

Environmental Ethics

2. Birth of conservationism or environmentalism

- John Evelyn, "Sylva", 1662
 - Rate of depletion of English forests is unattainable
 - Importance of "conserving" forests for future **use** (by man)
- Henry D. Thoreau "Walden: Life in the Woods" (1854)
 - The philosophical birth of nature possessing an inherent **worth**, independent of man's needs and usage
 - The simple life, self-sufficiency, living to the fullest, etc
 - The importance of **loving** nature, being intimate with it
- Progressive Era (U.S 1890s-1920s): conservation vs preservation
 - Conservation:
 - Embodied by President Theodore Roosevelt, the recognition that laissez-faire politics lead to wastefulness, depletion of forest resources, overuse of natural resources.
 - Economic well being in the long run would be damaged
 - Federal government must regulate and protect future resources
 - First time in the political sphere => talk about conservation
 - Preservation:
 - Embodied by naturalist John Muir, the idea that conservation policies were not strong enough to protect the interest of the natural world because they continued to focus on the natural world as a source of economic production
 - We must protect wildlife for the sake of protecting it. It deserve it.
 - Creation of national parks, protest against dams, highways, etc
 - Debate between two positions rages on through period
 - Culminates with Hetch Hetchy Dam
 - Hetch Hetchy => first environmental battle
- Great thinkers of **ecology** in the 20th century
 - Aldo Leopold (1887-1949)
 - Author of "A Sand County Almanac" (1949), considered one of the greatest treatises on preservation, ecology, since Thoreau
 - Last chapter, "The Land Ethic", often hailed as the manifesto of Environmental Ethics, the springboard of modern ecology
 - Beginning of environmental ethics
 - Rachel Carson (1907-1964)
 - Author of "Silent Spring" (1962), which deals with the catastrophic consequences of DDT and other pesticides.
 - Beginning of modern activism
 - Massive wave of environmental concern
 - Led to ban on DDT
 - Launched the modern environmental movement, led to ban of DDT in America, inspired grassroots environmental movement which spurred creation EPA, etc
 - Arne Naess (1912-2009)
 - Creator of the **deep ecology movement**, heavily influenced by Leopold and Carson, main figure of late 20th c. ecology

3. Leopold's Land Ethic

- What point does Leopold make with his opening statement about the God-like Odysseus?
- What is an ethic? Code of ethics that tells us what is right and what is wrong
 - First ethics was between individuals
 - The Mosaic Decalogue (10 commandments of Moses)
 - Code of Hammurabi
 - Later ethics dealt with the relationship between the individual and society
 - Golden rule ==> integrate individual into society
 - Finally man's relationship to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it

- Does not exist ==> land relation strictly economic
- Ethics expand to include more and more people
- Leopold does not offer an extensive list of rights and wrongs when dealing with the land
- Instead, he presents a few general principles that derive from his own lifetime and experiences in the wild
 - No right and wrong just basic principles
 - Ethics in relationship we can see, understand, feel, love or have faith in
 - In other words, direct contact with the natural world is crucial in shaping our ability to extend our ethics beyond our own self-interest
 - Know people to treat them with respect
 - He writes: “we can only be ethical in relation to something we can see, understand, feel, love, or otherwise have faith in”
 - In other words, direct contact with natural world is crucial in shaping our ability to extend our ethics beyond our own self-interest.
 - Leopold wrote his essays hoping to inspire others to embark on a similar lifelong journey of outdoor exploration, developing an ethic of care that would grow out of their own close personal connection to nature
 - Leopold writes that: “ The ordinary citizen today assumes that science knows what makes the biotic community clock tick; the scientist is equally sure that the does not”
 - Nature is too complex to reach a high level of understanding
 - Leopold believes that the economic motives behind conservation (like that of John Evelyn’s Sylva) are an insufficient basis for a proper land ethic. Why?
 - “Most members of the land community have no economic value”
 - “Of the 22 000 higher plants and animals native to Wisconsin, it is doubtful whether more than 5 percent can be sold, fed, eaten, or otherwise put to economic use. Yet these creatures are members of the biotic community, and if (as I believe) its stability depends on its integrity, they are entitled to continuance.”
 - Nature should not be valued in dollars
- So what general principle can we derive from all this?
 - A Thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.

4. Deep Ecology Movement by Arne Ness

- 8 points
 1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
 - Individuals have diversity
 2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves
 3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital human needs
 4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease
 5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive and the situation is rapidly worsening
 6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
 7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great
 - Values life differently => quality over quantity
 8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes
 - This is eminently a Kantian idea.
- So what would be a shallow ecological movement, then?
 - An economic fix?

- Cost/benefit analysis
- carbon trading, carbon tax
- Green tax credit
- A technological fix
 - We can turn to science for a solution
 - Geoengineering (global cooling)
 - Carbon sequestration
 - Genetic decoding, reintroduction of species
 - Development of renewable energy
 - Full recycling

5. Modern Environmentalism

- So, are any of you **deep ecologist**?
- Do any of you believe we must redefine the **good life**?
 - By the way, what does this mean exactly?
 - Good health, good relationships (family, love, friends), Helping (giving back using your talents), Career success ==> (salary, self-actualization, contributing, Travel, life experience, leisure)
 - If so, how can this be achieved?
 - i.e. How can we change deep-seated beliefs about what it means to be happy, to be successful, to be good?
 - Redefine success
 - No correlation between wealth and happiness
 - How can we change mentalities ==> change deep seated beliefs about what it means to be happy, to be successful, to be good
- Do you agree with David Suzuki that the environmental movement has fundamentally failed?
 - Part of right/left political debate
 - Another social cause to support
- “The Breakthrough in Renewable Energy”
 - Documentary on Renewable Energy
 - Produced by **NPO**
 - (Netherlands Public Broadcasting, Dutch equivalent of BBC or Radio Canada)