So we have our rules and norms for how to think about the environment and the economy. Let us now look at two of our case studies for this module.

You should challenge yourself to consider how our discussions of norms, values, and virtues come into play in each case. The first case, “Oil and the Caribou People” deals with a variety of environmental issues, as well as culture and oil dependency.

What is the moral dilemma for Ron Blanchard in this case? In part it is the challenge to make an appropriate recommendation regarding drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge at a time when the United States is dependent on foreign nations for oil. The other part of the equation is Ron’s personal bias for preservation of nature when it comes to issues involving environmental justice. Ron is trying to balance values of patriotism and environmental concerns.

Integrity requires that Ron base his decisions on facts presented to him regardless of his own personal inclinations. Our author uses this case as a way to discuss integrity.

Integrity takes on a variety of meanings as we read through this case study. Integrity can refer to the ideal of “completeness” or wholeness such that all the pieces or elements of an entity are held together. In the case of personal integrity, this means keeping our virtues, norms, and values intact in any situation and acting accordingly. For Ron Blanchard, personal integrity is involved in making a fair and honest assessment of the situation presented to him.

Cultural integrity is one of the concerns for the Gwich’in people who live in the area adjacent to the proposed drilling site. In this case, integrity refers to keeping traditions, language, music, and history of the native people alive for future generations. The fear for many of the indigenous people is that the influx of the oil industry and its workers will threaten the native language of the Gwich’in people and their customs. Also at risk may be the integrity of the caribou herd that is an essential element of the Gwich’in customs and spiritual identity.

How do we judge or analyze this situation? Utilitarian methods might challenge us to weigh the benefits against the possible negative impacts. We might ask questions such as: how many will benefit from the oil produced? How many will be negatively impacted by the drilling? But how do we weigh in on the environmental impact, the demise of a culture, or long term effects on fauna and flora?

Long-term environmental effects are difficult to determine. We often overlook the interrelatedness of various plant and animal species on the rest of the planet. Do our needs for additional non-renewable energy sources outweigh our responsibility to care for the environment? Where do we draw the line?
How much of the habitat of other species should we eliminate in the pursuit of limited amounts of oil? As Christians, we believe that we are called to be stewards of the earth. Recalling again that in Genesis man was placed in the Garden of Eden "to cultivate and care for it." We are called to care and nurture the natural world; we are called to be good stewards of the earth. As we read this case study, think about what you would do if you were in Ron Blanchard’s position. What recommendation would you make?

Our second case study deals with a number of issues that may be a bit closer to home for you. In the case study "Whose Water," we are introduced to a community faced with economic issues as well as moral issues that surround water use. We are asked to consider whether water is a right or a commodity. Certainly water is necessary for the life of every living creature; that makes it a right. It is therefore unjust to withhold access to water from the poor.

In this case, we will look at the crumbling infrastructure of Pendleton County. Their aging water pipes are leaking, and their water treatment plant no longer filters or treats the drinking water to levels acceptable for health and safety. For a small rural community during a time of economic difficulty, the cost of replacing water treatment plants and pipes is prohibitive. The costs of the water project would necessitate raising taxes at a time when unemployment is high and the average citizen is already struggling to make ends meet.

A solution is proposed by a water bottling plant. The corporation agrees to lend money for the water project, interest free, in exchange for unlimited use of the water as well as tax abatements for years. At first the suggestion sounds like a solution to all the problems of Pendleton County. There will be new jobs in addition to a new water treatment facility. So what is the downside to this arrangement?

There are ecological consequences to allowing a water bottling company to pump large quantities of water from the local lake. The water table will likely drop significantly, endangering fish and wildlife not just in Pendleton County, but downstream as well. To illustrate the point of the textbook case, recall the short video film clip you watched earlier in this module about a similar community in Michigan that faced the same situation.

There are also economic consequences in the case of the bottling plant. As you consider this case study, take note at how the personal financial concerns of the individuals in the case are in conflict with moral environmental issues. How are we to judge what is morally right in such a case? Our author suggests that when analyzing any case that we approach the topic “in faith with love and relationship to God, others and self in mind.” It is also imperative that we look at how personal experience and perspective affects us and those involved in the case. We should consider the power dynamics and identify the moral agents
involved. In this case, the power belongs to those who have the money and to the county commissioners who have the vote. The bottling company has a fiduciary duty to its stockholders to make a profit. That is the primary concern of the corporation. The County Commissioners on the other hand are responsible for the health, safety, and concerns of the citizens in their community. What happens when the two agencies become partners in a water project? Are their agendas compatible with one another, or will one agenda or the other eventually take precedence?

Take a look at all of the facts and complicating factors in the case. Did the County Commissioners look at all of the consequences to an agreement with a bottling plant before beginning their relationship with the corporation? Finally in your analysis of this case, what alternative courses of action are possible?

There are environmentalists today who are predicting that water will ultimately replace oil as the natural resource over which economic battles will be fought in the future.

Environmental issues are moral issues and involve moral decision making on both a personal and societal level. How does the Catholic Church view our moral obligations concerning the environment? *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

“The use of the earth’s resources is not absolute: “it is limited by concern for the quality of life of his/her neighbor, including generations to come; it requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation.” (2415)

In 1979, Pope John Paul II stated in his encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* the following: “The economic order is depleting the Earth’s resources of raw materials and energy at an ever-increasing rate, and putting intolerable pressures on the geophysical environment. It was the Creator’s will that man should communicate with nature as an intelligent and noble ‘master’ and ‘guardian’, and not as a needless ‘exploiter’ and ‘destroyer.’”

Then in 1990, Pope John Paul offered a critique of technology during his World Day of Peace address. He warned that consumerism and instant gratification are root causes of our environmental predicament. He suggested that humanity is indifferent to the damage that they cause to the environment.

Human beings do not live in isolation. Solidarity with humanity and with all of creation is a norm that should help us to see the interconnectedness of species and resources. The economic and ecological decisions that we make have an impact on our fellow human beings and on our wider world. It is essential that we look at the transitive effects of our actions on the environment and on our neighbors.