

# The Three I's for Ethics as an Everyday Activity: Integration, Intrinsic Valuing, and Intersubjectivity

Heesoon Bai, Simon Fraser University, Canada

## **Abstract**

*In addressing the theme of ethics as an everyday activity, this essay makes a case for the primacy of preventive ethics over interventional ethics. Preventive ethics aims at creating a condition of viability and wellbeing for all members of the earth community, an ethical ideal that follows from the thesis that all life-phenomena are interconnected and interpenetrating. By sharp contrast, interventional ethics functions to redress the already accrued harm and damage that results from not paying attention, on an everyday basis, to the community members' bio-social-psychic conditions of wellbeing. This essay suggests three interlinked practices for preventive ethics. First, we must integrate the mind/body, self/other, and subject/object. Second, we must learn to value the world intrinsically, as we do in aesthetic appreciation. Third, we must cultivate the art of intersubjectivity in order to counter the prevailing habit of objectifying the other.*

## **Résumé**

*Cet article porte sur la pratique quotidienne de l'éthique et fait valoir la primauté de l'éthique préventive sur l'éthique d'intervention. L'éthique préventive vise à créer un état de viabilité et de bien-être pour tous les habitants de la planète, un idéal déontologique qui découle de la théorie selon laquelle toutes les matières vivantes sont intimement liées et interdépendantes. En contraste absolu, l'éthique d'intervention cherche à redresser les torts et les dommages cumulatifs infligés par la négligence quotidienne au bien-être physique, social et affectif des membres d'une collectivité. Je suggère trois pratiques liées en matière d'éthique préventive. Nous devons d'abord intégrer la relation de l'esprit et du corps, du soi et de l'autre, et du sujet et de l'objet. Deuxièmement, nous devons apprendre à valoriser le monde de façon intrinsèque comme nous le faisons lorsqu'il s'agit d'une critique sur le plan esthétique. En dernier lieu, nous devons cultiver l'art de l'intersubjectivité afin de contrer l'habitude courante d'objectiver l'autre.*

## Why Ethics as an Everyday Activity

The theme of this seminar is making ethics an everyday activity. This is a theme that still comes up too infrequently in philosophical discourse, although fortunately that is changing. In part, ethics has traditionally been identified with difficult, out-of-the-ordinary contexts when decision and action are necessitated by instances of transgression, harm, and neglect. In other words, ethics steps in interventionally when there is a breach of social norms and expectations. When we witness a moral transgression, our usual response is moral outrage: "That's just unforgivable. We should not let them get away with this. They should be punished." But in many of these transgressive circumstances, the offenders may have "chosen" their particular course of morally culpable action because, when they came to this desperate point, the "choices" they faced were between lesser or greater ills or evils. In these situations, damage control may be the most one can do, but even for that, knowledge and skills, not to mention personal virtues, are required. But, if people were knowledgeable, skillful, and virtuous to begin with in facing the world and its multifaceted, complex challenges, would they have gotten to the desperate point of seeing no choices other than those between different ills and evils?

The consequence of making ethics an interventional affair requiring extraordinary effort to deal with difficult, hard-to-resolve life problems, like moral dilemmas, is that, often, the only options left are emergency measures that make everyone feel compromised and traumatized. Acrimonious blame gets passed around, and everyone is upset that the matter at hand was not dealt with sooner and in better ways. "How on earth have we come to this? Why didn't she straighten herself up sooner? Why did we let him fall apart like this? He should have more responsibility for himself and the situation." But the past cannot be undone. Situations like these are *moral emergencies*, to coin a term. In analogy, a case of medical emergency, like someone having a heart attack, requires immediate *intervention*, having missed the opportunity for proper *prevention*. The most we can hope to achieve in emergency situations is to survive the current disaster.

We are compelled to ask, "Should emergency be most of what there is to ethics?" If we asked the equivalent question in the health and medicine field, the answer would be an unambiguous "No." In fact, many will tell us that any sane Medicare system should focus primarily on preventive medicine. The primary objective of medicine should be the promotion of good health, not the treatment of ill health, let alone emergency room surgery, which should be only a secondary objective. If the priority of prevention over intervention were reversed in our Medicare system (which many would say is the case at present, unfortunately), we can be sure that our system would be in crisis.

We can argue likewise for ethics. Ethics should primarily be about preventive moral care so as to minimize extraordinary, interventional measures

of justice and remediation occurring at points of conflict and harm. Moral heroism should be applauded but not valorized. Prevention is most effective when the small but significant details of everyday life are cared for, which contrasts with the heroic, all-out effort exerted to address massive and often irrevocable damage in emergency situations. When we look after ourselves and our situations on a daily basis, with care and knowledge, then we minimize the chance of people and situations falling apart, becoming problematic and hostile, requiring extraordinary measures of intervention; and, we maximize having plenty of creative and generous possibilities for working with and influencing the people around us and steering the course of events in the direction of our moral ideals. Thus, as I read it, the wish behind making ethics an everyday activity is, precisely, to make ethics an everyday practice, like eating, sleeping or exercising, wherein we take care of the tasks of mutual life-making while they are still small and pliable, and before they become, out of ignorance and neglect, desperate and intractable. One ounce of prevention is better than one pound of intervention.

### Ecology as a Paradigm of Everyday Ethics

Having spoken of the importance of everyday ethics, we now come to the substantive question about the moral ideal towards which our enactment of everyday ethics is to be directed. What should be our moral ideal? What should our ethics be largely about? Do we have a viable and defensible ideal of what it is to lead a good life? What ideal or ideals are we aspiring to in our North American societies? In attempting to answer these questions, I am not proposing to offer demographically accurate survey data. For my purpose in this paper, it is enough to present a predominant picture and discuss its fitness as a moral ideal for our society. The currently hegemonic ideal of flourishing life in North America and in much of the so-called developed and developing countries is relentless consumerism. This consumerism is intent on reducing the whole planet to a mere resource base for commodity production that includes not only "stuff" but also all manners of commodified services. How well we live has come to be defined in terms of how much goods and services we consume. This consumption-based ideal of the good life is ethically very problematic because it irrevocably undermines the well-being of the *biotic communities*, to borrow Thomas Berry's term (1988), and is increasingly threatening the viability, let alone the flourishing, of most life forms on the planet, including human beings.<sup>1</sup>

That planetary viability or wellbeing should be our most comprehensive ethical ideal is not difficult to argue for and establish, even though it would take much persuading and convincing, or as we say, *consciousness-raising*, just because the population at large is still locked in a homocentric and instrumentalist mode of thinking that typifies the modernist industrial, economy-

driven mind-set.<sup>2</sup> The decisive logic behind the argument that the planetary wellbeing should be our most comprehensive and urgent ethical ideal is predicated upon the very fact of the interconnectedness and interpenetration of all life-phenomena on earth. We have to take the wellbeing of the whole planet as our basic, comprehensive concern to be reflected in our daily life, since life as it is known to us is the unity of all beings, animate and inanimate, on this planet, existing in utter interdependence and interpenetration with each other. How I live in the here and now has long-term implications and consequences for total strangers living on the other side of the planet. Hence, for human beings to lead a good life, they cannot be in disregard and in violation of the wellbeing of the whole planet. Given this, rapacious consumerism is a completely unethical ideal.

### Prevention at Its Best: Changing One's Mind

It is not that many of us do not know the state of environmental degradation and social disintegration. Such knowledge is almost commonplace, thanks to media and other channels of information propagation. Information about environmental crisis and social, moral, political malaise are readily available. Yet there is a striking disparity between how much and how well we know and what we do about this knowledge. We seem to be locked into the mode of thinking and pattern of conduct that precipitated the environmental and social crises in the first place. Among ecological thinkers and activists, there is increasing agreement that environmental and social problems are first and foremost problems of the mind. David Orr (1994) states:

The disordering of ecological systems and of the great bio-geochemical cycles of the earth reflects a prior disorder in the thought, perception, imagination, intellectual priorities, and loyalties inherent in the industrial mind. Ultimately, then, the ecological crisis concerns how we think and the institutions that purport to shape and refine the capacity to think. (p. 2)

If Orr and many others who give a similar diagnosis are right about the fundamental cause behind the social and ecological crises we face, then I suggest that we turn to philosophy as our first step in treatment. Philosophy is rich with resources for, and exemplary practices of, critical examination and conceptual revision of beliefs and values. I suggest that philosophy is the art of changing one's mind. Ethics from this philosophical perspective is an effort to re-vision the way we see and relate to the world so that the end result is that we live without harming each other, and, moreover, contribute to each other's viability and well being. In this sense, ethics is a "preventive medicine" in the moral dimension. In characterizing ethics this way, we can also say that ethics becomes the critical study of philosophy itself. Most often, it is the ethical concerns we face that prompt us philosophers to critically examine the

guiding philosophies of the day and attempt to revise them when we find evidence that the existing philosophies create and perpetuate problems. Critical philosophy diagnoses a civilization's malfunctioning philosophy and works at creatively reconceptualizing the failed or failing ontologies, epistemologies, and axiologies. These reconceptualizations are the proper business of critical education committed to the ideal of planetary well-being. In these educational efforts, ethics becomes both the diagnostic art and a treatment plan.

We are at a point in history where we see so much evidence that we have been enacting a failed philosophy of life. I would characterize this failed philosophy as alienation and disconnection—a theme most conspicuous in modern literature, philosophy, and psychotherapy. Human beings have become alienated and disconnected from each other and from the larger earth communities, and as a result we are egregiously destructive to each other and to other life forms with which we share the planet. The failed philosophy manifests as multiple ideologies: logocentrism, materialism, instrumentalism, anthropocentrism, economism, fundamentalism, and so on. To characterize very briefly a few of these problematic ideologies: logocentrism privileges the conceptual and the discursive over the sensuous and experiential. To use a common expression, we come to live in our “head.” Materialism reduces all that exists to the order of matter, that is, what occupies space; what is physically observable, quantifiable, and measurable.<sup>3</sup> Materialism would commit us to undermining and even denying the whole sphere of human experience that lies outside the characterization of matter, such as intrinsic worth (sacredness), love, and compassion. Instrumentalism, which generally results from the abovementioned ideologies, looks at the world as composed of *mere* tools and resources for human consumption. All these ideologies combined render our relationship to the planet, and to its myriad biotic communities, objectifying, extrinsic, and instrumental. Devaluation, domination, exploitation, and destruction of human beings, other beings, and the environment follows from our propensity to objectify the world and treat it merely as composed of instruments and resources for our projects.

My purpose in this paper is to counter these problematic ideologies by suggesting, although only in rough sketches, some strategies. I have three interconnecting strategies to offer:

- 1) *integration* of mind and matter, mind and body, the subject and the object;
- 2) *intrinsic valuing* wherein we value the other for what it is in itself and for itself, not just for what it can do or be for us; and
- 3) *intersubjectivity* wherein we see and relate to others as subjects like oneself, not merely as objects existing for the self.

I offer these three strategies as a basis for a preventive ethics of everyday activity that aims at re-creating a world of mutual and universal flourishing.

## Integration

Devaluation follows from seeing something as inferior to us and therefore not worth our utmost respect and love. Thus, preventing devaluation calls for revising our perception of things as inferior or less privileged. Now, historically, we have this tendency to privilege mind over matter and to see the order of matter as inferior to the order of mind. Thus, the body is inferior to the mind; animals are inferior to humans; plants are inferior to animals; and so on. A similar reasoning applies to the value status of children, women, people of colour, and the less socially privileged. These folks have historically been seen as less well endowed with intellect or mental faculties. This is a disturbing perception because its consequence is discrimination, domination, and exploitation of the people and beings who are thus negatively evaluated. One way of countering this disturbing perception is to resist the status quo and attempt to show that these unprivileged folks and creatures are just as mentally endowed. While this move is to be supported and promoted in many situations, the more radical move that can have greater potential for a more fundamental change is to challenge the dualistic thinking that categorically divided up the mental from the physical in the first place. Once the categorical division is made, so that mind and matter, the mental and the bodily, are substantively separate, then the logic behind these concepts, namely that matter lacks intelligence or some sort of animating principle, and therefore is “dumb,” takes us down the road of seeing mind to be superior to matter or body. The thing to do, then, is not to make the categorical division in the first place.

The above suggestion might provoke the reaction that I am proposing an impossible task, for categorical thinking is built into our language itself. Barring the possibility of getting rid of language altogether, which is simply an impossibility, or less drastically, getting rid of these troubling words from our language, it seems there is no way we can stop seeing mind as categorically separate from matter, from body, and so on. In response, I would like to argue that we do not have to use language in this categorical way. Without discarding words like “mind,” “matter,” and “body,” “nature,” “reason,” and so on from language, we can hear them and evaluate them differently. But what this calls for is somewhat radical: we have to know language differently—to have a different working relationship with it. I am aware that this proposal, even were it to be worked out in detail, is a major project. As such, this paper is simply not the place to undertake it at this scale, but for my limited purpose, I can lay the simple foundation to this project: to hear words, like “mind,” “body,” “self,” “object,” “Nature,” not as picking out some substantive parts of the world, that is, “entities” and “properties,” but as naming qualities of experience.

What is our usual understanding of language? Although the everyday person does not use philosophical vocabulary to describe how he or she is using language, we will employ just a bit of philosophical vocabulary for the

purposes of more precise communication in this paper. The term “objectivist view” refers to the usual understanding of language. In this view, words refer to, point to, some inherent property of the world. Thus, for example, “red” refers to a colour understood to be an inherent property of the world: redness exists “out there” as a preexisting and perception-independent phenomenon. This way of thinking takes us down the road of seeing the world in conceptual categories. In philosophy, we call this *metaphysical realism*. The world seen according to this ontological lens is not composed of perception-dependent, and therefore co-emergent, phenomena whose meaning is open to continual re-interpretation. It is fixed, therefore discrete and substantive. Hence, when we encounter words in this mode of understanding, we immediately think that the words are picking out items that are inherently “out there in a preexisting and perception-independent universe.” Understanding human cognition in this way is what we call an objectivist position in epistemology.

The objectivist epistemology sees the world not in terms of contingent and emergent relationships but in terms of substantive entities and their inherent properties. This view of the world is as a matter of fact a commonsensical one that most people entertain. But if we reflect carefully on the nature of experience, what makes more sense is relational ontology (Whitbeck, 1992) wherein the primary “units” of reality are relationships rather than substantive entities. Consider the self-other binary. From the perspective of the objectivist epistemology, the self is categorically separate from the other. The same goes for the subject-object binary. But if we pay close and careful attention to the logic of experience, as when we introspectively observe our experience, we can see that we can never catch the self or the subject independently of the other or the object. The same goes for other categorical binaries like emotion/intellect, body/mind, Nature/culture, subject/object, and self/other. In experience, we can never separate the emotions or senses from the intellect; the body from the mind; Nature from culture, and so on. For instance, has anyone experienced mind apart from body and vice versa? Mind and body, whatever we may want them to refer to exactly, are not separate entities. More rigorously speaking, they are not entities at all. For to say that something is an entity is to imply it is not only conceptually distinct but also ontically separable from other entities. Have we ever been able to test this separability thesis? The answer, in my view, has to be a clear No, as far as experience goes. In experience, we can never find one independent of the other. Where one is, the other is, too. In Buddhist thought, this understanding is called the thesis of *dependent origination* (*paticcasamuppada*).

However, if “body” is not an entity, then what is it? What are we referring to when we say “body”? I know that we are walking into a somewhat heady epistemology here, but we will go into it just slightly, only to the extent that we can shed some light on the present discussion. We cannot *sensibly* speak of the body in a way that is outside our experience. Body is body experienced. As such, when we talk about “body,” we have in mind a complex of feelings,

sensations, emotions, and notions, all of which emerge contingently out of our particular physical ways of being in the world. In this sense, the body is not simply an entity “out there” in the world, amongst other bodies, but more like a corporeal dimension of our being which is in continual interaction with all other dimensions. We can say something similar about “mind”: that it is the conceptual dimension of our being. Again, “corporeal” and “conceptual” do not refer to some substantive entities or properties. Rather, they refer to certain *qualities* of experience. The only reason we have separate words for “body” and “mind” is that they refer to differentiable qualities of experience. In this sense, categorical terms should not be understood as picking out substantive entities or properties of the world. Rather, we should understand them as *evoking* qualities of experience, the meanings of which are always shifting and reconfiguring. For qualities are the moment-by-moment impressions and reflections in the person experiencing that emerge from a complex of significations and interpretations he or she is immersed in. Hence our observation that experiential qualities are unstable, evanescent, and shifting.

This section has been about integration: our philosophical effort to overcome the categorical thinking through our language ridden with such binaries as mind-body, self-other, subject-object. Hence, insofar as ecology is a paradigm of everyday ethics, the cardinal step in environmental education is shifting our paradigm of thought from the binary, dualistic one to an integrated, holistic one. The dualistic and categorical mode of thinking induces psychic alienation from the “entities” we project to be less privileged and inferior. When we realize that conceptual categories are just the lens and not reality itself, and, hence, that experience can be interpreted and re-interpreted through various lenses of our choosing for particular purposes, the spell of metaphysical realism and the attendant objectivist epistemology is broken. Freed from this spell, we see continuity or contiguity between the self and the other, the subject and the object, mind and matter/body, and so on. When we see the world in this manner, we are far more likely to feel a spirit of kindredness towards all other beings with whom we co-habit on earth. We are the world; we are Nature; we are others; we are mindbody.

### Intrinsic Valuing

I have named the second practice in a preventive ethics as intrinsic valuing. In the way I shall introduce intrinsic valuing, it can be understood as a further extension or refinement of *integration* in the sense that it is an aid to integration. Instrumentalism is a hegemonic mode of perception and action that is devastating the world today. It is an ideology that destroys the very notion of sacredness or sanctity and renders everything and anything merely a means to some end. Typically, today, this end is an economic one. The whole world is being commodified. That which is merely a means is not



sacred, is violatable. Under instrumentalism, beings are not valued for what they are in themselves but only for their utility to us. For example, an instrumentalist looks at a giant cedar tree and sees its dollar value. He may be *looking at* the tree but may not see the tree. He or she values this cedar tree for its economic worth. To this person, there is no sense of valuing the tree for its own sake, that is, valuing it intrinsically, apart from its utility and profitability to his bank account.

Aesthetic enjoyment of what we encounter in the world is a supreme example of intrinsic valuing (Bai, 2001, 2003). In aesthetic appreciation, we enter into a state of communion with the other, leaving aside the usual preoccupation with self-interest and the calculation of profit or advantage through the other. Whether we use the aesthetic, the spiritual, or the moral language to describe and explain this phenomenon of aesthetic enjoyment, the key to this phenomenon is the sense of interfusion between the self and the other. How does this interfusion come about? In approaching and encountering the other, at first there is externalization, the sense that the other is categorically separate and external to the self. This is a perfectly ordinary, "normal," perception and stance, and is not a problem in itself. However, if we do not move beyond this initial, limited, step and instead treat it as the terminus, then we will be stuck with an alienated perception of the world and its social and ethical consequences. But if we continue farther along the process, new possibilities of perceiving and relating to the world open up. To experience these expansive possibilities, the next step is to mount an effort of intense and sustained attention. For reasons of space, I will not go into the details of the psychological transformation that occurs at the base of consciousness when we undertake this sort of attentional work.<sup>4</sup> But basically, what happens is that the self finds the initial sense of alienating otherness, which comes from the dichotomous set-up of the self versus the other, to subside, but without obliterating the actual other. The result is what I was referring to above as the transfusion of the self with the other. Some other people have called it, variously, the participatory mind (Skolimowski, 1994); the participatory consciousness (Berman, 1981); inter-being (Hanh, 1992); consanguinity of the self with the world (Tu, 1989), and so on. Often, this transfusional phenomenon is described as "losing one-self"—an apt expression, given that one experiences a temporary suspension of the usual self's strong presence of interests, needs, and desires. Simultaneously, through this effort, the self's usual (up)tight, categorical boundary between the self and the other softens and becomes permeable. The self no longer feels that it is on this side of the window, looking out at the world on the other side. The ethical implication we are seeking from this experience is this: the state of transfused consciousness is one in which we have no projected design upon the other, and in which we appreciate the other only for what it is rather than what it should or could be to us and for us. In this state, it is enough that the other is *here*, with us, and that one is

beholding it and participating in its reality. As a result of one's changed epistemic and ontic stance, a tremendous sense of wonder, warmth, sacredness, and gratitude is released in oneself.

The moral and ecological implications of intrinsic valuing as sketched out above are enormous and critical for us in this age of hegemonic instrumentalism. At the moment, our instrumentalist desires and designs are consuming the whole planet. We are losing the capacity to see the world as a sacred other that should not be rapaciously consumed and violated. We have lost the sense of sacred economy wherein our consumption of the other, necessitated by our biological needs, is conducted as a sacred act of communion, acknowledging the other's sacrifice to keep us alive. In a society that practices a sacred economy, greedy and wasteful conspicuous consumption would be considered totally mad, if not unthinkable.

Needless to say, the mode of intrinsic valuing is not easy to adopt when our whole outlook and habits are instrumentalist and consumeristic, but necessity should compel us to learn and cultivate it. If we continue in our instrumentalist way, we will face nothing less than the irrevocable devastation of the whole biotic community within a very short time. It may be a matter of two or three decades. When forests, oceans, rivers and atmosphere go, not only do other life forms go, but we go, too. Hence, environmental education that teaches us to value the world intrinsically is a survival necessity. The view that many entertain, especially people in positions of power and responsibility, that we will pay attention to environmental issues after we have put our economy to order, that is, after we have figured out how to be economically prosperous, is totally preposterous. It is a grand suicidal delusion. The economy must follow the ecological imperative, not the other way around. What this means is not so much curbing or abandoning our economy as re-defining economy so that it is in alignment with ecology and social justice (Schumacher, 1999). Monetary economy is not the only economy, nor should it be the supreme one. We need to rekindle massively the social economy (bartering, exchanging services, and volunteer work are all good examples) and also practice a sacramental economy. Both the social economy and the sacramental economy (acknowledging and honouring the terrible sacrifice of other life forms for the sustenance of our own existence) act to bond the self with the other, rather than alienating them from each other as does the monetary economy. We must re-vision what it is to be viable and prosperous. Life rich in aesthetic, spiritual, moral appreciation and enjoyment, as opposed to expensive, wasteful entertainment and material consumption, should be our goal. Learning the difficult art of intrinsic valuing—for it is a subtle, intricate, and arduous art—should be given priority in our formal and informal education.

## The Art of Intersubjectivity

Intrinsic valuing requires what I call the art of intersubjectivity. "Intersubjectivity" signifies the act of overcoming the subject-object dualism and entering into a state of subject-object communion, as briefly outlined in previous sections of this paper. In this section, I want to focus on how we may practice intersubjectivity.

The mode of perception that externalizes the other, that is, looks at the other from outside, is objectivist. The other is an object for the subject, the self. In this mode of perception, there is every sense that a categorical barrier permanently separates the two. But what is important is the realization that this is just one mode of perception, not *the* mode. Other modes exist, especially one that should interest us immensely: intersubjectivity. It is to be distinguished from the subjectivist mode that swallows up, colonizes, and consumes the other. The subjectivist mode obliterates the object, whereas the objectivist mode completely other-izes it, making it an alien presence. In both cases, what is missing is the possibility of a resonance and flow of sympathy, whereby the subject enters into a liminal space of ambiguity and wonder. In this space or state, the clear and distinct categorical division between the subject and object gives away to the self's movement towards the other, and there emerges a sense of participation in the other's reality, a reality that is ultimately a mystery. A mystery is not something to be explained away or solved but only to be participated in.

The movement of consciousness I speak of is not active in the sense of the self-exerting its will upon the other to penetrate it and figure it out. Rather, the movement of consciousness in question here is the willingness, even if only provisional, to be open, engage, and participate in the emergent reality of the other. But it is equally not apt to characterize this willingness as passivity or inertia. It is not passive in the sense of doing nothing and making no effort. It is in fact a very active process of making oneself receptive and susceptible. But instead of seeing it in the usual mode of effort-making wherein the self tries hard to make certain things happen, it would be more apt to characterize this form of activity as entering into grace, into a space of effortless resonance. The Daoists have a word for this state of being: *wu-wei*, non-action or non-doing. *Wu-wei* feels like non-action because of the absence of self-will and the ego's self-interested strivings and grasping. When the ego ceases to strive and grasp, it does not will to do something but is willing to be there for whatever arises. Receptivity, not activity, is what characterizes *wu-wei*.

However, I do not wish to give the impression I am arguing that being active or action-oriented is undesirable and needs avoiding. Activity and receptivity complement each other, and it is their integration and balance that we need, not the privileging of one over the other. Typically, most of the time, we are in the mode of activity: the ego's incessant strivings and grasping. The ego wants to arrange the world to suit itself. The egoic mode dominates, and

it is this over-activity that is creating the havoc. But we should not villainize the ego. It is part of who we are as human beings. What is important is that we engage the ego in worthy pursuits but also limit it sufficiently so that it does not take up the entirety of the self and leave no room for grace to enter. What the ego can do is to will to pause itself and to stand aside so that grace or the mode of *wu-wei* can take place. I am reminded of what Reb Anderson Roshi once said, during one of the meditation retreats he led in Vancouver, about meditation and the role of the ego. Meditation's "goal" is, according to the traditional Buddhist understanding, egolessness, which basically means the same as the transfusion of the self and the world that we talked about previously. But, since egolessness is the goal of meditation, one might assume that we should keep ego out of the way when we set out to meditate. But, says Anderson Roshi, most of us do need the ego and its discursive and effortful capacities to successfully get ourselves to the meditation cushion. Ego has its particular virtues, which are the strength of will and the ability to practically calculate for risk, loss, and benefit. The point is to utilize them. We need the will to bring oneself to the meditation cushion, and further will to sit through the meditation. We also need the ego's practical intelligence that calculates risks and makes choices in order to safely get ourselves to the meditation hall, for instance.

In the way I have been using the term, *intersubjectivity* is both the practice of entering into the liminal space of grace or *wu-wei* and the attained state of consciousness wherein we do not see the world as if "out there," separate from oneself, but whereby we experience the co-emergence of the world-self. This is how Susan Griffin (1990) illustrates the way we can understand the co-emergent sense of perception:

Let me take as an example the color of the flowers here on the stage. They are yellow. Understanding that this color derives from something that happens between the flower, light and my eye, or our eyes, we can say that all of us and the light and the flowers are in a kind of communion through which we create something—something we feel and name and recognize—and this is the color yellow. The existence of color in this way of thinking becomes a symbol not of alienation but of union with the earth. (p. 52)

Not all perceptions are of the same quality. A cold and objectifying perception reduces and devalues the world, but an intersubjective, participatory perception honours and adores the world, even when there is so much suffering. This mode of perception is actually well known to us, although in a restrictedly personal context: love. Our challenge is to extend and normalize this personal context of love to all of perception so that our basic mode of being-in-the-world is love. If we could live our lives as lovers of the world rather than as rapacious consumers, indeed, we would have succeeded in our effort at living the preventive ethics I have outlined in this paper.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In this paper, I shall not go into any detail about the state of environmental degradation and world-wide social disintegration, for comprehensive and detailed accounts of the state of the world are readily available everywhere. However, I do have a particular recommendation for reading: the annual publication of *State of the World* by Norton Publishers is an excellent reference source.
- <sup>2</sup> A typical response to the proposal of making environmental care and social justice central to human activity is this: we should look after our economy first and then we worry about these other causes. That many politicians and people in responsible power positions think like this is most frustrating and disheartening.
- <sup>3</sup> Descartes (1985) championed the mechanical understanding of matter. This is how Descartes defines matter: "The nature of body consists not in weight, hardness, colour, or the like but simply in extension" (p. 224). By "extension," Descartes means "being extended in length, breadth, and depth."
- <sup>4</sup> For those who are interested in exploring this transformation of the consciousness, I recommend a dip into the Buddhist literature on Mindfulness practice, although it is certainly to be acknowledged that other psycho-spiritual traditions have also explored the same phenomenon of experience.

## Notes on Contributor

**Heesoon Bai** is Associate Professor at Simon Fraser University in Canada. She teaches in Philosophy of Education, and her research interests are in ethics, epistemology, ecology, and Asian philosophies. She has published widely in academic journals and edited volumes on topics ranging from democratic education to Zen aesthetics. Her most recent publications are in *Canadian Review of Art Education*, *Paideusis*, *Educational Insights*, and *Encounter*. Please direct correspondence to: Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C., Canada, V5A 1S6.

## References

- Bai, H. (2003). Learning from Zen arts: A lesson in intrinsic valuation. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, 1(2), 1-14.
- Bai, H. (2001). Challenge for education: Learning to value the world intrinsically. *Encounter*, 14(1), 4-16.
- Berman, M. (1981). *The reenchantment of the world*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Berry, T (1988). *The dream of the earth*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Descartes, R. (1985). *The philosophical writings of Descartes*. (J. Cottingham, R. Stootholff, & D. Murdoch, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Griffin, S. (1990). Daring witness: The recovery of female time. In J. Ogilvy (Ed.), *Re-visioning philosophy* (pp. 49–59). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Hanh, T.N. (1992). *Peace is every step: The path of mindfulness in everyday life*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Orr, D. (1994). *Earth in mind: On education, environment, and the human prospect*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.
- Schumacher, E.F. (1999). *Small is beautiful: Economics as if people mattered*. Point Roberts, WA: Hartley & Marks Publishers Inc.
- Skolimowski, H. (1994). *The participatory mind*. London: Arkana.
- Tu, W. (1989). The continuity of being: Chinese visions of nature. In J.B. Callicott & R.T. Ames (Eds.), *Nature in Asian traditions of thought* (pp. 67–78). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Whitbeck, C. (1992). A different reality: Feminist ontology. In A. Garry & M. Pearsall (Eds.), *Women, knowledge, and reality*. (pp. 51-73). New York: Routledge.