of wealth and it is set up to continually strive for more. Science, of course, plays a central role in this drive for wealth. Business is in partnership with science. Science helps business by giving it more efficient production processes, cheaper more robust materials and more innovative products. Science gives business progress and progress is essential to the predominant story of business. Think of the number of industries that are based on progress. Some, like

home computer manufacturing, mobile phone technology and many healthcare products have resulted from what seem like dramatic advances in science. These advances have created some markets and revolutionised others. Almost invariably, this has led consumers to buy new products. It has reinvigorated commerce.

Whilst science has sustained business through its advances, this does not mean that the partnership is all one way. Business also has a role to play in disciplining science and acts as the main intermediary between science and individuals. For many, disenfranchised with government, their activity in the market is the only way they can influence scientists and businesses to produce the products that have such a profound effect on the way they live their lives. Consumers may be weak as individuals, but as a group in the market they have immense power over what is produced and how.

This can be seen in how the genetically modified food debate has taken very different course in different continents; many US consumers embracing the technology whilst European consumers have been much more cautious. There is then a role for business in directing science and technology to where it is needed. Businesses, as they compete against one another, can identify what consumers need, what they will find acceptable and what they will grow to like.

Competition, then, becomes a central element of business. It acts to sustain the progress that underpins business' continued success, but also to discipline science so that it keeps in line with what consumers will accept. This happens because competition offers reward based on reciprocity. Consumers expect to pay for the things they need and want. The idea that scientists would or should innovate for the

good of society without the expectation of significant reward is derided. If we just focused on societal wealth, where would the drive for efficiency come from? Where would the incentive be to take the risks on which scientific progress is founded? Instead, the measure of progress and success is whether consumers have bought a product. Wealth is something that is measured by consumer spending and profit.

The implication is that through consumption business provides the basis for social exchange and, moreover, interaction. By providing people with products that help them define themselves relative to others, it promotes a form of interaction that does not explicitly rely on social position, conflict or repression and on the whole allows us to lead peaceful lives. These peaceful lives that are spent striving for and consuming the next offering that science gives us, the next improvement in comfort, health and wellbeing. Of course, some people will choose not to participate in a system that hangs on the partnership of business, science and consumption. And this, in itself, can be seen as a triumph of business. Business gives people the freedom to opt out at little cost and it gives people that choice precisely because it is neutral.

What we have here is a narrative that brings together stories that have their roots in the history of trade, science and politics. The predominance of science in our society is one that has its roots in the Enlightenment. The free market based approach to the economy is one that has had more or less influence since aristocracy and mercantilism set the framework for trade and exchange. Indeed, we can see that there has been a continued development of the capitalist system that has led us to a consumer based capitalism that, as well as being an economic system, has started to

play a political role. Consumerism as a way of expressing preferences and views has, for some, become a substitute for what they see as faulty and discredited political systems.

So, what virtues come to the fore with this business narrative? It seems that the narrative of business as I have presented it here would demand seven virtues:

*Impartiality, Enterprise, Capability, Innovation, Perseverance, Constraint and Consumption.* The business person would be *impartial* in that they would accept the right of all people, irrespective of their faith or values, to trade and partake in business. They would be *enterprising* in that they would be focused on the generation of wealth, for themselves and their families, but also with regard for the benefits this wealth will have for society as a whole. *Capability* is a virtue in the sense that a person who is capable at their work should be efficient and more able to generate the progress that is so central to the partnership between business and science.

Indeed, the fourth and fifth virtues, *perseverance* and *innovation*, are important for those who are going to succeed in business or scientific endeavour. The ability to innovate is necessary if the advances the business system thrives on are going to occur. At the same time, we should not delude ourselves into thinking that the process of innovation is easy. It requires continued effort and perseverance. The energy that the virtues discussed so far offer needs to be tempered by *constraint*. The constraint we speak of here is market based and it is demanded by society. In turn,

this leads us to the final virtue *consumption*, as consumption is necessary if we are going to play our part in communicating to business what we find acceptable.

### **An Environmental Narrative**

Environmental Ethics concerns itself with the moral consequences of our interactions with the environment. That is, with non-human animals, plants and soil. In this, we can see that Environmental Ethics is distinct from ethical disciplines that limit their focus to human society. However, this distinctiveness does nothing to limit the proliferation of the narratives promoted by those with environmental concerns. Indeed, as with business, there are several perspectives.

Elliott (1995), when surveying Environmental Ethics, differentiates between the anthropocentric or people centred and non-anthropocentric or environmentally-centred approaches when discussing the main perspectives. These approaches have their own stories to tell and, hence, narratives. Elliott (1995) includes Welfareism, which argues that we should preserve animals and the environment to ensure the future survival of humans, as an example of an anthropocentric approach to the environment. With this approach we will protect the natural environment because it is in our self-interest to do so. Non-anthropocentric approaches can be Existentialist or Holistic. Existentialist approaches vary from those that would give limited rights to those that would offer the full extension of rights to all flourishing organisms.

Holistic approaches tend to focus on the moral worth of the whole and, for example, our ability to protect the natural evolution of ecosystems.

As with business, with environmentalism I am in the position of choosing between a range of narratives. And again I will aim to show a grand narrative of environmental concerns that would be familiar to many and acceptable to most people. In other words, I want to present the environmental narrative as people would tell it. The environmental narrative I will present emphasises ecological sustainability (van Wensveen 2001) based on interaction and interdependence within the environment, diversity and a combination of science and experiential observation (Preston 2001).

It is clear that as human beings we are dependent on the environment in which we live. We would not be able to survive without the resources that the environment provides us. At a fundamental level, we need clean air to breath, our rivers for water, the sea to provide fish and good soil to grow crops. For these reasons alone we need to be concerned with the environment. Indeed, we should care for the environment to ensure our future.

When we start to look at how we can maintain these resources it soon becomes apparent that our focus has to go beyond seeing them in isolation. The resources we use exist as part of ecological systems where one species depends on another and all of these may depend on the soil, climate or other conditions. Indeed, we need to understand these ecological systems in order to protect the natural resources we use. Science can help us do this by showing the interaction and interdependence of

different species. It can show us that we should value a diverse environmental base if we are to continue to prosper. Still, science also shows us that ecological systems are massively complex and hence difficult to predict.

This ecological complexity means that as much as we can try to understand the systems, in reality, our understanding is limited and we can rarely predict the full effect of our actions in the environment. Therefore, the focus on ecological systems means that our attitude has to shift from one that emphasises what we as humans find directly useful to one that emphasises our dependence on the environment as a whole. It moves us from a position of instrumental calculation to an attitude that recognises the intrinsic worth of the environment. Only by encouraging ecological diversity and ensuring our restraint when acting in the environment can we really be certain of having natural resources for the future.

This shift in attitudes leads to a focus on sustainability. We should work to maintain environmental resources, but this does not mean that we have to withdraw from the environment. We should instead continue to use the resources that the environment gives us but, being grateful for this gift, consider the impact we are having. In effect, there is a demand on us to act with respect and care for the ecological systems of which we are a part. This means having regard for the way in which ecological systems change. That ecological systems change over time is inevitable and, in fact, is part of their healthy evolution. Still, these systems only have a certain propensity for evolution and changing them too quickly can be immensely destructive. The question becomes what level of change is destructive?

I have already said that although science can help us understand the ecological systems that exist their complexity means that it can never predict the effect of our actions on the environment. This means that we should show restraint when we are taking resources from the environment or making changes in it. It also means that we should pay much more attention to our experiences of ecological systems. Indeed, there is considerable value in close observation of the environment in particular locations. Only by developing a close relationship with the environment we live and work in, and by caring for and working with the flows of that environment, can we really come to promote proper sustainability.

This narrative reflects stories that have been developed over the last 150 years, although some are much more recent than that. For example, Thoreau's (1854) work at Walden ponds highlights many intellectual and physical virtues that are reproduced in the narrative's emphasis on restraint and integrity in our dealings with the environment. The narrative also reflects both Aldo Leopold's (1949) emphasis on the interdependence of biotic communities and on keen perception and precise description through its emphasis on the importance of experiential observation. In more modern times, Carson (1962), when arguing against the abuses of the agro-chemical industries, discussed the role that science can have in understanding the environment and how humility and gratefulness is essential to a better relationship between man and environment. Indeed, in highlighting the similarities with these authors, Cafaro (2001) would argue that we are actually citing virtue ethicists. In this, then, there should be little surprise that there are similarities in the virtues the narrative promotes



and the virtues the environmental virtue ethicists (Cafaro 2001, Fraz 1993 and Shaw 1997) discuss.

It has already become clear that the environmental narrative promotes nine virtues: *Humility, Respect, Prudence, Judgement, Patience, Eagerness, Persistence, Precise description and Restraint*. We need to have *Respect* for the environment because we need the resources it offers to survive and destroying them may lead to our destruction, but also because environmental forces are so much more powerful than humans. We just cannot master them. The wider realisation that we are part of hugely complex and powerful environmental systems requires *Humility*. And indeed, this very complexity means that *Prudence* is needed when working in the environment and good *Judgement* about when we should hold back because we are uncertain about the consequences of our actions. *Restraint* is certainly important when we are working and living in the environment. *Patience* is fundamental as we need to take time to observe and learn about the environment and *Eagerness, Persistence* and skills of *Precise description* are essential to ensuring that we learn from our experiences within the environment.

### **Links between Business Virtues and Environmental Virtues**

Explicit links between Business Ethics and Environmental Ethics are limited. Rosenthal and Bucholz (1998) try to bridge Environmental and Business Ethics at a conceptual level. They argue that Business Ethics has slipped in to a state of ethical

pluralism where no one set of theories is adequate. On the other hand, environmental ethicists, they argue, have rejected the theoretical perspectives used by business ethicists. In light of these conclusions, they argue for American pragmatism as a meta theory. Obviously, we would want to counter the argument that Virtue Ethics does not give a sufficient basis for guiding moral development in the business and environmental domains, but their work does highlight the conceptual gaps that exist between those in the Business Ethics and Environmental Ethics fields.

Whilst the conceptual links may be weak, there are clues in some of the main debates in Environmental Ethics of more concrete links to business issues. Dickinson (2000) argues that changing people's attitudes will not solve environmental problems as they have only limited power. He argues that organisations are the real holders of power and that changes must be promoted at this level. Whether this is a realistic prospect or not, and if so, on what terms, it clearly makes the link between business and the environment. Indeed, the majority of people are going to change only if businesses present them with 'realistic' alternatives. Offer the long distance commuter environmentally friendly cars or efficient rail services that take them where they are going, and they are likely to use it. De George (1999) cites pollution and deforestation as examples of where there are clearer links between businesses and the environment. Here, it is the process used to make the product, rather than the product's use that has an impact on the environment and he goes on to discuss these issues in terms of rights based ethics.

Given that we have demonstrated links between Environmental Ethics and Business Ethics, it should be of concern to us that the virtues embedded in the stories associated with them are so different. This is not to say that the virtues apparent in our narrative of business (Impartiality, Enterprise, Capability, Innovation, Perseverance, Constraint and Consumption) are all at odds with the environmental virtues (Humility, Respect, Prudence, Judgement, Patience, Eagerness, Persistence, Precise description and Restraint). Innovation (business) versus eagerness (environmental) and perseverance (business) versus Persistence (environmental) seem to correlate and, on the surface at least, have the same teleological ends. Constraint (business) versus Prudence, Judgement and Restraint (environment) seem to correlate, even though they are directed at different teleological ends. Nevertheless, there are other virtues that contradict each other at a fundamental level. In particular, restraint (environmental) and consumption (business) contradict each other at the level of their ends but also a practical level.

The key, then, is to build a link between these narratives. Considering what King (1999) says about putting our stories into the audience's context, it is clear that we need to tell these stories in business language. For example, when the BBC web site reported on the campaign to reduce pollution from aircraft it told the story in language people will understand saying:

“...aircraft emit more of the main greenhouse gas than cars for each passenger they carry... one return flight from the United Kingdom to Florida produces as much carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) as a year's driving by the average British motorist.

And [the environmental groups] say commercial jets add almost as much to global warming annually as the whole of Africa.” (BBC 2000)

The next step is to show why the airlines should want to act to limit their effect on the environment. Indeed, we need to tell the airlines' stakeholders, whether they are suppliers, customers or shareholders, what it is in their environment that means that they should change. In building this case we need to show the benefits they would receive from doing this in their, business, context. In this example, as well as the benefits to the local environment, using technologies that are more fuel-efficient and can cut costs once they are embedded help show a commitment to the local community, create better customer relations and support a different way of thinking about business. This way of thinking can include in its foundation the environmental virtues, thus ensuring environmental ends are seen as legitimate business ends but also that these other benefits are achieved.

The differences in the narratives I observed above mean that the change to environmentally virtuous business that we are trying to promote with these stories will be dramatic. Indeed, the example of Airline pollution shows that a distinct shift in business policy will be required. This is a point that I wish to make first, by reference to Dion's (1998) typology of environmental policies, and second, by way of analysing the virtues apparent in UK business environmental policy.

## **Environmental Virtues in Business Policy**

Dion (1998) presents us with a typology of corporate environmental policies that is helpful when examining the way organisations might respond to environmental issues. The typology includes four categories of organisation; the Neo-technocratic, Techno-environmentalist, Pseudo-environmentalist and Quasi-environmentalist (Table 1). Starting with the Neo-technocratic enterprise, organisations that follow these policies will, incrementally, become much more committed and take more complex approaches to environmental issues whilst, at the same time, becoming less anthropocentric.

Therefore, an organisation that took a Neo-technocratic approach would limit its environmental aspirations to conformity with regulations, transparency, collaboration with community groups and government. At the same time they would be emphasising individual employees' responsibilities, which Dion (1998) notes, shows that these organisations lack the commitment needed to take responsibility for environmental issues. In contrast, organisations in the Quasi-environmentalist category hold ecological ideals that have supporting strategies and go as far as promoting green research and development and educational initiatives that go beyond training staff.

**Table 1: Dion's (1998) Typology of Corporate Environmental Policies**

	<b>Neo-technocratic Enterprise</b>	<b>Techno-environmentalist enterprise</b>	<b>Pseudo-environmentalist enterprise</b>	<b>Quasi-environmentalist enterprise</b>
<b>Non-anthropocentric</b> ↑				Ecological ideals and the supporting strategies. Support of green R&D. Educational objectives.
			Recycling. Recuperation and reuse. Reduce use of products / materials. Safe elimination of waste. Means and methods of prevention.	Recycling. Recuperation and reuse. Reduce use of products / materials. Safe elimination of waste. Means and methods of prevention.
		Environmental programs / emergency plans. Quasi-legal mechanisms. Personnel training. Supporting scientific / technological innovations for environmental protection.	Environmental programs / emergency plans. Quasi-legal mechanisms. Personnel training. Supporting scientific / technological innovations for environmental protection.	Environmental programs / emergency plans. Quasi-legal mechanisms. Personnel training. Supporting scientific / technological innovations for environmental protection.
↓ <b>Anthropocentric</b>	Conformity to laws and regulations. Corporate transparency. Collaboration with community groups, associations, and governments. Emphasis on individual responsibility.	Conformity to laws and regulations. Corporate transparency. Collaboration with community groups, associations, and governments. Emphasis on individual responsibility.	Conformity to laws and regulations. Corporate transparency. Collaboration with community groups, associations, and governments. Emphasis on individual responsibility.	Conformity to laws and regulations. Corporate transparency. Collaboration with community groups, associations, and governments. Emphasis on individual responsibility.

Putting Dion's (1998) typology into the context of the narratives we presented earlier, it is not surprising to see that the business narrative, and the virtues associated with it, would only support the use of the Neo-technocratic and Techno-environmentalist approaches. Adopting policies that supported these approaches could be justified because they reduce the threat that causing damage to the environment may have to profits. No organisation wants to see itself the subject of litigation with the penalties that may result, or moreover, face the public relations disaster that may ensue. It seems, then, that the virtues of enterprise, driven by the demand to generate profit in both the short and long term, and constraint, promoted by societal concern, will lead organisations to take limited action on environmental issues. Indeed, for some organisations, in some industries, this may mean that they have to expend some considerable effort, meaning that the virtues of capability, innovation and perseverance become relevant.

Only if an organisation had come under particular scrutiny from environmental lobbyists, or had been in receipt of particularly damaging publicity, would the business virtues support a longer term Pseudo-environmentalist approach as, here, organisations may need to do that much more to establish their environment credibility. To give the Pseudo-environmentalist and Quasi-environmentalist approaches the support they really need we have to turn to the environmental narrative and the virtues that it promotes. We can see the Quasi-environmentalist approach requires each of the virtues discussed in the environmental narrative if the

core values that this approach suggests are actually going to be transformed into action.

When actually looking at environmental policies, it is interesting to consider the advice given by the UK government. Whilst encouraging organisations to write an environmental policy they suggest that "the benefits associated with writing an Environmental Policy include:

- assuring customers of commitment to demonstrable environmental management;
- maintaining good public/community relations;
- enhancing image and market share;
- improving cost control;
- reducing incidents that result in liability;
- conserving raw materials and energy;
- sharing environmental solutions;
- improving industry/government relations." (Envirowise 2000)

An examination of these benefits shows that they appeal to the business narrative and drive towards the Neo-technocratic and Techno-environmentalist approaches to environmental policy. Indeed, many large UK organisations, including Barclays and Unilever, seem to be limited to these approaches. Even where organisations like British Petroleum (BP) support green R&D and have explicit educational objectives, their policy statements stop short of making the sorts of commitments that will limit profits. And the primary reason the managers of companies like this give for not



going further is that they have an obligation to shareholders to optimise profit. This means that, short of demanding a revolution in the capitalist system as it is currently constituted, the route to getting businesses to adopt environmental virtues is to change shareholder views. Our stories of the environment need to target them as much as the businesses themselves. Until this happens it will be difficult for these companies to embrace the ecological ideals needed when cultivating the environmental virtues and the Quasi-environmental approach to policy that would follow. Indeed, only organisations that are brave enough to give as much prominence to environmental objectives as profit will be able to do this. At the moment, the few companies that do this tend to be small, privately owned and operating in industries that are intrinsically intertwined with environmental improvement. If we are to get more organisations to operate through the environmental virtues we need to convince large organisations and their shareholders to take this approach.

## **Conclusions**

We have, then, presented a picture of two worlds, two worlds that promote different virtues. One is the world of business and science where enterprising people go about putting huge effort into creating change and producing new innovative products and services. People work to satisfy the markets and, at the same time, act as consumers in those markets. Moreover, it is their duty to participate in those markets. The other world, the world of the environment, is one where we realise that people cannot master everything and are actually part of an environmental community. Here, we

work and live in an environment that we don't fully understand and at times have to hold back from doing what we want because we are not certain of its consequences. We have to learn before we act and this entails a different type of progress. We are no less eager to move on but we want to innovate in ways that enhance our experience of being with the environment rather than conquering it.

These stories of two different worlds are both positive. They are both about making things better. However, it is important to realise that the dominance of the business narrative is having damaging effects. It makes us blind to the situations where we harm the environment that we depend on. As Glotfeltey (2001) shows us, our actions really do reflect dominant stories. Therefore, it is imperative that we start to counter the dominance of the business narrative by introducing stories that will move people to see the environment in a different way. The message that we can have productive business and a healthy environment is an important one.

We can see that there are moves to take the environment into account when doing business. Legislation and negative publicity ensures that organisations show at least a basic level of concern for the environment and the UK government emphasises the benefits to business of doing this. Still, we have seen that organisations are reluctant to move to a position where environmental issues are of equal concern to profit. This is in part because people have not yet accepted that the environment is really that important. To get people in general, and shareholders in particular, to accept environmental aims means that we need to put much more effort into developing

stories of the environment. Only then will people begin to move toward the Environmental Virtues.

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