While a graduate student at Fordham University in 1983, I had the good fortune to take part in Father W. Norris Clarke's excursion to the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania. The landscape he led us across was unforgettable, as was the sight which greeted us at our destination, a waterfall at its wellspring. After our long, hard trek to the spring, it felt good just to be able to slip into its cold, pristine waters, and frolic there for what seemed like hours. When, some ten years later, I received my copy of Fr. Clarke's book, Person and Being,¹ the memory of that trip to the mountains came back in a flash, and with it, a recollection of the man who had so eloquently articulated before an attentive audience of his Metaphysics students, his own clear understanding of the dynamism of Being. It struck me then that not only did Fr. Clarke's metaphysics of Being stand in stark contrast to the long-standing scholastic misreading of the philosophy of St. Thomas as a philosophy of static objects, but that it rooted in, and referred back to his own great devotion to and respect for nature. His formulations pertaining to the dynamism and self-diffusiveness² of Being have profound applications to the profusion and resilience of life-begetting-life everywhere on earth (particularly in a country like the Philippines, where merely to make an observation concerning the unstoppable growth of its vegetative life alone seems almost a redundancy); or to the manner


² Fr. Clarke's descriptive term for the way in which Being "expresses" or "shares" itself, namely through activities that are "actually the whole point, the natural perfection or flowering of being itself, the goal of its very presence in the universe."
in which the sun’s energy is captured by our planet, and bound, through photosynthesis, into the organic molecules of plants.

Lessons in environmental ethics are implicit in Fr. Clarke’s assertion that Being manifests itself in accordance with the potentialities of each particular mode of being. Environmentalists speak today of the “carrying capacity” of ecological niches and of the “tolerance levels” of biotic communities, even as they call attention to what results from the failure to take these into account—floods precipitated by reckless deforestation, global warming brought about by the indiscriminate burning of fossil fuels, sickness and death caused by the improper disposal of nuclear and radioactive wastes.

His claim that real being is not a solitary ego or object, but “a field of interaction which is at once one yet many” goes right to the heart of what ecological textbooks refer to as the “relations between organisms and their environment.” Physicists tell us there is a degree of interconnectedness and inseparability of physical entities on the subatomic level, and that the higher up they are on the ladder of being, the

3. The being of minerals, for instance, can manifest only its particular mode. It cannot share vegetation, animal sensation, and rationality because it is limited by its mode of being. Plants may be able to share the mode of being they absorbed from minerals. But the limitations of their vegetative mode of being prevent them from experiencing animal sensation or manifesting human rationality. This insight is illustrated by ecology in terms of the more varied ways of relating to the environment as we ascend the more intensive levels of existence. Plant mobility, for example, is fixed by their rootedness to the soil. Their relationships to the environment are limited by the variety of atmospheric conditions. Animals are more variable because of their capacity for self-motion. Their migration and adaptation to other habitats are more flexible. Humans, however, are the only beings that can deliberately transform their environment. Their spiritual nature allows them to “own their act of existence,” and thus transcend the limitations imposed by the environment.

4. Dr. Amando F. Kapauan of the Ateneo’s Chemistry Department once observed that it requires more energy to clean after our wastes than to dispose of them properly in the first place. Following the second law of thermodynamics, he says that “it is invariably more economical to recycle materials that we have won from nature than to produce more materials.” Amando Kapauan, “Nature can Take Revenge,” *Pantas* 5, no. 1 (1992): 2.


greater the degree of relationality among them.\textsuperscript{7} The failure to map out such intricate relationships produces dangers similar to those which a Malaysian community found itself having to face when, to eliminate a plague of mosquitoes, it arranged for DDT to be sprayed upon its environs. While the mosquitoes were eliminated, together with that other pest, the roaches, so were the cats that had been feeding upon the roaches. The disappearance of the cats allowed for an increase in the rat population, which in its turn brought about a worsening of local levels of disease and epidemic. The Royal Air Force had, in the end, to parachute cats into the village, to save human lives.\textsuperscript{8} What had not been taken into sufficient account was the fact that ecological systems are characterized, not by linear processes of development, but by circular processes and feedback mechanisms.\textsuperscript{9} Nutrients are absorbed by living organisms that eventually die and decompose; water evaporates, condenses, and precipitates; carbons, sulfur and nitrates are photosynthesized and respired, combusted, or decomposed, releasing nutrients that thereupon are consumed by a new generation of living organisms. In this way, organisms feed on each other in mutual symbiosis and complementarity. We stand to gain from maintaining a healthy respect for the webs of relationships within our natural environments. Environmentally-protected forests would be able to provide us with more fresh air, environmentally enhanced lands with arable surfaces that will not wash out, and environmentally-protected oceans with an abundance of marine life that should endure for generations to come.\textsuperscript{10}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{7} Daniel J. McNamara, SJ, "A New Model for the Physical World," in \textit{Oikocenter: Center for Studies in Sustainable Development} (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Economics Department, 1992), 27.
\item \textsuperscript{8} Disch, ed., \textit{The Ecological Conscience}, 13. The crisis was compounded by the fact that a synthetic chemical that had not evolved naturally from the environment had been introduced into it. Such a chemical is relatively more difficult to breakdown by natural processes because of its non-biodegradability.
\item \textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 4.
\end{itemize}
The proper management of our natural resources requires what St. Thomas calls "providence," or the capacity to exercise "forethought about the order of things and the establishment of this order."11 To be human is precisely to be able to exercise forethought in regard to one's own life and to the environment. It is to "think globally, act locally," especially in face of an ecological disaster. When a fuel tanker leaked oil in Alaska in 1989, environmental workers utilized the best products of the human mind. They sprayed nitrogen-phosphorus fertilizers to stimulate oil-eating bacteria. They also surrounded the oil spill with buoyants to contain the disaster. Those who volunteered to participate in the clean-up may have been physically exhausted by their work, but at the end of each day, they were spiritually gratified by their efforts.12

By constantly reminding ourselves that we must take the environment into account in our decision-making processes, we, too, can cultivate prudential virtues that promote actions that "tend to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community." Environmentalism, therefore, is not only an intellectual virtue, but a product of the will. It can be realized only by constant and actual practice. The dynamism of being and the dynamism of human persons, insofar as they participate in being, cannot be fenced in. Responsibility for the environment requires that we reverse our attitude from egocentrism to eccentrism. Again, Fr. Clarke's notion of "transcendence" offers a framework for overcoming the attitude that we "own" the universe, and for functioning instead as its stewards.

When we become aware that the universe is not originally our own, but a gift given for our use and enjoyment, then our natural response to such giftedness is one of gratitude to the Giver of these gifts. To induce such an experience among my students, I have adopted a spiritual exer-

therefore of no small consequence that when Jacques Maritain proposed marriage to Raissa, he supposedly plucked a blade of grass from the sidewalk and proclaimed: "It is!" Raissa said, "Yes!," and they lived happily ever after. There is, after all, "the common bond of existence that bonds together all real existents" (Person and Being, 96). It is this bond that allowed St. Francis of Assisi to claim brotherhood with the Sun, sisterhood with the moon, kinship with every being that is.

cise suggested by the late Fr. Anthony de Mello, SJ. It is perhaps best described as a “phenomenology of gratitude that leads to a metaphysics of the splendor of being.” I begin this exercise by asking my students to set aside a few moments in their daily lives to personify and give thanks to everything that happens to them—to thank the sun that bears down upon them, and the green grass underfoot, and the food which they ingest, and the preparers of that food, and their classmates for their presence, and the pen in hand, and the chairs they happen to be sitting on, and the air rushing through their nostrils, into their lungs, through their arteries, to their brains. It is important to be able to relate in gratitude with every being that inhabits one’s life. Every being is precious, not only because it gives something to us, but because it also was given by Someone out of Love. Suggesting the ecological implications of this synoptic vision, Fr. Clarke writes:

(St. Thomas) . . . declared that because of the bond of the rest of the universe with rational beings as its fulfillment, it is possible to love with the altruistic love of charity, not only other persons, but the whole material universe itself! The new perspective opened on ecology and care for the earth is a rich one. It is hard to conceive of a more radically personalized universe than this. 14.

14. Person and Being, 80.