**EXXON-MOBIL**

*In the 1990’s a consortium of multinational oil (energy) companies had begun to build a pipeline to transport oil through Chad and Cameroon (W Africa) to a Coastal port. These are two of the worlds “poorest” nations (in financial terms). Various concerns: moral-political, environmental and economic led to a re-consideration of the pipeline project. This situation had two distinctive “moral-political” aspects. Firstly, the tribal way of life of “primitive” Bagyeli pigmies in Cameroon had already been heavily damaged (by several accounts) by the construction of the pipeline through “their” native forests. Secondly, a few years previously the activities of Shell in neighbouring Nigeria had created major international controversy and had damaged that company’s reputation. Two of the consortium members had already pulled out of the project and it was being re-considered by another member, a major oil and energy company*.

**Discussion.**

This pipeline project would be described in *Blessed Unrest* as a prime example of *non-*ecological commerce: the type of “value-destruction” generally associated with the global extractive industries, or, more pointedly, with “resource-hungry corporations...destroying…sanctuaries of life in the lands of indigenous cultures”(Hawken, 2007, p.7). It is but one illustration of the more oppressive aspects of globalization (e.g. Pilger 1999; Klein, 200*7).* Typically when MNCs make deals with 3rd or 4th world governments, the benefits flow to the local government officials themselves. The citizens receive none of the benefits but also pay a high price by having their way of life disrupted. Furthermore when the people protest or try to fight back to defend their way of life and correct the injustice , their “government” sometimes ruthlessly punishes or kills them. There are many documented (or video) examples of this pattern. Hawken’s book happens to mention that one of the millions of organizations that make up “*The Movement*” is the “Association of Human Rights and Tortured Defenders in Cameroon”:

**A decision to go ahead**

Despite the “injustices”, a decision by a member of the consortium to “go ahead with the pipeline” can nonetheless be supported or justified, as in the previous case, by referring systematically to various *right*-poles of the stable framework, as follows (this time in bullet-point format):

* Ultimately, this project can be justified with reference to collective human needs: the world wide consumer and industrial demand for oil and energy. Like any other enterprising trader throughout history we as an oil company are simply attempting to meet a strong market demand for a product that we know how to produce and distribute.
* We employ many great scientists and engineers and of course we are aware of the risks of various types of environmental damage that our operations can cause; but these strategic investment decisions almost always require tradeoffs. The fact is that the aggregate level benefits of supplying oil to the world market outweigh these costs (utilitarian reasoning without the justice constraint).
* The pipeline project now includes many community development projects in the region (clinics, schools, etc.) which are intended to *compensate* for any un-priced externalities and the risk of environmental damage.
* With regard to the tribes-people who now live in the area, we have already consulted with anthropologists and we have offered the tribes some ideas and products that we think will improve their lives. In this respect we honestly believe we have been a greater force for good in the area than the national government, who have done nothing for years to assist these people. Furthermore, we are attempting to mimimize any disruption to traditional tribal territories by re-routing parts of the pipeline. In the final analysis, however, we do not fully agree that preserving any particular ancient way of life is necessarily the best thing. Individually and collectively we are all caught up in a larger evolution-like process that encompasses advances in tools and technologies. Major religions have adapted to this “truth” too. People everywhere have to adjust. Why should the Bagyeli, for example, be exempt?
* We agree there is always a risk of environmental damage but our latest technology is designed to minimize that risk. We have invested heavily in this, in part because we recognize that in the contemporary and future political and international legal environment such investments will (increasingly) pay off.
* (ii) On a wider philosophical point we (as a business) do value human progress and we consider that history and theory overall demonstrate that the accumulation of financial capital enables timely investments in the “next” technology, including not only alternative energy supplies, but also social services (which are funded in part by taxation on business profits, in jurisdictions where there is good government).

**A decision to abandon the project**

A decision to abandon the pipeline can then be justified with reference to the *left*-poles, as follows:

* First of all, as mentioned in the discussion this oil pipeline, if it goes ahead, would cause the typical kind of “*value*-destruction” that is widely associated with the global extractive industries. It would be a prime example of “resource-hungry corporations...destroying…sanctuaries of life in the lands of indigenous cultures.”
* We have all witnessed the destruction in the developed world: The Exxon Valdez incident, Royal Dutch Shell’ operations in Nigeria, and B.P. owned operations in the Gulf of Mexico, to mention a few. The technologies may be improving but the technical challenges are always changing and the pattern of damage will remain the same.
* The problem with many of the arguments from the right is that they fail to accept the very high *intrinsic value* of ecosystems, communities and traditions. Many people want to continue living in the way to which they have become accustomed, rather than accumulate financial wealth (Max Weber). To deliberately prevent this is undemocratic and therefore an abuse of (private) power.
* The scientific truth is that capitalist industrial development is destroying life support systems (the environment as a neglected but silent *stakeholder*), creating health hazards for almost everyone and forcing millions to become slaves to their superficial desires that in turn have been created by other corporations (i.e. a false consciousness) .
* The global capitalist system legislates that land can be private property, something that can be purchased from a government (as in this case) or from other private entities; but this is just an idea, it is not some natural law or ultimate truth. Tribes people everywhere understand the opposite in their hearts: that the land “owns” them (or has power over them). The life of the tribes is thus authentic and in a way more intelligent. (Marx wrote that property makes us stupid). The life of the Bagyeli tribe is based on a deep and emotionally satisfying personal understanding of their surroundings and circumstances. They are seemingly contented because their rituals and practices express that understanding. It is a tragedy to be involved in deliberately disrupting that system. It is a violation of the golden rule (Deontology) and it is quite like an unjust act of war: the company is banishing people from their garden of Eden in order to satisfy others’ selfish, material and ultimately dangerous purposes.
* The expertise of the company should therefore be directed instead at enabling as many people as possible to revise their material desires and to live sustainable and fulfilling lives.