

2015

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Conservation
Biology Course
1120-400

[ETHICAL EVOLUTION]

A Reflection of the writings of Aldo Leopold's "The Land Ethics, A Sand County Almanac with Essays on Conservation From Round River"

Ethical Evolution

Ethics by definition is the behavior of society, based on what is morally right and wrong. That being said it is society's belief at a particular time that determines the ethics of the time. Aldo Leopold brings up the history of Roman slaves being considered property and not worthy of consideration in his essay, *Land Ethic's, A Sand County Almanac* as an example of revolutionizing ethics over time. Western ethics takes decades and generations to modify social views. The "Golden Rule", doesn't deal with man's relationship with nature, it still only property of economic value with no moral considerations. However thorough the evolution of moral ethics a broader view expanded who or what belongs in our moral compasses, addressing what qualities something had to possess to be considered or to have rights.

Leopold belief held land as a member of our community, where all members are connected within a whole ecosystem, for the land, plants and animals to be considered not based on economy but with moral obligation. Humans are not conquerors of nature, but member of the community. Leopold express the need to change our current intrinsic philosophy to whom/what we have an ethical responsibility for regardless of financial worth.

Conservation cannot be based on economic value alone as only a small portion would have financial worth. Yet those that cannot produce an income are just as valuable in the stability of the whole community and deserve consideration regardless of economic gain. The government cannot be the only entity to care for land conservation and feel obligated to do so. But the private landowners need to take up where government cannot under voluntary conservation by becoming ecologically mindful of their obligation to the land itself; not just for

profit but for the diversity the land provides. There cannot be conversation without obligation and conscience. (Leopold)

Leopold used his example of the Biotic Pyramid as a way to show society's need for ethically change, as we are all connected in the community. The pyramid is a highly organized opened system of layers, where each layer depends on the layer below it for food and energy flow, all functioning thorough mutual dependences. The bottom layer foundation is soil upon which the energy flows upward to the apex. Change in one layer will in time affect other layers. There is a interdependency in nature that includes humans, we are not apart from this biotic community, human have the biggest impact to the community thorough our evolutionary use of tools we have rapidly made changes to the community disrupting the energy circuit .

I believe that we have to protect our environment by limiting our impact to it. For me this means recycling, growing my own organic garden, getting a degree in environmental sustainability and population control. I look at nature as a gift that we need to be protectors not conquerors of. I can see humans are connected to our biotic community we do not live apart from it. I believe we need more awareness of the impact we have on our environment. We should be fighting to keep the resource we have and look for ways to restore the ones we have damaged. Four years ago I picked up a book by Lester Brown titled *World on Edge*, which opened by eyes to water shortages, falling crops and environmental stress. These crises lead to government collapses that affects are being felt globally, with wars and food shortages. I began to read about food and the commercialization of factory farms in a book by Michael Pollan called the *Omnivores Delimena*. This started me on a path to vegetarian lifestyle as I didn't

agree with the inhumane treatment of animals. In the process I went back to school and learned more about the damage to our environment. The more I read the more angry I became at the political nonsense of “global warming” years, the back and forth of climate change issues. I am frustrated by the lack of public awareness and degradation of your natural resources.

Respect of the land as the sole of the community is what is desperately needed. Soil management and conservation is where I am planning to spend my energy in the future. I receive email newsletters from SWCS, (Soil and Water Conservation Society) and I currently am respectful of my water usage, promoting this with my family and friends. People in highly development nations have no concept of water management and their wasteful use of this natural resource. They have never been without and use water as an endless reserve degrading it with chemicals and waste.

I believe the biggest tragedy of our society’s view of its land relationship we currently have. An example the former President Bush administration opened up oil drilling leases in Utah in 2008, at the end of his term. Land near Utah’s National Parks that was previously protected was put up for sale by the Bush administration, added on to prior proposed leasing maps at the last minute. At the time regional park director Michael D Snyder was quoted in the New York Times, stating ““This is the first time where we have not had sufficient opportunity to comment.” He had asked to have the newly added leases pulled from auction which was declined. (NY Times) This is only one example of the political maneuvering that our environment suffers because of.

Since politics have such an impact in our land management and views I feel we need to ask our representatives to better protect our resources and holding them accountable when they don't. We have an obligation to speak for the community and a duty to argue for or against proposals that can damage the ecosystem we are a part of. As a community we need to be able to co-operate with the land instead of conquering it.

I agree with Leopold quote on doing the right thing about the benefit to the community and not to the individual member of that community. This means to me that land and resources are above a members need for economy profit. If I have to let go of a dream to live on the coast in favor of stopping coastal development destruction, than I would do this. I am downsizing my entire life style to live simply reducing my carbon footprint. My next home will be less than 500 square feet and built with environmental friendly materials. There is a movement of tiny homes that is catching on in the United States for people that want to make less of an environmental impact and not be tied financially to large material means. This type of lifestyle is very appealing to me. (CBS)

My greatest joy in the morning is my commute to work and watching the change in the morning as the sun rises. I have seen amazing views of our mountain ranges on my morning drives and wonder do others take the time to appreciate this view? I also enjoy watching the birds when I take my dog for a walk or I am sitting outside my home seeing them play in my bird bath. So I am going to say for myself, I view the land with respect and beauty as opposed to duty.

Beauty is how I would describe the greatest vacation I have had in years. It was a trip to Death Valley Desert in California; now when I tell someone this, reactions are mixed, but the majority is really, why? It was beautiful; the formation of the mountain ranges, the sparse vegetation and the surprising valleys of green, I loved every minute of it. I believe truly that I have a "land ethic" interest that is all about nature and not about self-interest. Why else would I sell my home to pursue a dream of working in the field? My views have evolved over the past five years as I have expanded my moral views to encompass all things in nature. The connection and the need for balance is how I strive to live my life.

Leopold's writings are not only a call for ethically change, but are poetic views of the true nature of all things. "The evolution of the land ethic is an intellectual as well as emotional process." (Leo pg. 263) After reading the "*The Land Ethic*", I was saddened by how little progress we have made since it was written in the early 1950's. I felt Leopold's frustration when he points out that our education and economic system moves further away from respect of the land, and lack of ecological learning. I agreed when he mentions man being bored in nature unless using a gadget or golfing. (pgs. 261-262). How true this is in today's world of internet and smartphones, where people cannot just take a walk and see the beginnings of an early spring in February, as the trees are beginning to show fuzzy starts on their bare branches. They are texting or talking on the phone walking as a way to get from one point to the other. I also felt uplifted by his poetic view of the land when I read a few of his other writings, such as the "*Good Oak*", a described process of sawing down a tree for wood to heat his cabin; recalling the 100 years of the oaks life cycle. It made me appreciate just how much nature records human influences. My views of land ethics have not changed since reading the essay, however I

realize I need to be more active in my current beliefs as I was answering the proposed questions. I would recommend the entire essay collection of Leopold's as required reading in school curriculum, perhaps as an introduction to ecology. I enjoyed the whimsical view of animals or birds the Leopold follows in some of his writings. I also found the "*Round River*" essay a good educational view on human impact to the environment. I cannot say there was a part of the essays I didn't like. I feel reading it enhance my current "land ethic" and only strengthen my desire to continue my education goals.

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