

Environmental Ethics

- What role should humans play on Earth?
- What obligation do we have to the human species?
- To other species?
- To future generations?
- How serious are the environmental problems we face?
- What is our world view?



Environmental Ethics

- Journal Entry #6
- What is your view of ethics & the environment?
- As we proceed through this presentation - write your thoughts along the way



Environmental Ethics

- Maybe we should start with:
 - What is an Ethic?
 - What is an environmental ethic?
 - What is an environmental worldview?



Environmental Ethic

- **Human-centered** or Anthropocentric viewpoint:
 - Human-centered
 - Human are the most important and dominant species on Earth
 - Should manage Earth for our own benefit
 - Other species' values depends on their usefulness to us
 - “our” Planet or “our” Earth



Environmental Ethics

- **Human-centered** basic environmental beliefs:
 - There is always more (Earth has unlimited resources)
 - All economic growth is good
 - Potential for economic growth is limitless
 - Our success depends on how well we understand, control & manage Earth's life-support systems



Environmental Ethics

- **Earth-centered** or Biocentric viewpoint:
 - Any human-centered worldview will eventually fail
 - Earth's resources are finite
 - Our knowledge is so limited compared to the complexity of the Earth's life-support systems
 - Learn to work with Earth by becoming more responsible Earth citizens



Environmental Ethics

- **Human-centered** versus **Earth-centered**

- Is there a right or wrong answer?
- Do we change our views according to the issue?
- Do our views change over time?



Environmental Ethics

- Different viewpoints on ethics and the land:

- **Aldo Leopold** - land ethic
- **Wendell Berry** - (Home Economics) - community
- **Roderick Nash** - (The Rights of Nature) - evolution of ethics
- **Bill McKibben** - (The End of Nature) - Oddballs



Discussion Questions

- **Leopold's A Sand County Almanac Questions: (Journal Entry #6)**

- How much do you know about nature's activities? Human activities?
- How did Leopold view nature?
- Did Leopold always have the same view of nature?
- Your thoughts about his "oak tree"?
- What is his "land ethic"?
- Do we teach an environmental ethic in our schools?



Environmental Ethics - Leopold

- **Aldo Leopold**

- [A Sand County Almanac](#)
- Land Ethic
- Biologist/Wildlife Management
- The Shack
- [Http://www.aldoleopold.org/shack/shack.htm](http://www.aldoleopold.org/shack/shack.htm)



Environmental Ethics - Leopold

- Born in Burlington, Iowa, on January 11, 1887
- Interest ornithology & natural history
- Enrolled [Yale forestry school](#), first graduate school of forestry in the United States
- Graduated with masters in 1909
- Joined [U.S. Forest Service](#)
- In 1933 he was appointed chair in Game Management at [Univ. of Wisconsin](#), a position he held until his death.



Environmental Ethics - Leopold

- Forefront of **conservation movement**
- **Father of wildlife conservation**
- Authored classic text **Game Management**, which is used today
- Died of heart attack April 21, 1948 while helping fight a grass fire
- Named to [National Wildlife Federation's](#) Conservation Hall of Fame



Leopold . . . Land Ethics

- The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.

Leopold . . . Land Ethics

- This sounds simple: do we not already sing our love for and obligation to the land of the free and the home of the brave? Yes, but just what and whom do we love? Certainly not the soil, which we are sending helter-skelter downriver. Certainly not the waters, which we assume have no function except to turn turbines, float barges, and carry off sewage.

Leopold . . . Land Ethics

- Certainly not the plants, of which we exterminate whole communities without batting an eye. Certainly not the animals, of which we have already extirpated many of the largest and most beautiful species. A land ethic of course cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these 'resources,' but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state.

- Leopold, Aldo: *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*, 1948, Oxford University Press, New York, 1987, pg. 204.

Leopold . . . Conservation

- Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land. By land is meant all of the things on, over, or in the earth. Harmony with land is like harmony with a friend; you cannot cherish his right hand and chop off his left. That is to say, you cannot love game and hate predators; you cannot conserve the waters and waste the ranges; you cannot build the forest and mine the farm.

Leopold . . . Conservation

- The land is one organism. Its parts, like our own parts, compete with each other and co-operate with each other. The competitions are as much a part of the inner workings as the co-operations. You can regulate them--cautiously--but not abolish them.
- The outstanding scientific discovery of the twentieth century is not television, or radio, but rather the complexity of the land organism. Only those who know the most about it can appreciate how little we know about it.

Leopold . . . Conservation

- The last word in ignorance is the man who says of an animal or plant: "What good is it?" If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part is good, whether we understand it or not. If the biota, in the course of aeons, has built something we like but do not understand, then who but a fool would discard seemingly useless parts? To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering.

• Leopold, Aldo: *Round River*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, pp. 145-146.

Environmental Ethics



- Leopold's view on killing the wolf. . .

Leopold . . . On killing the wolf

- **Killing the Wolf**
- [...] We were eating lunch on a high rimrock, at the foot of which a turbulent river elbowed its way. We saw what we thought was a doe fording the torrent, her breast awash in white water. When she climbed the bank toward us and shook out her tail, we realized our error: it was a wolf. A half-dozen others, evidently grown pups, sprang from the willows and all joined in a welcoming melee of wagging tails and playful maulings. What was literally a pile of wolves writhed and tumbled in the center of an open flat at the foot of our rimrock.

Leopold . . . On killing the wolf

- In those days we had never heard of passing up a chance to kill a wolf. In a second we were pumping lead into the pack, but with more excitement than accuracy; how to aim a steep downhill shot is always confusing. When our rifles were empty, the old wolf was down, and a pup was dragging a leg into impassable side-rocks.

Leopold . . . On killing the wolf

- We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes--something known only to her and to the mountain. I was young then, and full of trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view.

Leopold . . . On killing the wolf

- Since then I have lived to see state after state extirpate its wolves. I have watched the face of many a newly wolfless mountain, and seen the south-facing slopes wrinkle with a maze of new deer trails. I have seen every edible bush and seedling browsed, first to anaemic desuetude, and then to death. I have seen every edible tree defoliated to the height of a saddlehorn. Such a mountain looks as if someone had given God a new pruning shears, and forbidden Him all other exercise. In the end the starved bones of the hoped-for deer herd, dead of its own too-much, bleach with the bones of the dead sage, or molder under the high-lined junipers.

• Leopold, Aldo: *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*, 1948, Oxford University Press, New York, 1987, pp. 129-132. .

Environmental Ethics



- Impressions of Leopold's land ethic?

Environmental Ethics - Berry

- **Wendell Berry** is a conservationist, farmer, essayist, novelist, professor of English and poet
- Born August 5, 1934 in Henry County, Kentucky where he now lives on a farm
- Wrote books such as The Gift of Good Land & Home Economics
- Berry is called the "prophet of rural America"
- Wendell Berry's concept of "**community**" . . .

Environmental Ethics - Nash

- **Roderick Nash**
- Historian, Writer, Philosopher
- Wrote "The Rights of Nature"
- Evolution of ethics
- What law gave nature rights?



Environmental Ethics - McKibben

- Wrote - **The End of Nature**
 - Traveled to Griz' Country
 - Developed the concept of "Oddballs"



Environmental Ethics

- What is the human place on Earth? What is your view?
- “We can break the mountains apart; we can drain the rivers and flood the valleys. We can turn forests into throwaway paper products. We can pour toxic chemicals into the soil and pesticides onto the fields, until the soil is dead and blows away in the wind. . . We can invent computers capable of processing ten million calculations per second. And why? To increase the volume and speed which we move natural resources through the consumer economy to the junk pile or the waste heap . . . We are, supposedly, creating a technological wonderworld. . . But our supposed progress . . . is bringing us to a wasteworld instead of a wonderworld.” *Thomas Berry*



Environmental Ethics



- “We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”

Aldo Leopold

Environmental Ethics

- “Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature’s peace will flow into you as the sunshine into the trees. The winds will blow their freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves. . . “

John Muir



Environmental Ethics

- Final impressions?
- What is your ethic toward:
 - Water
 - Air
 - Soil
 - Species
 - Ecosystems
 - Energy
 - Minerals?



Environmental Ethics

- This brings us to . . .
- Student Action Plans
- Develop your thoughts & ideas about the environment into an action plan


