*In his essay “Axe in Hand” Aldo Leopold explains the natural bias he shares with different species of plants on his land. Leopold argues that a natural bias allows for him to see with a calm assurance, whether or not his actions are truly for the good of the land. Leopold makes an early assumption that: “not all trees are created free and equal”. Doing so, allows him to consciously explain his preference of pine over birch trees. Which in the end leads to the Throughout his essay with factual evidence that is not only immune to perception, but clearly leads the reader through a very persuasive argument that suggests his bias is generally better for the land.*

### *The wielder of an axe has as many biases as there are species of trees on his farm.*

### *He goes on to persuade the reader given more evidence of how his bias for aspen, the tamarack, and the ancient cottonwood all benefit the tree.*

### *His biases are more numerous than neighbors.*

### *His plant biases are in part traditional, or passed down from previous generations.*

### *Our plant biases reflect not only vocations but avocations, with a delicate allocation of priority as between industry and indolence.*

### *Our biases are indeed a sensitive index to our affections, our tastes, our loyalties, our generosities, and our manner of wasting weekends.*

# *Axe in Hand*

## *Thesis: Leopold assumes that whoever owns land must forsee, compare, and decide with the calm assurance that his bias will, on the average, prove to be an irreplaceable tool.*

### *Philosophy and Vocations*

#### We classify ourselves into vocations, each of which either wields some particular tool, or sells it, or repairs it, or sharpens it, or dispenses advice on how to do so.

#### But there is one vocation—philosophy—which knows that all men, by what they think about and wish for, in effect wield all tools.

#### It [philosophy] knows that men thus determine, by their manner of thinking and wishing, whether it is worth while to wield any.

### *Intentions*

#### Without this clear view of treetops, one cannot be sure which tree, if any, needs felling for the good of the land.

##### *If it were for the good of the land Leopold would not chop down the tree.*

#### It is a matter of what a man thinks about while chopping, or while deciding what to chop.

##### *Immanuel Kant*

#### A conservationist is one who is humbly aware that with each stroke he is writing his signature on the face of his land.

### *Bias and Reasoning*

#### Our plant biases reflect not only vocations but avocations, with a delicate allocation of priority as between industry and indolence.

#### I find, first of all, that not all trees are created free and equal.

#### I have an a priori bias; I always cut the birch to favor the pine.

#### The wielder of an axe has as many biases as there are species of trees on his farm.

#### His biases are more numerous than neighbors.

#### His plant biases are in part traditional, or passed down from previous generations.

#### The pine will ultimately bring ten dollars a thousand, the birch two dollars;

##### *Money factor*

#### Our biases are indeed a sensitive index to our affections, our tastes, our loyalties, our generosities, and our manner of wasting weekends.

### *Birch*

#### Planted pine himself, while birch planted itself

##### *If pine was natural seedling he’d like pine even more.*

#### Birch is abundant while pine is scarce

##### *Bias for underdog*

#### Birch only lives for half as long as pine

##### *Legacy*

#### Pine shelters and birch feeds grouse

##### *Bed more important than board*

#### Loves all trees, but loves pines

# *Preserving Wildness*

## *Thesis: The argument over the proper relation of humanity to nature.*

## *Describes both sides of the conflict*

### *The argument over the proper relation of humanity to nature is becoming, as the sixties used to say, polarized.*

### *At the other extreme are the nature conquerors, who have no patience with an old-fashioned outdoor farm, let alone a wilderness.*

### *If I had to choose, I would join the nature extremists against the technology extremists, but this choice seems poor, even assuming that it is possible.*

## *II. States his assumptions*

### *The middle, of course, is always rather roomy and bewildering territory, and so I should state plainly the assumptions that define the ground on which I indent to stand:*

#### We live in a wilderness, in which we and our works occupy a tiny space and play a tiny part. We exist under its dispensation and by its tolerance.

#### This wilderness, the universe, is somewhat hospitable to us, but it is also absolutely dangerous to us (it is going to kill us, sooner or later), and we are absolutely dependent upon it.

#### That we depend upon what we are endangered by is a problem not solvable by “problem solving.” It does not have what the nature romantic or the technocrat would regard a solution. We are not going back to the Garden of Eden, nor are we going to manufacture an Industrial Paradise.

#### There does exist a possibility that we can live more or less in harmony with our native wilderness; I am betting my life that such a harmony is possible. But I do not believe that it can be achieved simply or easily or that it can ever be perfect, and I am certain that it can never be made, once and for all, but is the forever unfinished lifework of our species.

#### It is not possible (at least, not for very long) for humans to intend their own good specifically or exclusively. We cannot intend our good, in the long run, without intending the good of our place—which means, ultimately, the good of the world.

#### To use or not to use nature is not a choice that is available to us; we can live only at the expense of other lives. Our choice has rather to do with how and how much to use. This is not a choice that can be decided satisfactorily in principle or in theory; it is a choice intransigently impractical. That is, it must be worked out in local practice because, by necessity, the practice will vary somewhat from one locality to another. There is, thus, no practical way that we can intend the good of the world; practice can only be local.

#### If there is no escape from the human use of nature, then human good cannot be simply synonymous with natural good.

### *What these assumptions describe, of course, is the human predicament. It is a spiritual predicament, for it requires us to be properly humble and grateful; time and again, it asks us to be still and wait. But it is also a practical problem, for it requires us to do things.*

## *III. Call to action*

### *In going to work on this problem it is a mistake to proceed on the basis of an assumed division or divisibility between nature and humanity, or wildness and domesticity.*

#### The indivisibility of wildness and domesticity, even within the fabric of human life itself, is easy enough to demonstrate.

#### The same is true of a healthy human economy as it branches upward out of the soil.

#### Breeders of domestic animals, likewise, know that, when a breeding program is too much governed by human intention, by economic considerations, or by fashion, uselessness is the result.

## *IV. Our cultures dominance upon nature*

### *To be divided against nature, against wildness, then, is a human disaster because it is to be divided against ourselves.*

### *But to say that we are not divided and not dividable from nature is not to say that there is no difference between us and the other creatures.*

### *But humans differ most from other creatures in the extent to which they must be made what they are—that is, in the extent to which they are artifacts of their culture.*

### *In the recovery of culture and nature is the knowledge of how to farm well, how to preserve, harvest and replenish the forests, how to make, build, and use, return and restore.*

### *Harmony is one phase, the good phase, of the inescapable dialogue between culture and nature. The awareness that we are slowly growing into now is that the earthly wildness that we are so complexly dependent upon is at our mercy.*

## *V. Our economy doesn’t positively reward good use of nature.*

### *To me, this means simply that we are not safe in assuming that we can preserve wildness by making wilderness preserves.*

### *Conservation is going to prove increasingly futile and increasingly meaningless if its proscriptions are not answered positively by an economy that rewards and enforces good use.*

### *Our present economy, by contrast, does not account for affection at all, which is to say that it does not account for value.*

### *Now that the practical processes of industrial civilization have become so threatening to humanity and to nature, it is easy for us, or for some of us, to see that practicality needs to be made subject to spiritual values and spiritual measures.*

### *“The dignity of toil is undermined its necessity is gone,” Kathleen Raine says, and she is right.*

## *VI. The Reason to Preserve Nature*

### *And so, though I am trying to unspecialize the idea and the job of preserving wildness, I am not against wilderness preservation.*

### *The reason to preserve wilderness is that we need it.*

### *We need wilderness also because wildness—nature—is one of our indispensable studies.*

#### What is here?

#### What will nature permit us to do here?

#### What will nature help us to do here?

### *The second and third questions are obviously the ones that would define agendas of practical research and of work.*

### *But the second and third questions are ruled by the first.*

### *However, to say that wilderness and wildness are indispensable to us, indivisible from us, is not to say that we can find sufficient standards for our life and work in nature.*

### *Clearly, if we want to argue for the existence of the world as we know it, we will have to find some way of qualifying and supplementing this relentless criterion of “natural.”*

## *VII. Hope In Finding Solution*

### *We are creatures obviously subordinate to nature, dependent upon a wild world that we did not make.*

### *Humans differ from earthworms, thrushes, and hawks in their capacity to do more—in modern times, a great deal more—in their own behalf than is necessary.*

### *We have no way to work at this question, it seems to me, except by perceiving that, in order to have the world, we must share it, both with each other and with other creatures, which is immediately complicated by the further perception that, in order to live in the world, we must use it somewhat at the expense of other creatures.*

### *But in the recognition of the difficulty of our situation is a kind of relief, for it makes us give up the hope that a solution can be found in a simple preference for humanity over nature or nature over humanity.*

## *VIII. Population*

### *As undertake this work, perhaps the greatest immediate danger lies in our dislike of ourselves as a species.*

### *For these reasons, there is great danger in the perception that “there are too many people,” whatever truth may be in, for this is a premise from which it is too likely that somebody, sooner or later, will proceed to a determination of who are the surplus.*

### *I would argue that, at least for us in the United States, the conclusion that “there are too many people” is premature, not because I know that there are not too many people, but because I do not think we are prepared to come to such a conclusion.*

### *The “population problem,” initially, should be examined as a problem, not of quantity, but of pattern.*

### *The population issue thus leads directly to the issue of proportion and scale.*

## *IX. Conclusion*

### *When we propose that humans should learn to behave properly with respect to nature so as to place their domestic economy harmoniously upon and within the sustaining and surrounding wilderness, then we make possible a sort of landscape criticism.*

### *Looking at the monocultures of industrial civilization, we yearn with a kind of homesickness for the humaneness and the naturalness of a highly diversified, multipurpose landscape, democratically divided, with many margins.*