

Take Kshelman, HPPH7009, Ass 1.

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In this piece of work, arguments & ideas are presented with great clarity & precision, achieving a good balance between sophisticated analysis & clear expression. Objections are considered & generally evaluated throughout, with noticeable evidence of independent thought. In terms of improvement, Midgley's paper could be reviewed in more detail, drawing on further sources to help you do this. But this is an excellent annotated bibliography which makes some very complex arguments very accessible.

Leopold, Aldo, *The Land Ethic* [originally appeared in Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, 1949], in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, eds. Zimmerman et al (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998), pp. 103–114

As a foundational text in environmental philosophy, Aldo Leopold's *The Land Ethic* introduces and articulates a radically more inclusive ethical framework compared to the incumbent philosophical traditions held during its initial publication in 1949. As the title suggests, Leopold endeavours to evolve beyond the shortcomings and contradictions he identifies within the presiding anthropocentric worldview, offering instead an expanded outlook that extends ethical consideration to include entire ecosystems and environments.

Leopold begins by establishing the lingering pitfalls and limitations of normative ethics to reveal the urgency for developing—and adopting—a more ecocentric framework. To do so, he traces a lineage of Western philosophical thought back to Antiquity, highlighting how civilization has gradually evolved away from viewing certain people as morally insignificant objects (i.e., slaves), replacing that notion with the prevailing contemporary conception that all people warrant moral consideration (p. 103). Leopold continues that the gradual proliferation of technological sophistication and population density required that ethics expand its scope beyond just the relations between individuals to also consider the increasingly intricate interactions between individuals and collectives (e.g., society). It's important and meaningful progress, but as Leopold points out, the established ethic of his time hadn't yet evolved to adequately address the growing complexities of our world, particularly regarding the devastating ecological impact wrought by human behaviour. He therefore underscores the urgency of expanding the "boundaries of the [ethical] community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals" (p. 103). For Leopold, this is both a tangible possibility for humanity's evolution as well as a necessary step to ensure ecological integrity (p. 103).

Having established the inadequacies of what Routley would later define as "human chauvinism"—a philosophical system which views humans as somehow separate from and

superior to the surrounding biosphere—Leopold explores the ethical potential of community.¹ As such, he articulates that a new Land Ethic triggers a conceptual shift from seeing *Homo sapiens* as the "conqueror of the land-community to [merely a] plain member and citizen of it" (p. 104). For Leopold, the mutual influence between individuals and their ecology makes it extremely difficult to refute his idea that humans, too, are a part of the land—not its isolated overlords (p. 104). The challenge then becomes how to encourage humanity to acknowledge our responsibilities as members of the biosphere.

Having articulated the tenets of his Land Ethic, Leopold then explores the obstacles and opportunities of adopting a community-oriented (i.e., ecocentric) moral system. He begins with a discussion on the dubious nature of "conservation," exploring what it actually means and the various ways in which it's (mis)applied. As an attempt to clarify the concept, he defines conservation as a moral and methodological system of human stewardship which promotes "a state of harmony between men and the land" (p. 105). However, it's important to note that this definition does not mean ecological harmony is dependent on humankind. Thinkers such as Næss, Taylor, and Curry expand on this point further, suggesting that the *absence* of humans might do more to improve ecological integrity given our ongoing legacies of environmental exploitation.² Focusing on humanity's propensity to adversely impact our ecologies, Leopold lambastes what he deems a perverted malpractice of conservation ideology. He argues that because people don't properly teach, prioritize, or uphold the moral guidelines implicit in true conservation, the concept is rendered malleable and vulnerable to interpretation in that it becomes wholly ineffectual in practice (p. 105). To illustrate this point, he argues that one could just as easily defer individual ecological responsibilities or justify environmentally destructive behaviours, all in the name of 'conservation' (p. 105).

Building on his critique, Leopold considers the failures of various stopgap measures people have developed in lieu of adopting a fully formed ecological ethic. His first point hinges

¹ Routley, Richard, *Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?*, Proceedings of the World Congress of Philosophy, No. 1, Varna, Bulgaria, 1973, pp. 205–10

² Næss, Arne, *The Deep Ecology Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects*, in Philosophical Inquiry, Vol. VIII, No. 1–2, 1986, pp. 405.

Taylor, Paul, *The Ethics of Respect for Nature*, in Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology, eds. Michael E. Zimmerman et al (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998), pp. 72.

Curry, Patrick, *Ecological Ethics: An Introduction*, second edition. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011), pp. 35.

on competing notions of value, citing the common and historical impulse that strives to protect a given creature, species, or biosphere by furnishing it with economic worth (p. 107). For Leopold, this practice is not only arbitrary, but entirely irrelevant given the underlying contention that every aspect of an ecology has intrinsic value (p. 107). He then considers how economic interests shape our notions of responsibility to other members of the biotic community, bemoaning the tendency for individual landowners to neglect their ecological responsibilities, leaving them for governments to (mis)handle instead (p. 108). What's more, Leopold highlights the inability for governing bodies to develop or enforce sufficiently sound ecological policies given that the agencies in charge of overseeing conservation efforts lack an ethical framework from which to operate (p. 108). He therefore concludes the only feasible path forward is to instill ethical obligations in individual landowners that supersede their economic self-interests (p. 109).

Leopold furthers his critique of environmental commodification, offering his Biotic Pyramid concept as a potential solution to address ecological crises. He begins by troubling the mechanistic view of nature, which he argues inaccurately reduces the intimacy of interdependent ecological exchange into a disconnected series of independent transactions (p. 109). He therefore sets out to reshape how we view and understand the environment: not as an inert context in which life can flourish, but as a dynamic "fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals" (p. 109). Land, in Leopold's Biotic Pyramid, is pluralistic.

✓ However, this brings up an interesting possibility; though he describes the land as "biota," at what point might the land *itself* be alive (p. 112)? While Leopold doesn't explicitly articulate this point, his characterization of food chains as "living channels" through which ecologies operate suggests the belief—or the conceptual inconsistency—that the land itself *can* live in at least some capacity (pp. 109–110). It's an exciting possibility, especially for animists seeking allies in philosophical circles, but it's also one that would benefit from further discussion and clarification from Leopold himself. ✓ Good.

Focusing on his surrounding zeitgeist, Leopold articulates a significant schism amongst conservationists—one he hopes his Land Ethic might remedy. In the first group, he includes those who appreciate an ecological system based on its utility and economic value (p. 112). As

such, this group champions commodity-production in what Leopold rightly considers an agronomic ideology (p. 112). Naturally, Leopold places himself in an opposing camp of conservationists who recognize that there's more to an ecology than its capacity for human commodification—namely the intrinsic value of the overarching biosphere (p. 112). Expanding his outlook, he then argues that everyone ought to adopt an ecocentric worldview, particularly those in forestry, wildlife management, and agriculture (p. 113).

For Leopold, our ecological future likely depends on nuances in human nature. He posits that people tend to protect what or whom they love (p. 114). As such, an adequate ecological ethic requires that people recognize a deep-seated "love, respect, and admiration for the land" (p. 114). Whereas Leopold states that this process is both intellectual and emotional, it's worth adding that the awe he describes may also be accessed and enriched through spiritual experiences as well. Regardless of the scope or mechanisms through which one cultivates a deeper connection with the land, Leopold outlines the need to overcome certain aspects of cultural conditioning that reinforce a conceptual schism between humanity and nature, particularly those that cast the environment as an adversary to be conquered (p. 114). Leopold ultimately offers a North Star to help guide that journey: "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" (p. 114). Unfortunately, Leopold offers little guidance or clarification in terms of how this ethic might weigh or accommodate the needs of *individuals* within an ecological network. Rather, the onus tilts towards the well-being of entire species—a position that provides little recourse to ensure the ethical treatment of individuals (e.g., factory farm animals) if their suffering doesn't adversely impact the stability of the overarching whole.

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**Midgley, Mary. *Beasts Versus the Biosphere?*, Environmental Values, Vol.1,
No.2, 1992, pp.113–120**

Focusing on the perceived tensions between the deep ecology and animal liberation movements, Mary Midgley's *Beasts Versus the Biosphere?* recontextualizes the conversation to argue that these frameworks are by no means incompatible, nor mutually exclusive. Instead, Midgley recognizes ecocentrism and biocentrism as complementary ethical theories along a shared spectrum, albeit with different emphases.

Midgley begins by calling to question whether the alleged schism between deep ecology and animal liberation was ever necessary, let alone productive (p. 113). Rather than a conflict in principle, she attributes the hullabaloo to the urgency by which both groups sought to establish themselves in a new and emerging field of environmental philosophy in the 1970s (p. 113). On one hand, early ecocentrists prioritized the whole over that of the individual. On the other, early biocentrists were busy extending moral consideration to other-than-human beings. Midgley grants that, in all the hubbub, it's unfortunate, but understandable how these two emerging approaches could be seen to conflict, especially when passions from both camps fuelled unnecessary infighting as everyone involved ultimately pursued the same, or similar, outcomes (p. 113).

For Midgley however, the wounds inflicted between early ecocentrists and biocentrists are shallow and self-healing. She posits that in the span of about twenty years, thinkers on either side of the deep ecology-animal liberation debate had time to calm down, mull everything over, and employ common sense to quell much of the kerfuffle (p. 114). To galvanize this point, she creates a conceptual Venn Diagram—albeit one without distinct edges—to illustrate the ways in which ecocentrism and biocentrism cannot be separated from one another. Rather, according to Midgley, both share a fundamental gravity of mutual influence and interdependence. Within this proposed overlap, she pinpoints the common ecological understanding shared by both ideologies, namely that individuals and the overarching environment need one another (p. 114). Furthermore, she states that disagreements are natural and necessary aspects of any relationship, and by no means require the wholesale

rejection of alternate worldviews (p. 114). In support, she offers an example from political theory, citing the practical reality that one isn't obliged to share the exact same beliefs or interests as your allies; you can simply share enough to pursue mutual good (p. 114).

Midgley's criticism of campaigning ideologies leads to a broader discussion regarding the danger of holding a myopic, close-minded philosophical outlook. For this, she charges some early deep ecologists and animal liberationists with a sort of fanaticism that encouraged both sides of the argument to focus on invalidating competing theories rather than developing their own (pp. 115–116). But, as she points out, nuance between philosophical frameworks is not sufficient grounds for one to negate the other. Instead, she writes:

Any sane and workable approach to life has to contain both an attitude to individuals and an attitude to larger wholes. Neither of them is reducible to the other. It is always possible for the two to conflict, but it is always necessary to try to bring them into harmony (p. 116).

Put another way, morality cannot exist or function in a philosophical vacuum solely devoted to individuals or ecosystems at the expense of the other. Rather, a moral framework needs to fit into and evolve within a dynamic and inclusive matrix of real-world relations, interactions, and conflicts. Midgley cautions against lingering elements of this 'fanaticism', which still contributes to the unwarranted scuttlebutt over an alleged ecocentric–biocentric divide (p. 116). Expanding her arguments to the unfolding history of ideas, her insights suggest that an *'either/or'* approach to ecological ethics is inherently self-defeating—the real work requires a *'yes, and.'*

Midgley champions a philosophical landscape of abundance, where even conflicting worldviews cooperate to create a rich and generative tapestry of ethical possibility. This of course stands in glaring contrast to what Midgley identifies as a reductive, scarcity-based mindset that plagues much of the philosophical canon. She states, "one great philosopher doesn't displace another; [...] there is room for all of them and a great many more" (p. 117). This emphasis on expanding modes of thought leads to a subsequent critique of any attempt to

seek a monolithic moral theory because, by its very nature, it would inevitably ignore the complexity of living (pp. 116–117). Furthermore, Midgley attributes the reductive impulse to what she calls a "fanatical refusal" of some early ecocentrists and biocentrists to tolerate one another's ideas, in what she views as an unfortunate and avoidable cultural context that allowed some (such as Callicott) to pit otherwise compatible ideologies against one another (p. 117).³ Midgley's criticism, however, is tempered by the admission that deep ecologists and animal liberationists were both "disgracefully neglected" throughout history and therefore had to vie for attention and legitimacy (p. 117). However, perhaps due to a cathartic sense of solidarity ironically illuminated by Callicott's warmongering, Midgley asserts that it has become increasingly clear that ecocentric and biocentric ideals are not only compatible but are "indeed inseparable aspects of a decent moral problem" (p. 117).

After establishing the cohesion between deep ecology and animal liberation, Midgley shifts her focus to address the more difficult challenge: maintaining that sense of compatibility in situations where these ideologies conflict. However, for Midgley, conflict itself isn't cause for immediate concern (p. 117). The question becomes how to handle these disagreements, which she explores by providing an example of an environment being overgrazed by a specific herbivore species. Granting that this situation is very likely the result of human actions (i.e., animal agriculture), she makes the case that humans ought to do *something*, even if it's nothing (p. 118). *Less Colloquial* *certainly* Sure, we should act when and where we can. But Midgley's logic presupposes that, even when we are at fault for creating tension between individuals and ecologies, we are sufficiently *qualified* to make and enact a judgement in either direction. In other words, Midgley neglects to establish why or how human-led ecological stewardship is possible—or even appropriate—even though this may very well be the case. *Good*

The scope of Midgley's overgrazing example becomes increasingly problematic in that it offers non-intervention and culling as the only viable options. However, it becomes clear that Midgley is only considering an immediate timeline to enact change, thereby limiting the number and scope of potential 'solutions'. Before providing her proposed approach, she briefly considers what she lauds as creative and inventive strategies to handle conflicts between

³ Callicott, J. Baird, *Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair*, Environmental Ethics, Vol. 2, 1980, pp. 311–38.

individuals and overarching systems—namely conservation initiatives, benevolent tourism, ecological education, and animal contraception (p. 119). But while she explores the strengths and weaknesses of each approach (there are many), she prematurely discounts each on the grounds that they tend to be largely intangible and terribly impractical (p. 119). But rather than working to refine these strategies, Midgley offers what she believes to be a more immediate solution to overgrazing animals: just kill them (p. 119). Apparently, for Midgley, culling is both a practical solution and a means to somehow galvanize the bonds between ecocentrists and biocentrists. In her confounding cosmology, compromise leads to action—and action is progress in apparently preventing the imagined squabbles that distract ecological ethicists from finding inventive ways to evolve (p. 119). Though it's absolutely unclear how culling in this circumstance is a sound or sufficient compromise, Midgley observes that individuals will never escape difficult dilemmas between objectionable options (p. 119). This is fair, but also limited in that it is distinctly possible that altering *human behaviour* (e.g., reducing overconsumption, curbing economic exploitation of the environment, etc.) can prevent ecological conflict such as overgrazing from arising in the first place. Her argument fails to consider that we are not limited to choose between immediate evils, but can also adopt positive, long-term solutions. In her attempt to distil ecological ethics to the question of "which deaths and when?", she doesn't account for an entirely different possibility of asking instead, 'do I *really* need this widget; that hamburger; another child?' (p. 120). Instead, Midgley attempts to reduce ethical behaviour down to an alleged moral responsibility of humans to deal out death in order to "minimize large-scale damage" (p. 120). Unfortunately, this conclusion detracts from her thesis, offering an uninspiring defence of culling as a practice in place of what should be a workable example illustrating the inherent cooperation between ecocentric and biocentric ideals. However, even without such a blueprint or case study, Midgley nonetheless establishes the firm theoretical grounds for the innate interdependence of deep ecology and animal liberation.

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References

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Rodogno, Raffaele. *Sentientism, Wellbeing, and Environmentalism*. Journal of Applied Philosophy, 27 (1), 2010, pp. 84–97

In his *Sentientism, Wellbeing, and Environmentalism*, Raffaele Rodogno seeks to establish an alternative moral system that satisfies what he considers to be significant oversights in sentientist and holistic environmental ethics. From one angle, he argues that sentience itself is an insufficient criterion for an adequate ethic because it excludes many beings who are nonetheless worthy of moral standing—instead offering well-being and interests as more accurate indicators thereof (p.84). However, he also places significant limits on expanding the scope of ethical criteria, arguing that collectives (e.g., species, ecosystems, etc.) are *expressions* of coalescing individual interests, but are not themselves worthy of moral consideration (p.84).

To establish the case for expanding sentientism's ethical barometer, Rodogno systematically criticizes the work of prominent sentientist thinkers, starting with Singer. Considering the position that only beings with the capacity for suffering or enjoyment have interests, Rodogno argues that Singer's logic is mired by a false premise that an individual must *experience* something for it to affect their well-being (p.87). Rodogno turns to Thomas Scanlon's work on Henry Sidgwick's "False Friend" scenario to destabilize similar foundations of Singer's sentientism.⁴ The question goes like this: all other things being equal, is it better to be made happy by fake friends without knowing they dislike and ridicule you behind your back, or to be made happy by true friends who genuinely care about you (p.87)? Rodogno suggests sentientists are obliged to say both scenarios are equal—a position he characterizes as an affront to human intuition (p.87). For Rodogno, because this idea assaults our sensibilities, it therefore reveals there must be "more to well-being than mere experience" (p.87). However, Rodogno's appeal to human instinct betrays problematic presuppositions and confirmation biases. The reality is that individual intuition varies greatly depending on one's context, personality, and socio-cultural conditioning, to the effect that some—perhaps even Singer—

⁴ Scanlon, Thomas. *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 112.

may feel just fine about a (false-)positive experience of disingenuous 'friends'. However, despite Rodogno's regrettably reductive conception of human sensibilities as an immutable singularity, the *possibility* that at least some people may differentiate between well-being and the *experience of well-being* nonetheless illustrates that both are distinct ethical criteria.

With enough ground to stand on, Rodogno defends well-being as an appropriate indicator of moral significance, but in broader terms than sentientists acknowledge. To Rodogno, sentientism inaccurately evaluates an individual's well-being based on subjective comparisons to what well being *should look like* for the individual's species (pp. 88–89). Employing Robert Nozick's "Experience Machine", he adds that an individual's well-being is valuable to them, even if it's not seen as such by others (p.90).⁵ For Rodogno, this holds true even in cases where an individual lacks the capacity for pleasure or pain, pointing out that an individual's well-being can be affected without them *feeling* it (p.90). By extension, well-being cannot be verified outside of subjective experience—and even then, it can exist independently of an individual's senses.

Rodogno then shifts his sights to critique another sentientist cornerstone: Feinberg and Regan's claim that "an entity has interests or well-being only if it is capable of consciously desiring things in its future" (p.92). In response, Rodogno offers three rebuttals. First, he notes that this premise precludes certain individuals, including severely brain-damaged humans, from having rights (p.92). However, this isn't actually a criticism of Feinberg and Regan; it's a straightforward application of their principle. More successfully however, Rodogno then challenges the implication that *conscious* desires are a necessary condition for having interests (p.92). He considers the reality that people often want what's detrimental to their well-being (e.g., cigarettes, fast food, etc.) (p.92). Furthermore, something can satisfy our interests without us desiring it, such as a surprise inheritance from an unknown relative (p.92). What follows is an unavoidable conclusion that conscious desire is not a prerequisite for having interests, well-being, nor moral significance.

Having sufficiently challenged sentientism's ethical scaffolding, Rodogno then test-drives his more inclusive moral framework, stopping first in the plant kingdom. Whereas

⁵ Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), pp. 42–43



sentientism tends to preclude plants from having moral significance due to the idea that they lack the capacity for pain, pleasure, interests, or consciousness, Rodogno argues otherwise. He offers that even if a being such as a plant lacks consciousness, well-being, or interests *in the way we understand and experience them*, we cannot therefore conclude that the individual lacks these capacities (p.93–95). Put plainly, humans can't judge other-than-human beings using human criteria. But doesn't this refreshing humility open the floodgates to furnish anyone (*everyone?*)—and *anything (everything?!)—with moral significance?* Rodogno offers a resounding 'no', arguing that inanimate objects such as cars and stones are incapable of well-being (p.94). However, this example precipitates a considerable problem: his presupposition that rocks, rivers, sunlight, or any other so-called 'objects' are, in fact, inanimate (p.95). Graham Harvey's research complicates this position, citing the Ojibwe people's understanding that, at very least, some stones are animate (i.e., alive).⁶ This divergence in cultural cosmology reveals a fraught attempt by Rodogno to limit the scope of his moral theory solely to animate beings, for it all depends on where one draws that distinction—if at all. Here, he falls victim to his own critique: just as sentientism falters atop excessively narrow ethical criteria, Rodogno trips over his own murky conception of the inanimate.

In light of this, Rodogno considers a different ethical possibility. Citing Goodpaster's biocentrism, he explores whether being alive—as opposed to being sentient or having interests—is enough to merit ethical consideration (p.96). Rodogno swiftly rebukes this premise on the position that someone's death might actually be better for their well-being (p.96). By implication, life itself cannot guarantee an individual's well-being and therefore is neither relevant nor specific enough to grant moral significance. He carries this point further to challenge Goodpaster's concept that entire biosystems are, themselves, alive. Rodogno draws a semantic distinction between life and existence, clarifying his view that any collective (e.g., species) should be considered as a positive function of the combined interests of its constituent members, not a living being itself (p.96).

Rodogno continues to elucidate the nuanced moral tension between individuals and communities. He considers the tenets of ethical holism put forth by Rolston and Callicott, who

⁶ Harvey, Graham. *Animism: Respecting the Living World*. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011), pp. 31–38

consider the greatest good to be the well-being of a community (e.g., ecosystems) over that of individuals.⁷ Rodogno draws an analogy in an effort to refute this claim, suggesting that a citizen needs access to food and water, but the overarching state (or parish, oblast, etc.) itself does not (p.97). The problem with this analogy is that governmental entities are socio-political, not ontological. Endemic though they may be, political structures are a choice—a creation people can dismantle, refashion, or abandon entirely. It's much more difficult for an individual to remove themselves from their given species or ecosystem. So, does the species 'hedgehog' need water or just the hedgehog? Rodogno's logic simply points to 'yes.'

Taking another angle, Rodogno considers the divergence between the interests of the whole and those of its individual members. He states that any majority within a group cannot reasonably decide or ensure the interests of individuals, especially those in the minority (p.97). He concludes that because collectives lack the ability to fully embody the interests of its individuals, any attempt to ascribe interests or wellbeing onto the collective (e.g., species) is self-sabotaging (p.97). This of course doesn't preclude groups of individuals pursuing shared interests. But as Rodogno points out, that doesn't mean that the interests of a species then supersede those of its individual members (p.97). At best, collective interests can support individual interests, just not dictate them.

Taken together, Rodogno's insightful evaluations of sentientist and holistic ethics establish the feasibility and benefits of pursuing a more inclusive moral theory. However, while he makes a compelling case for well-being and interests as appropriate ethical criteria, Rodogno's attempt to limit their purview to exclude 'inanimate objects' cannot effectively contain the constructive implications and applications of his ideas. And perhaps that's a good thing.

⁷ Rolston, Holmes. *Values in and Duties to the Natural World*, in L. Gruen and D. Jamieson (eds) *Reflecting on Nature: Readings in Environmental Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)
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