``“Axe in Hand”, Aldo Leopold

“Preserving Wildness”, Wendell Berry

1. *The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away, but 2.He is no longer the only one to do so.*

Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County almanac, and sketches here and there*.(p.67)

Wendell Berry, due to his own “manner of thinking and philosophy—which knows that all men, by what they think about and wish for, in effect wield all tools” (Leopold 68) suggests that he is forever a wielder of an axe and shovel.

The argument over the proper relation of humanity to nature is becoming, as the sixties used to say, polarized. And the result, as before, is bad talk on both sides. At one extreme are those who sound as if they are entirely in favor of nature [...]. At the other extreme are the nature conquerors (Berry 516-17)

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 I would prefer to stay in the middle, not to avoid taking sides, but because I think the middle is a side, as well as the real location of the problem (Berry 517)

When presented with a choice between “nature extremists” and “technology extremists”, Wendell Berry is forced to side with the nature extremists. This is due to the inescapable fact of the human perspective. Because mankind is homocentric in nature, this “nature extremists” side does not exist. Therefore, Wendell Berry is in the center of a battle between man and nature or in other words, Ecocentrism versus anthropocentrism.

Leopold exercises his axe and shovel differently, depending upon the variables: sunlight, draught, weevil, and the birch in order to preserve the pine (his bias).

Birch competition is a minor affliction compared with this weevil, whose progeny kill the pine’s leader and thus deform the tree. (Leopold, 70)

While Leopold does what he does for the “good of the land”, Berry does what he does out of the human need to wield nature. If Berry was interjected in the situation where Leopold encounters the affliction of a weevil on page 70 of the Leopold text, we can see they ultimately would have the same bias to prune the birch.

Now, I must attempt to interject Leopold into the governing rules of Berry. Doing so, I must meet the challenge of examining Leopold’s actions, perspectives and motivations through Berry’s model:

1. What is here?
2. What will nature permit us to do here?
3. What will nature help us to do here? (Berry 525)

According to Berry, it is vital that I consider the possibilities available to Leopold and the provisions, as well as assistance granted him by nature.

If the birch stands south of pine, and is taller, it will shade the pine’s leader in the spring, and thus discourage the pine weevil from laying her eggs there. Birch competition is a minor affliction compared with this weevil, whose progeny kill the pine’s leader and thus deform the tree. It is interesting to mediate that this insect’s preference for squatting in the sun determines not only her own continuity as a species, but also the future figure of the pine, and my own success as a wielder of axe and shovel. (Leopold ?)

We have the pine, the birch, the weevil, and the sun. The birch blocks the sun on our beloved pine and the weevil prefers the sunlight, but when that weevil lays those eggs in that tree, it will become deformed. So nature in the form a birch is helps save the beloved pine.

Berry does what he does to save society, Leopold does what he does to be a successful wielder of the axe and shovel; both however, result in the good of the land.

Leopold’s model of a shovel and an axe gives him the ability to create or destroy plants. According to Berry’s model, Leopold is now in a situation where there are multiple factors: draught, the weevil, and his bias. Leopold is only permitted by nature to give or take, in other words, “divine functions”. Nature, in this situation, can help Leopold by means of sunlight, draught, and weevil.

On page 529, Berry notes “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” and that is “how the branches intertwine” (Leopold ?) to tie the knot between Mother Nature’s “respectable husbanding” (Berry ?) and a “signature on the face of the land” (Leopold 67)

Leopold would save the birch in order to save his pine; therefore, the pine is his bias: “Again, if a drouthy summer follows my removal of the birch’s shade, the hotter soil may offset the lesser competition for water, and my pine be none the better for my bias” (Leopold 70)

If there is a drought next summer, a weevil, and if the pine is in the sun, the weevil will lay eggs in his pine. The weevil’s offspring will cause it the pine to be deformed next summer.

[I]f the birch’s limbs rub the pine’s terminal buds during a wind, the pine will surely be deformed, and the birch must either be removed regardless of other considerations, or else it must be pruned of limbs each winter to a height greater than the pine’s prospective summer growth. (Leopold ?)

Sometimes the birch can harm the pine, but others times it may provide shade from the sun. If there is sunlight, Leopold has a higher regard for the birch to shade the pine. Without the presence of sun, the weevil that prefers sunlight is ridden. Therefore saving the pine from the weevil’s offspring.

Leopold, haven previously informed the reader of his bias towards pine trees, proves how his bias can “be something more than good intentions” (Leopold ?) Therefore his bias on average is “for the good of the land” (Leopold ?).

Wendell Berry’s intent is to save society, and Leopold intent is to be a successful wielder of the axe and shovel. Both however, result in the good of the land.

Such are the pros and cons the wielder of an axe must forsee, compare, and decide upon with the calm assurance that his bias will, on the average, prove to be something more than good intentions. (Leopold ?)

Through Mother Nature’s gift of a particular tool, it appears as if I have finally reconciled Leopold’s stewardship, and given a sustainable balance to Berry, without breaking the fundamental rules present in both essays. I conclude that Leopold does not demonstrate the same need for humanity that Berry does, but both struggle to demonstrate a sustainable ecological model.

“I always cut the birch to favor the pine” thus I must cite (Leopold 69)

More often than not we see the divine. Just think of this as my ‘wasteful time’.

Works Cited