III. Environmental Philosophy - critique and argument

A. The Land Ethic - Aldo Leopold 1887-1948 A Sand County Almanac (1949) essay "the Land Ethic" --

1. lays the thematic ground for the first ecocentric ethic

2. a radical rethinking of ethics in light of ecology and the sustained abuse of the environment is an absolute necessity

3. Early life a conservationsit -- nature a resource to be managed "the varmint question"

4. "Thinking Like a Mountain"

B. Leopold's extensionism

1. Leopold wants to develop an ethical philosophy that

establishes a moral relationship between humans and

the land and the animals and plants

2. his philosophy is holistic

a. define the new boundaries of the moral

community

i. basis for moral standing

ii. question of value

b. new understanding of how we should live in

this moral community - the moral "ought"

c. suggest limitations on social organization and

policy

C. Three assumptions throughout his argument.

1. it is a fact that the earth is alive not dead matter, a living world

a. reducible to physical laws

b. not reducible to quantification or the dollar

2. living world is too complex to be predictable,

a. cannot predict the consequences of our actions

b. unanticipated and unintended consequences

of our actions

i. overfishing of pollock

ii. coral reefs

iii. Black Sea

3. accepts the holistic perspective of ecology

a. everything is interconnected, interrelated

b. even man no subject outside or above the world

4. According to Leopold the conqueror role is self- defeating.

a. Unstated assumption is that the conqueror knows

all, can foresee and therefore predict and control the consequences of his actions

b. that the conqueror knows both who and what is valuable, and who and what is worthless

5. Both of these are wrong

a. the ecosphere is so complex that its workings exceed science's attempts to grasp it

b. values in a capitalist society are based on market,

on economics

c. doesn't take into account aesthetic elements,

song birds and wild flowers are valueless

e. doesn't take into account essential elements

of the ecosphere like marshes and wetlands

and tree covered hillsides that are essential to

the entire functioning of the systems

D. Leopold's argument

1. "biotic pyramid"

a. complexly organized and intricate structure of biotic and abiotic elements through which solar energy flows

b. Species of this biotic pyramid arranged in "trophic levels"

i. according to the food they eat,

ii. population get smaller as you get to the top levels, less predators the higher up on the food chain

c.. Man is not at the top. he shares and intermediate

layer with the bears, racoons, and squirrels which eat both meat and vegetables

d. Lines of dependencey are food chains, and each species is a link in many chains

"The pyramid is a tangle of chains so complex as to seem disorderly, yet the stability of the system proves it to be a highly organized structure. Its functioning depends on the cooperation and competition of its diverse parts.'

e. The trend of evolution is to elaborate and

diversify biota in relation to the abiotic environment over a long period of time

f. the line between biotic and abiotic elements is

is very fine

i. dead trees through the work of fungi

and insects become rich soil

ii. soil then nutures living things

"Land, then, is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuti of soils, plants, and animals."

g. There is always decay and death but a return to the soil

h. the reality is a whole system

i. complex

ii. interdependent

iii. in flux

4. From this holistic understanding Leopold believes that an ethical theory, the land ethic

a. fundamental reality: the land communtiy

b. the land, its biotic and abiotic elements,

have moral standing

i. include species

ii. ecosystems

b. human beings are members of this land community with moral standing

i. not Lord of Earth

ii. but member

b. as members

i. respect for all members

ii. respect for community as whole

c. basic moral principle

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity of the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

d. consequentalists

i. determine the morality of an act or

policy, its rightness or wrongness by the

effect it has on the community

ii. so complex that we can't determine the

consequences of our actions

c. actions and policies

i. Preservation of life forms and biotic and abiotic diversity necessitate that we introduce changes slowly so adaptation can be accomplished

ii. avoid introducing alien species to ecosystems

iii. human intervention should be slow and

minimal

iv. genetically modified organisms and

the precautionary principle

d. social organization

i. small self-sustaining farms

ii. local markets

E. Callicot's analysis of Leopold

1. not a moral philosophy but a practical philosophy, How would the phronemos live?

2. The natural world is so complex and complicated that the human idea of mastery of it is just a form of hubris and will eventually be self-defeating

3. humans need to relate to the environment in a different way

4. however, Callicot says, it the beginning Leopold

he says in the beginning that love etc precedes moral

behavior

5. David Hume and late Darwin -- argued that the basis for morality is feeling or sentiment,

6. moral laws, the sphere of moral behavior is articulated on the basis of natural human feelings.

7. for Darwin this is natural and evolutionary, communities organized around love, intimacy, respect for the other survived.

8. For both morality has a natural basis. Callicot argues that Leopold is saying that modern society has lost this natural feeling of love and sympathy for the natural world--need new image -- complexity, sympathy

9. did western society ever have it

10. summary:

a. moral standing: the community as a whole

i. species and ecosystems

ii. not necessarily individuals

b. basis for moral standing

i. member of the system

ii. system is basis

c. ought: to act toward system in terms of its

stability

d. social organization: small farms