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Business Ethics for the Anthropocene

TransAtlantic Business Ethics Conference

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University of St. Gallen

Central Propositions

- (1) The currently **unsustainable** state of the **Earth** is largely due to the **activities** of **business**, so reconsidering the role of business in society and nature is unavoidable.
- (2) Without **transforming business** into a progressive social institution, which **respects nature, future generations** and the **common good** of **society** there is no chance of creating a Sustainable Earth.

The New Reality of Anthropocene



Paul J. Crutzen
(1933-)



Eugene F. Stoermer
(1934-2012)

As consumption and population have risen, humankind has ushered in a new era called **Anthropocene**.

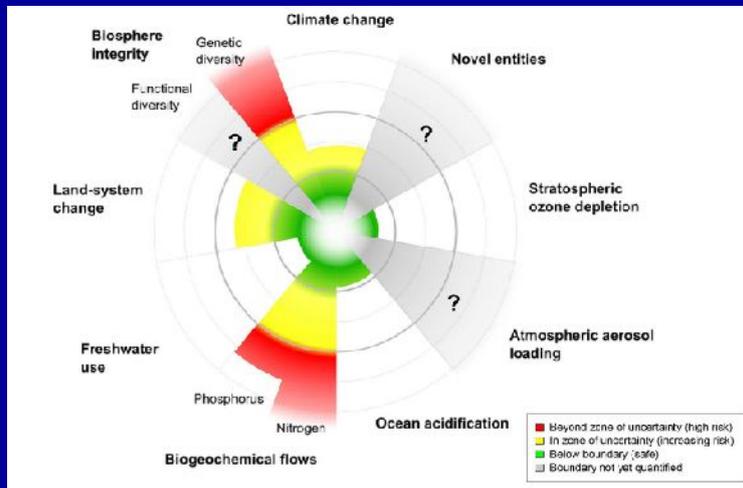
The **cumulative impacts of business activities** are altering the biogeochemistry of the Earth, **destabilizing** climate and **harming** co-evolution at the planetary level.

The New Reality of Anthropocene

There is an increasing evidence supporting the concept of Anthropocene:

- **Earth System trends** have been convergently **deteriorating** since the 1950s.
- Anthropocene specific attributes, which are completely new, can be observed through **stratigraphical records**.
- **Human perturbation levels** of four of the Earth system processes/features **overcome the planetary boundaries**, that is, the **safe operating space for humanity**.

The New Reality of Anthropocene



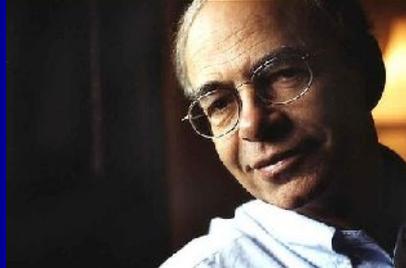
Business Ethics and Ecology

- (i) individual biological creatures
⇒ awareness-based ethics
- (ii) ecosystems
⇒ ecosystem ethics
- (iii) Earth as a whole
⇒ Gaia ethics

Awareness-based ethics

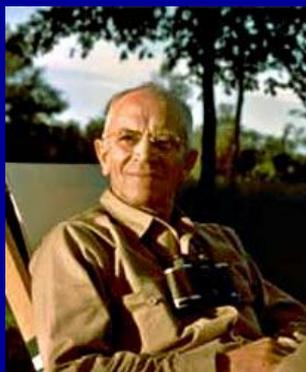
If a natural being suffers, we should take this into consideration.

Animals should be provided with natural life-conditions and painless existence.



Peter Singer
(1946-)

Ecosystem ethics



Aldo Leopold
(1887-1948)

An act is right if it preserves the integrity, stability and beauty of natural ecosystems.

The original state of ecosystems should be preserved and restored.

Gaia ethics

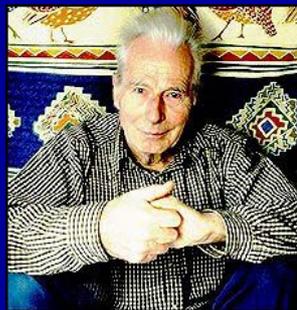


James Lovelock
(1919-)

The **Earth** is a **living** entity.

Business should respect the **global patterns** and **mechanisms** of the **Earth**.

Ecological Consciousness



Arne Næss
(1912-2009)

Deep Ecology:
„Live a **rich life**
with **simple means**”



Deep Ecology Platform

Point 1: The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has intrinsic value.

Point 7: The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of intrinsic value) rather than adhering to a high standard of living. There is a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.

Patagonia



Yvon Choinard
(1938-)

“Build the best product.
Cause no unnecessary harm.
Use business to inspire
and implement solutions
to the environmental
crisis.”

“Repair is a radical act”
Common Threads Recycling
Program
Garment repair center in
California

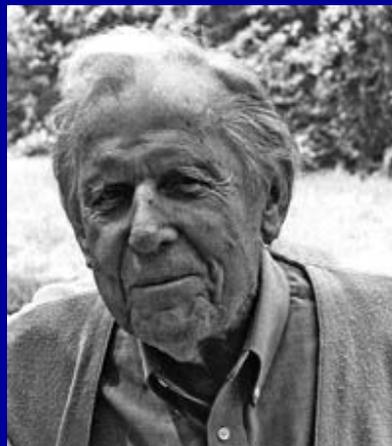
The Commonwealth of Life

Humans are **members** of, not masters over, **life's commonwealth**. It is the **flourishing of life** (human and non-human, present and future) that matters.

Earth's limited capacity to construct and maintain far from equilibrium systems implies **limits to legitimate human appropriation** of nature (energy and sinks).

Thomas Berry, C.P.

„From here on, the **primary judgement** of all human **institutions, professions, and programs** and **activities** will be determined by the extent to which they **inhabit, ignore** or **foster** a mutually **enhancing human-Earth relationship**.”



Thank you!