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In this work you present sustained & plausible critiques of the arguments at stake.

Your review of Atfield's article is particularly well written & perceptive.

Arguments are well presented generally, & reveal a good grasp of the selected texts.

In places there's a need to develop/expand what you have said. But overall, this is a very good piece of work.

10/8/21. 65%

g.

Neil Messam Environmental ethics annotated bibliography 2021

A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There (Penguin Classics) by Aldo Leopold, Kindle Edition (undated)

Leopold's article on the Land Ethic seems to be best read in the context of the whole book A Sand County Almanac, as without this it is possible to miss the nuanced attitude to his environment that led Leopold to make his stronger claims. I will argue from this wider reading that the paradoxes in Leopold's writing reflect the on-going themes in today's environmentalism and that his writing is appealing at times, but flawed and falls short of being a practical ethic. *Use italics for titles. See Reference Guides.*

Leopold says "The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community, to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively, the land... In short, a land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow members, and also respect for the community as such" (1).

He wants to review what is meant by "value" (2)

"By value, I of course mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense". (2)

"Conservation is getting nowhere because it is incompatible with our Abrahamic concept of land. We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity". (3)

He sees ownership in a different way,

"The county records may allege that you own this pasture, but the plover airily rules out such trivial legalities. He has just flown 4,000 miles to reassert the title he got from the Indians, and until the young plovers are a-wing, this pasture is his, and none may trespass without his protest." (4)

And from another perspective:

"Books or no books, it is a fact, patent both to my dog and myself, that at daybreak I am the sole owner of all the acres I can walk over." (5)

He also presents a different view of globalism.

"They have graduated from flying school, and on cool August nights you can hear their whistled signals as they set wing for the pampas, to prove again the age-old unity of the Americas. Hemisphere solidarity is new among statesmen, but not among the feathered navies of the sky." (6)

The Land Ethic could be read as placing moral equivalence between soil and for example our children, but I think this is overplayed, and a broader reading of the Sand County Almanac places this into context. The overall impression one gets is of a sense and sensitivity, highly developed through an intellectual, emotional and practical relationship with an old farm and its wider environment, fed also by a lifetime of experiences in wilderness settings.

"Fragrant little chips of history spewed from the saw cut, and accumulated on the snow before each kneeling sawyer. We sensed that these two piles of sawdust were something more than wood: that they were the integrated transect of a century; that our saw was biting its way, stroke by stroke, decade by decade, into the chronology of a lifetime, written in concentric annual rings of good oak." (7)

His ethic is only a literary personification (not literally "mother earth", though similarities with concepts such as this are there), a sensitivity to the needs of the biotic community. He elucidates a highly developed sense of an interplay within a complex "system",

"Land, then, is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals." (8)

Leopold learnt through formative experiences like his kayak trip with his brother (9), over layered and interpreted through his knowledge gained in an academic setting and added to with experience as an older adult in the repeating cycle of seasons with its movement of animals and their relationship with the changing flora. Sharp perception (10) and a feeling of sadness in what has been lost (11), (12). Respect for the previous humans that have left evidence of living in harmony (13). 30kg of soil is therefore not morally equivalent to a child, but is important to all of us that live (most of us

Abra complete sentence. Rephrase

Soil is

Again, write in full sentences.

unconsciously) in interdependence on the complex massive interconnected web of life.

However, as the section called the Land Ethic is not fleshed out, we don't really have much more than a more developed sensitivity to rely on. This sensitivity may be important but can we call it a useful ethic? ✓ Good Q.

Callicott describes Leopold's work as the archetype, the "paradigm case" (14) and if I take the liberty of borrowing this idea, we can see this paradigm is one of paradox, elitism, and hypocrisy. For example Leopold held that a thing is wrong where it tends otherwise than "preserve the integrity, stability, beauty of the biotic community (15) yet he lives in a city all week, which has, by this definition, an existence which is morally wrong. He then drives (making observations about environmental ethics from his car (16), hundreds of damaging miles every weekend to an old farm where he weekends it, a part-timer (17). There is also a clash with his ethic when he describes the "unspeakable delight" (18) he's experienced in animal cruelty (19).

His elitism is often more circumspect, (20), (21), (22), (23), (24) but at times leans towards population control,

"Violence, in turn, varies with human population density; a dense population requires a more violent conversion. In this respect, North America has a better chance for permanence than Europe, if she can contrive to limit her density." (25)

His elitism is not in favour of fellow academics (26) but people with a highly developed perception (27), (28), (29).

We are not the "pueblo Indians" who lived lightly on the soil (30) and neither is the author. We were born into a world that doesn't know true wilderness and can't find it, and most of us have an idea of "nature" which is more like Leopold's description of managed European hunting reserves, parks and gardens. There are plenty of people who don't know even this amount of nature, as half the population of the planet live in urban areas and even many people living in rural areas are in intensively agriculturally changed environments. Leopold gives us no practical ethic for these situations, instead relying on a much smaller population of low impact lifestyles in wilderness. In short, it's not an ethic relevant to most of humanity. ✓ Good point.

However, the worth in reading him is the mirror it holds up to our environmental issues today, how we got here and where we go. He seems to

espouse ecocentrist views (he's clearly no sentientist), but is well aware of the paradoxes of his existence (31), and even expresses regret (though not for youthful slaughter) (32). There are some difficult questions to ask of ourselves as environmentalists and a sympathetic reading of Leopold may open these questions up. What good is conservation? What constitutes environmental education, or understanding? Are there too many humans? Are environmentalists elitists? Are we part-time environmentalists? Is our modern existence itself morally wrong? Is the damage already done and the wilderness lost forever? Will legal measures be counter-productive? (33), (34) Does environmentalism require effort? (35)

Italics needed
Leopold's vision in a Sand County Almanac is only a starting point, leaving more questions than answers. The Land Ethic is not codified (he writes in a more abstract way, and had no opportunity to develop the idea in response to peer feedback as he died fighting a wild fire shortly after finishing the book, and he expressly hopes to see a social evolution of love of the biota).

"I have purposely presented the land ethic as a product of social evolution because nothing so important as an ethic is ever 'written'." (36)

Try not to end writing with a quotation.

Environmental Ethics and weak anthropocentrism, Bryan G Norton
Environmental Ethics 6 (2):131-148 (1984)

Norton states that his person-centred ethic is more effective than those ethics that ascribe intrinsic value to nature, but he believes that "a successful environmental ethic cannot be individualistic in the way that standard contemporary ethical systems are". I will argue in this essay that Norton's view is countered by the findings of recent psychology and that the difficulties with resource depletion don't appear to find a satisfactory answer.

pg. no.
He uses the last man/last tree idea, because he is "unconvinced" (1) that this leads to a non-anthropocentric ethic being needed and he attempts to make this clearer by drawing a distinction between a "felt preference" and a "considered preference" (ibid). He uses this distinction to build ~~to~~ another *idea which* between strong and weak anthropocentrism, where he characterises the former in these terms: "any desire or need of a human individual can at least temporarily be sated by some specifiable experience of that individual" (ibid). The latter is focussed on world view satisfaction. This distinction will be criticised below.

draws on a distinction

He thinks we need a stronger basis to criticise exploitation, "Since there is no check upon the felt preferences of individuals in the value system of strong anthropocentrism, there exists no means to criticize the behavior of individuals who use nature merely as a storehouse of raw materials to be extracted and used for products serving human preferences. Weak anthropocentrism, on the other hand, recognizes that felt preferences can be either rational or not (in the sense that they can be judged not consonant with a rational world view). Hence, weak anthropocentrism provides a basis for criticism of value systems which are purely exploitative of nature."(2)

His position highlights a gap in the account of the strong anthropocentrist – an account which is perhaps missing an essential part of what makes us human, namely the considered rationality or reflection. Norton allows for an ethic that can start from the human need for immediate satisfaction but also requires more considered reflection on what is right or moral. Furthermore, for Norton, the ethic exists already; it does not need to be invented.

He proposes that the last man might not cut down the last tree because he is living by some strong ideal (to not harm nature). Norton raises this point because he wants to show that this ideal does not need intrinsic value in the natural objects, it's a standalone ideal to live by. It is anthropocentric but not strong because it is motivated by a higher ideal than immediate preference satisfaction.

He goes on to say that European and American ethics is individualistic, and after showing why he believes this to be the case, he states that environmental ethics was previously thought to be distinctive because it recognises the intrinsic value of animals and plants. He argues instead that it is in fact distinctive because it is non-individualistic in weak anthropocentrism.

Norton then develops ideas from Parfit's paradox (we can't adjudicate current behaviour for future generations because those future individuals cannot complain about our excessive consumption and reproduction, because their very existence depends on our excessive population growth).

"From these conclusions a new direction for environmental ethics emerges which is weakly anthropocentric-it finds all value in human loci and which is also non-individualistic in the sense that value is not restricted to satisfactions of felt preferences of human individuals."(p.3)

This needs to be expanded if you're going to mention it.

So his ethic is still based on humans, but not on felt preferences, rather considered ones. It's an interesting principle - surely most of us can consider our actions? However, this argument appears to have a weakness in that it relies on human psychology, and we have discovered from psychologists that we use our rationality to *justify* our felt preferences (rather than influence them or adjudicate over them). Intelligent people have been shown to be even more entrenched, instead of challenging their assumptions they are just far more effective at justifying their preferences (4). In fact our education system has long supported this approach in debate and discussion. Marks are awarded for the way an answer is justified and argued for.

Norton uses the analogy of a trust and how it is to be managed (5) and then goes on to describe the ""generalized obligations." They are obligations of the current generation to maintain a stable flow of resources into the indefinite future and, consequently, they are stated vis-a-vis resources necessary for ongoing human life, not vis-a-vis individual requirements."(6)

This is how he distinguishes between the individualistic and non- individualistic stages of his ethic:

"Resources represent the means for supporting life looked at from a non-individual perspective. The individual perspective determines needs and wants and then seeks means to fulfil them. Concern for the continued flow of resources insures that sources of goods and services such as ecosystems, soil, forests, etc. remain "healthy" and are not deteriorating. In this way, options are held open and reasonable needs of individuals for whatever goods and services can be fulfilled with reasonable labour, technology, and ingenuity. The emphasis of this concern, however, is not individualistic since it is not focused on the fulfilment of specifiable needs, but rather on the integrity and health of ongoing ecosystems as holistic entities." (7)

However, we may identify that questions arise where he talks in more detail about resource use,

"What is required, then, is a constant supply of resources available for utilization by succeeding generations. Once the problem is framed in this manner, human technology and the phenomenon of substitutability of products become relevant. Present humans may use up non-renewable resources, provided they take steps to provide suitable substitutes. If, for example, the present generation uses up a major portion of the accumulated

fossil fuels available, they will have done nothing wrong if they leave the next generation with a technology capable of deriving energy from renewable sources such as the sun, wind, or ocean currents." (8)

We may aver that it's not much of a trade off if the non-renewables are the preferential choice (as they appear to be - that's why the current generation are using them up) - his description only becomes balanced on each side if the two are equal - if non-renewables and renewables provide equal outcomes. But his description itself implies that they are not equal (the preference is used up by first-come-first-served). It's like saying we've eaten the bread at lunchtime but we left behind a cornfield for the late arrivals.

The principle of continued resource flow is not very developed (however in Norton's favour it is after all a principle) and it sounds more like a logger's business plan, (as long as there's a tree left we can keep cutting). It seems different from an idea of sustainability that asks us to pass on an equal amount of existing resources to future generations.

He says that "Scientific evidence is sufficient to imply that many currently widespread practices violate those obligations either directly or cumulatively and are, in terms of this system, immoral." (9) We may question this by asking what about those who reject the concept of *scientifically* immoral?

He may have an answer for our question, "While science plays a crucial role in this system, the system is not naturalistic. It does not derive moral obligations from purely scientific statements. Central to all obligations of present individuals to the future is an obligation to perpetuate the value of human consciousness. Science elucidates and makes concrete the specific obligations flowing from that central obligation but does not support it." (10)

In conclusion, Norton's stated aims of re-establishing anthropocentrism may have cast some light on the discussion, but his argument may be undermined by people using their reflective side to justify pre-existing felt preferences and behaviour in the status quo, which continues to cause environmental damage.

In this article, Attfield looks at both causal and moral responsibility for climate change. He thinks agents are just as responsible when their actions are mediated as when they are unmediated, and that Parfitt provides the supporting argument. I will argue that feelings of direct responsibility should not be overlooked and that a distinction arises between factual cumulative action and its moral status.

Attfield begins by tipping his hat to Hans Jonas and saying the entire context of ethics has changed from affecting contemporaries.

"... now, because of technology, the impacts of a great deal of human action have to be recognized as affecting large swathes of the biosphere and future generations for many centuries to come".(1)

Jonas believes anthropocentric ethics are not adequate to deal with this, and Attfield says "human responsibilities need to be reconceptualized to match this radically new context, so that the scope of ethics corresponds to the range of impacts of human actions and omissions."(2)

Attfield wants to consider mediated responsibilities - ones where "there is one or another kind of distance or gap between action and foreseeable impacts"(3). In doing this he includes both causal and moral responsibility and his examples include time bombs, landmines and cluster bombs, which he uses to emphasise the responsibility over time of our actions.

"Besides mediation by spatial or temporal distance, by the agency of others, or by uncertainty, the mediated aspect of responsibility can relate to diffusion."(4)

This example of diffuse impact also helps understand diffuse causes, "For as the CFC case shows, significant problems can be caused by large numbers of apparently insignificant actions having a joint, cumulative impact."(5) ✓

Attfield refers next to Parfitt's thought experiments.

"according to Parfit one of the "mistakes of moral mathematics" consists in ignoring the effects of sets of acts, and assuming that if some act is right or wrong because of its effects, the only relevant effects are the effects of this particular act."(6)

"“Even if an act harms no one, this act may be wrong because it is one of a set of acts that *together* harm other people. Similarly, even if some act benefits no one, it can be what someone ought to do, because it is one of a set of acts that together benefit other people.” (7)

This may be the nub of the problem, expressed by Attfield as, "The issue now becomes which are the relevant sets of acts that jointly harm or benefit, and how we can know that our act would be a member of such a set, and right or wrong as such." (8)

"Here, Parfit cogently claims that “When some group together harm or benefit other people, this group is the smallest group of whom it is true that, if they had all acted differently, the other people would not have been harmed, or benefited.” (9)

This may seem to be a reverse angle viewing of the problem: Don't start with the individual acts, but start with the significant impact, then work back to the group or set that produces the significant impact. From this, work back again to reduce that group size to the minimum which would have that resultant impact.

Attfield sets out further ideas from Parfitt

“When (1) the outcome would be worse if people suffer more, and (2) each of the members of some group could act in a certain way (he should perhaps have said: ‘in a certain avoidable way’), and (3) they could cause other people to suffer if enough of them act in this way, and (4) they would cause these people to suffer most if they all act in this way, and (5) each of them both knows these facts and believes that enough of them will act in this way, then (6) each would be acting wrongly if he acts in this way.” (10)

The 2021 coroner report into the death of Ella Adoo Kissi Debrah is possibly relevant here (11). The death of this nine year old girl was attributed to years of air pollution from the nearby road to where she lived in Lewisham in London. Do each of us who passed through this road daily have any responsibility for her death?

Lets look at Parfitt point 5): “each of them both knows these facts and believes that enough of them will act in this way, then”...

Here the argument seems to fall down. Each of the drivers that pass along that road can use the same point to justify *not* doing anything different - each knows that "enough of them will act this way" *regardless* of that person's individual actions - the road will remain clogged with traffic, the air just as lethal.

Attfield stresses Parfitt's argument that in the current age, "Each of us can now, in countless ways, affect countless other people." (12) This can be convincingly expressed as "all of us....". However, the difficulty for Attfield and Parfitt is to convince us that it is indeed "each of us..".

Attfield goes on next to describe some of the results of global warming, results themselves of cumulative activity. He follows this with an assertion that "great good could be achieved through an accumulation of environment-friendly practices" (6). This is true, but the accumulation is the key. To put it in Parfitt's terms, it is the set that causes global warming. Individual actors that comprise that set ~~remain~~ might remain unconvinced that they have a moral responsibility.

Attfield briefly discusses ecological debt, following Martinez' distinction between two kinds - "The first lies in the inadequate compensation paid for the raw materials of relatively poor countries by richer ones." (14)

"Second, rich countries make a disproportionate use of environmental space or services without payment, and even without recognition of other people's entitlements to such services (particularly, the disproportionate free use of carbon dioxide sinks and reservoirs)." (15)

Carl Talbot describes toxic imperialism as for example where dioxin laden ash is cheaply dumped abroad from the producing countries.

Attfield's discussion goes on to recognise the emissions at the production end of our retail habits. Although, as he says, "In terms of quantity, these emissions probably do not compare with the emissions from traffic in Western cities", he says they should not be forgotten (16).

"Those directly responsible for such emissions are agents in distant places. But the incentives for them to initiate and develop these practices are the purchasing power of Western consumers, and in the absence of our behavior

as consumers, these practices of manufacture would probably either not take place, or would adopt different forms better suited to local markets."(17)

✓ Attfield finishes by extending the discussion to the actions of governments and international agreements, which he says is restricted by the democratic structures which focus on current interests, not allowing for the mediated responsibility to future generations. He believes this can be mitigated if members are appointed who represent the unrepresented (such as future generations). He finally says that international agreements will not be effective unless they recognise mediated responsibilities.

There are a number of questions that arise from a reading of this paper, but space here is too limited to fully develop the discussion. What if the moral mathematics relies on the members of the set feeling direct rather than mediated responsibility? These people might feel morally good for contributing £5 to a charity appeal that needs £500,000 to achieve its goal, and feel morally bad when they realise the clothes they have bought were made with child labour, but because they feel *directly* responsible.

If it is true that these people feel direct responsibility and their actions are motivated by that, then this in itself may indicate that arguments in favour of mediated responsibility may only bring out the factual rather than the moral status of actions. The move between Parfitt's point 5 and point 6 is a difficult step to take. Understanding of the facts of cumulative action does not necessarily produce the desired action – there is no necessary connection between the moral and factual and it is clearly possible to act in a damaging way whilst fully understanding the facts of cumulative behaviours. Conversely, those who act in the desired way may not do so because of an understanding of the facts of mediated responsibility at all. They may feel direct moral stain on their character for the undesired actions, and a feeling of moral rectitude when they act in the desired way. ✓

A further concern arises when Attfield relies on government intervention, which suggests the argument for individual action won't suffice. *Well said*

In conclusion, Parfitt's moral mathematics and Attfield's supporting arguments are appealing for advocates of moral responsibility but they may only bring out the factual aspects and may not have bridged the gap to the moral, leaving those who don't already feel direct moral responsibility unconvinced that their individual actions carry moral weight.

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References and notes

Aldo Leopold A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There, Penguin Edition, Kindle Format

1. p.157
2. p.172
3. p. xxxii
4. p.26
5. p.31
6. p.26
7. p.8
8. p. 166
9. p. 105
10. p.111 The song of the waters
11. p.97 "despite several opportunities to do so, I have never returned to the white mountain. I prefer not to see what tourists, roads, sawmills and logging have done for it and to it".
12. p.102 "Escudilla still hangs on the horizon, but when you see it you no longer think of bear. Its only a mountain now".
13. p.111 native americans on the Gavilan.
14. Environmental Ethics Volume 2, Issue 4, Winter 1980 J. Baird Callicott
Pages 311-338, introductory paragraph.
15. p.173
16. p.33
17. p.19
18. pg.92

19. p. 98
20. p.6 farm ownership
21. p.6, weekend astride a radiator
22. p.111 "Parks are made to bring the music to the many, but by the time many are attuned to hear it there is little left but noise".
23. p.76 "But all conservation of wildness is self-defeating, for to cherish we must see and fondle, and when enough have seen and fondled, there is no wilderness left to cherish."
24. p.130 "It is clear without further discussion that mass-use involves a direct dilution of the opportunity for solitude; that when we speak of roads, campgrounds, trails, and toilets as 'development' of recreational resources, we speak falsely in respect of this component."
25. p.169
26. p.132 "Let no man jump to the conclusion that Babbitt must take his Ph.D. in ecology before he can 'see' his country. On the contrary, the Ph.D. may become as callous as an undertaker to the mysteries at which he officiates."
27. p.132 "Perception, in short, cannot be purchased with either learned degrees or dollars; it grows at home as well as abroad, and he who has a little may use it to as good advantage as he who has much."
28. p.141 "Thus Margaret Morse Nice, an amateur ornithologist, studied song sparrows in her back yard. She has become a world-authority on bird behavior, and has out-thought and outworked many a professional student of social organization in birds."
29. p.141 Charles L Broley.
30. p.111
31. p.139 "On the other hand, motorized transport has nearly destroyed the sport of wilderness travel by leaving only flyspecks of wilderness to travel in."
32. p.133 "The trophy-hunter is the caveman reborn. Trophy-hunting is the prerogative of youth, racial or individual, and nothing to apologize for."
33. p.136 "Wisconsin deer-hunters, in their pursuit of a legal buck, kill and abandon in the woods at least one doe, fawn, or spike buck for every two legal bucks taken out[...]The illegal carcasses are left where they fall [...]Such deer-hunting is not only without social value, but constitutes actual training for ethical depravity elsewhere."
34. " 'The one-bullet-one-buck' idea[...] these ideas were forced on us; we made a virtue of necessity". This section Leopold intends to demonstrate cultural evolution of an ethic, forced by circumstance not law.
35. p.160 "Is not this formula too easy to accomplish anything worthwhile? It defines no right or wrong, assigns no obligation, calls for no sacrifice".

36. p.173

Environmental Ethics and weak anthropocentrism, Bryan G Norton

Environmental Ethics 6 (2):131-148 (1984)

Pages here are quoted from the PDF version, beginning at page 1.

1. p.4

2. p.5

3. p.11

4. The Intelligence Trap by David Robson (Hodder and Stoughton) 2019

5. p. 12

6. p.14

7. p. 15

8. p. 23

9. p. 16

10. p.16

Mediated Responsibilities, Global Warming, and the Scope of Ethics by Robin Attfield. Journal of Social philosophy Volume 40, Issue2, Summer 2009

PDF page references

1. p.1

2. p.1

3. p.1

4. p.3

5. p.3

6. p.4

7. p.4

8. p.4

9. p.4

10. p.4/5

11. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-55330945>

12. p.5

13. p.6

14. p.7

15. p.7

16. p.8

17. p.8