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On the Possibility and Necessity of the Land Ethic

Abstract

Environmental scientists warn us that we, together with nature, might be doomed unless necessary measures are taken. Aldo Leopold asserts that an ethic which makes us responsible for the preservation of whole nature, with all its constituents, is evolutionarily possible and ecologically necessary. Land ethic has been especially criticized for its holistic perspective. For this may lead to violation of individual rights, and to a sort of fascism, called ecofascism. J. Baird Callicott's attempts to save land ethic from ecofascism make land ethic impotent to save nature, and contrary to his intentions, also anthropocentric. In this paper, it is argued that this dilemma that land ethic faces can be resolved by endorsing a weak anthropocentric position, which is fairly compatible with Leopold's own views.

Key Words

Land ethic, Holism, Ecofascism, Anthropocentrism, Leopold, Callicott.

Toprak Etiğinin Olabilirliğı ve Zorunluluğı Üzerine

Özet

Çevrebilimciler, gerekli önlemler alınmazsa bizim doğayla birlikte yok olabileceğimizi söylüyorlar. Aldo Leopold, bütün bileşenleriyle birlikte tüm doğanın korunması için bizi sorumlu kılacak bir etiğın, evrimsel açıdan mümkün ve çevrebilimsel açıdan zorunlu olduğunu belirtmektedir. Toprak etiğı, özellikle bu bütüncü yaklaşımından ötürü eleştirilmektedir. Bu yaklaşımın bireysel hakların ihlal edilmesine, hatta ekofaşizm diye adlandırılan bir tür çevre faşizmine yol açabileceğı düşünölmektedir. J. Baird Callicott'un toprak etiğini çevre faşizmi suçlamasından kurtarmak için ileri sürdüğü görüşlerse toprak etiğini güçsüzleştirmekte ve Callicott'un savunduğunun aksine, onu insanmerkezci yapmaktadır. Bu yazıda, toprak etiğinin karşı karşıya bulunduğı bu ikilemin, Leopold'ün görüşleri ile uyumlu olarak, zayıf insanmerkezci bir etik anlayışla giderilebileceğı iddia edilmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler

Toprak Etiğı, Bütüncülük, Ekofaşizm, İnsanmerkezcilik, Leopold, Callicott.

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I

“If there is at all any moral *life* in a person and not merely moral routine, then a significant part of that life consists in *coming to learn* the scope of the responsibility which he has already accepted” (Fingarette 1967: 43). With this concise and eloquent statement, Herbert Fingarette does not only underline one of the most crucial aspects of morality, namely responsibility, but also points out a way to see whether one has really accomplished a moral life. Thus, my awareness as to how responsible a person I am and as to what extent I accept responsibilities in my life might be a good measure of testing moral value of my life.

Most of us are reluctant to accept “extra” responsibilities, other than those we cannot avoid. Most of us do not escape from the responsibility for our families. Many of us do also care for our friends, or for our relatives, or perhaps for our neighbors. Sometimes, for instance in the case of a disaster, we also care for our distant citizens. But we, in general, are more indifferent to people far from us than to ones closer to us. No doubt we feel pity for the people who suffer from starvation, or from a disaster in a distant country. But, frankly, we do not seem to accept responsibility for them, at least as much as we accept for our family members, or for our friends, or at most, for our citizens. But there are people, although not many, who sincerely care and who accept further responsibilities, even for species other than human beings.

II

Human beings, relatively weaker and needy creatures in nature, especially immediately after they were born, have struggled a lot to accomplish to consolidate their survival as a species. After thousands of years of struggle, they have not only achieved mere survival, but also have grown an arrogant confidence to realize the so called aim of mastery of nature.

During this struggle, the history has not only witnessed their “mastery” of other species in nature, but also of their own species members as well, through various mechanisms, such as slavery, or by means of various other forms of apparatuses, applied more extensively and violently especially after the emergence of nation states, such as wars, massacres, tortures...

In the end, we, human beings, have achieved, more or less “comfortable life,” at least on the average, notwithstanding wars, massacres, murders, tortures, and other crimes going on here and there. Nevertheless, some of our species members draw attention to the fact that mastery of nature have turned out to be tyranny of nature, a tyranny which does not only threaten the life of other species but also the whole life in our little planet. Some have warned us that we should no more pursue the malignant aim of mastery of nature rather we had better learn to live in harmony with nature. Some others have advocated that other animals, too, like ourselves, have their own rights, and that we have to observe not only rights of humans, but also of animals.

But some have even gone further, and claimed that observing the rights of humans and animals only will not do. Unless we understand that animals, including humans, are part of nature, and that we have to extend the scope of our responsibility to

the preservation of whole nature, and that we must stop abusing nature, we, together with nature, might very well be doomed. And we would be morally deficient unless we realize our duties to nature properly. For we have been warned and informed enough, especially by environmental scientists for quite a long time.

III

Aldo Leopold was presumably the first who dared to state that the scope of our responsibility must be extended to the preservation of whole nature; in his words “to the land” which involves “soils, waters, plants, and animals” (1991e: 300; 1991g: 310; 1991h: 336; 1966: 239). According to Leopold, this is the third step in the evolutionary development of ethics.

In his view, ethics first “dealt with the relation between individuals.” Second step, was to establish “the relation between the individual and society.” Now, we need for an ethic which deals “with man’s relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it.” This is “an *evolutionary possibility* and an *ecological necessity*,” asserts Leopold (1966: 238-239, emphases added; cf. 1991b: 182).

It is understandable that Leopold, a proponent of Darwinian Theory, anticipates land ethic as an evolutionary possibility, for he simply states his conviction for a new step in the evolutionary progress of ethics. But why is this step necessary? One of the most novel and significant aspects of Leopold’s land ethic is its rising on the resources of ecological and environmental knowledge. In other words, land ethic has its force and energy from the data provided by environmental sciences and ecology. And these data compel us to accept extending the boundaries of our responsibility to the preservation of the whole land. In this sense, Leopold’s land ethic is naturalistic.

We need a new ethic. Because, existing ethics are able to coordinate relations within human community. But we do not only have human beings in the world. We also have innumerable nonhuman entities with which we might have direct or indirect relationship. Human population has got bigger and bigger and the human civilization has got more and more developed and complicated through time. In the end, human encroachment has had an immense impact on nature. However, many environmental sciences, especially ecology, provide undeniable evidence which shows that the impact of men on nature has resulted in considerable deterioration. Many forms of pollution, deforestation, species extermination are some examples of anthropogenic destruction of nature. Perhaps, a new ethic which will serve as a mode of guidance which coordinates relations between men, human society and nonhuman entities might open a way out of this problem, as Leopold believes. Indeed, some wise men in the past (e.g. Ezekiel and Isaiah) had pointed out that it was wrong to harm not only human beings but also nonhuman ones, much earlier a time than huge impact of human beings had emerged (Leopold 1991a: 94; 1991b: 182; 1966: 239). Fortunately, a minority of people, who are aware of the need to regulate the relations between humans and non-human beings, have also emerged recently. They are known as conservationists. They do not have a unanimous view to halt the ongoing deterioration of nature, though. For instance, as the species extinction has accelerated, some conservationists have solely concentrated on saving endangered species from extinction. However, species extinction is just an effect

of land deterioration (Leopold 1991b: 190). All of the species on earth depend on land which involves soil, water, animals, plants, and people together (Leopold 1991e: 300; 1991g: 310; 1991h: 336; 1966: 239). Land is not a constant which is immune from the deeds of the beings which depend on it (Leopold 1991b: 190). Therefore, conservation movement which aims at overcoming an effect, e.g. species extinction, without taking into account the real cause of this effect, will presumably not succeed. Thus the new ethic which will coordinate relations between men, human society, and the nonhuman entities should aim at the cause of the deterioration of nature, rather than some of the effects of it.

Leopold urges us to question the impact of our deeds on nature. We should interrogate the consequences of governing the land by selfish economic interests only, such as *irresponsible* use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, or deforestation, or building dams, hydroelectric power plants, etc. Hence we have to look at ourselves, first. Who are we, or more particularly, what is our role in nature? We have pretended to be the masters of nature till this time. But do we not see how weak we are when an earthquake, or a flood, presumably triggered by our reckless use of the land, results in thousands of deaths? Is it not the time to question this malignant role of mastery of nature? Is nature or land our enemy? Can we not cooperate and live in harmony with it, instead of trying to conquer it?

“A land ethic,” says Leopold, “changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it” (1966: 240). This is the crucial step. Unless we accept abdicating the role of master or conqueror, and abiding by the new role, we can hardly achieve to stop the doom of the land. As a further and complementary step, the land ethic not only requires us to change our role from the master, or conqueror, to “the biotic citizen,” but also requires us to treat the land as “the collective organism” of which we are a part, rather than the land as “the slave.” Finally, the role of science, too, must be reconsidered. Until this time, we have mostly exploited scientific knowledge to realize our economic self-interests. Science has served as “the sharpener of [our] sword” in our war against nature. In the new era, Leopold suggests, science will have the role of “searchlight on [our] universe”, so that we will understand nature, realize our responsibility for preserving the health of it, and learn to live in harmony with it (Ibid., 258-261).

Therefore, Leopold first urges us to enlarge the boundaries of our responsibility, from ourselves to whole nature. We need an ethic principles of which are able to encompass and regulate the relationships not only within human community but within whole biotic community also. This extension in the scope of ethics necessitates changing our role in nature. We will no more be pretending to be master or conqueror of nature, rather we will understand and admit to be plain members of the biotic community. Thus, the land, together with all its constituents, is no more our slave; as a part of it we shall live in accord with it. Science is no more a mere instrument of human beings to abuse the land; rather, as it has inspired, and urged us to change our ethical view, it will continuously inform us while we try to accustom our new role and to learn how to live harmoniously with nature.

But do we not need a set of obligations to force us to leave our old habits and to endorse and apply the requirements of the land ethic? “Obligations have no meaning

without conscience,” says Leopold, and adds that, “the problem we face is the extension of the social conscience from people to land” (1991i: 341; 1966: 245-246). Although the land ethic already “reflects the existence of an ecological conscience,” we need, before positing obligations, to get rid of the obstacles in front of the widening and deepening of ecological conscience and consciousness through the hearts and minds of all members of *Homo sapiens* (Leopold 1966: 258). We need to revise our educational and economic system which does not support “an intense consciousness of land” (Leopold 1991g: 319; 1999: 197-198; 1966: 261). Moreover, we need to reconsider our attitude toward land. We have thought land as if it were an adversary, and we have abused it. For we have regarded it “as a commodity belonging to us.” However, “when we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect” (Leopold 1966: xviii-xix; cf. *Ibid.*, 240).

Furthermore, to be able to construct an ethical relation toward the land, we need to attribute a higher value to it, “value in the philosophical sense” (*Ibid.*, 261). If we feel that value in our conscience, then we should “quit thinking about decent land-use as solely an economic problem, [and] [e]xamine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. 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” (*Ibid.*, 262). In other words, we, human beings, have the responsibility of preserving the integrity, stability, and beauty of the land, while obtaining economic gain out of it. We will continue to extract utility of the land, as we have done for centuries. But we are beginning to understand that good land-use should not rest only on exploiting the economic value of the land, but also on observing, respecting and preserving the non-economical values of it. That is to say we should not ignore ethical and esthetic aspects, such as beauty, recreational value, and rights for existence of every member of the land, besides economical aspects.

IV

Leopold’s land ethic emphasizes the necessity of taking nature as a whole, implying that individualistic approaches, which try to save this or that species, or a particular ecosystem, only palliate but do not suffice to cure the problems of nature. Hence, it urges us to extend our limits of responsibility to the preservation of whole nature together with its soils, waters, and biodiversity.

Nevertheless, the land ethic has been criticized especially about this very perspective of holism. It has been argued that holistic outlook makes the land ethic ignore individual rights. This, in the end, it is argued, leads us to a new sort of fascism, called ecofascism. For instance, land ethic might allow for deliberate culling of some individual members of a species, if this is thought to be necessary for the sake of the whole natural habitat where these individuals also live.¹ However, human species in

¹ In Leopold’s view, human beings, at times, have to intervene, including culling of some individual members of a species, in order to preserve whole nature. Refraining from doing this might lead to a much more severe destruction, including the members of the species in question. For instance, he criticizes some “conservationists” who object to the controlling of deer population as follows:

general, and many human individuals in particular, too, have had substantial negative impact on the stability, integrity, and beauty of the biotic community. On the other hand, according to the precepts of land ethic, human beings are on the same status with other members, i.e. they are plain members of the biotic community. So, does the land ethic allow for culling of some human individuals for preserving the stability of nature (Regan 1985: 361-363; Callicott 1999: 70-71)?

Instead of Leopold, J. Baird Callicott, the most ardent follower of Leopold, dealt with the ecofascism accusation against land ethic. Callicott argues that Leopold did not establish land ethic as a substitute for existing human ethics. Land ethic does not replace existing ethics, but it was thought as an accretion in the course of evolutionary development of ethics. According to Callicott, “biosocial development of morality does not grow in extent like an expanding balloon, leaving no trace of its previous boundaries” (1989: 93). He prefers rings of tree analogy to be able to explain Leopold’s depiction of evolution of ethics in stages. If the scope of ethics can be conceived like tree rings, the innermost ring depicts the boundaries of our responsibility for our family, and the outermost ring does those for the land. Thus, accepting the responsibility for the preservation of whole nature does not mean the denial of our responsibility for our family or for our species members in general. In the case of conflict, we are allowed to realize first our duties which fall under the limits of an inner ring. “Family obligations in general come before nationalistic duties and humanitarian obligations in general come before environmental duties” (Ibid., 94). Thus, we do not have to give up individual human rights for the sake of nature.

But to this depiction of Callicott, another criticism is in order. Preserving the privileged status of human beings in moral conflicts greatly reduces the force and claim of the land ethic. For it might result in the abandonment of acts which tend to preserve the integrity of nature for the sake of relatively small interests of human beings.

Hence land ethicists are faced with a quandary. Land ethic requires changing the role of humans from the master to the plain members of nature, and treating nature as a whole together with people, animals, plants, soils and waters collectively. So if it is right to limit the population of other species with coercive human intervention when it is thought to be necessary for the sake of whole nature, then it is also right to do the same for human individuals whose activities have much more negative impact on nature than any other species members. On the other hand, if we cannot restrict human beings as we do other species members, land ethic is nothing but a paper tiger. For in many

These people call themselves conservationists, and in one sense they are, for in the past we have pinned that label on anyone who loves wildlife, however blindly. These conservationists, for the sake of maintaining an abnormal and unnatural deer herd for a few more years, are willing to sacrifice the future forest, and also the ultimate welfare of the herd itself.

...

The basic fallacy in this kind of “conservation” is that it seeks to conserve one resource by destroying another. These “conservationists” are unable to see the land as a whole. They are unable to think in terms of community rather than group welfare, and in terms of the long as well as the short view. They are conserving what is important to them in the immediate future, and they are angry when told that this conflicts with what is important to the state as a whole in the long run (Leopold 1991i: 342).

cases, the acts to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of nature might have to be precluded for the sake of human interests (cf. Crook 2002: 175-179).

To be able to resolve this dilemma, that is, to preserve the force of land ethic without being ecofascistic, Callicott posited two priority principles. According to the first principle (SOP-1) “obligations generated by membership in more venerable and intimate communities take precedence over those generated in more recently emerged and impersonal communities” (Callicott 1999: 73). So, for example, if one has a limited income by which s/he can only meet the bare necessities of his/her family members, s/he is not expected to donate, say, Greenpeace. The second principle (SOP-2), on the other hand, aims at preserving the force of land ethic: “stronger interests (for lack of a better word) generate duties that take precedence over duties generated by weaker interests” (Ibid.). Therefore, if one has sufficient resources, s/he is morally obliged to spend his/her effort and money for the good of the members of the larger communities, including biotic community, that s/he is also a part, rather than for luxurious demands of his/her family members, for instance.

Callicott believes that “ecofascism” is barred by SOP-1, and “paper tiger-ness” by SOP-2. But doesn’t SOP-1 open the door wide for anthropocentrism? And isn’t it dubious to what extent SOP-2 could limit this? For it remains very subjective and obscure how a decision making procedure which is based on the strength of interests could make a human being act for the sake of nature. It is very likely that there will often emerge conflicts of interests which stem from being members of different communities, and that our duties to nature will often be precluded by our duties to “more venerable and intimate” communities. Indeed, Gary Varner provides an example to show that Callicott could not save the land ethic from being anthropocentric:

Suppose that an environmentalist enamored with the Leopold land ethic is considering how to vote on a national referendum to preserve the spotted owl by restricting logging in Northwest forests. According to Callicott, he or she would be required to vote, not according to the land ethic, but according to whatever ethic governs closer ties to a human family and/or the larger human community. Therefore, if a relative is one of 10,000 loggers who will lose jobs if the referendum passes, the environmentalist is obligated to vote against it. Even if none of the loggers is a family member, the voter is more closely related to any of them than any spotted owl, and is still obligated to vote against the referendum (Varner 1991: 176).

Varner’s example makes us doubt that our duties to “more venerable and intimate” human communities might often, if not always, override our duties to biotic community, if the land ethic is a mere accretion to existing human ethics.

Callicott does not agree with Varner, though. In his opinion, Varner takes only SOP-1 into account, but not SOP-2. According to Callicott, if one compares the damage that will be done to the biotic community with the possible loss of the loggers, s/he can see that the former is incomparably larger than the latter.

The spotted owl is threatened with preventable anthropogenic extinction ... and the old-growth forest biotic communities of the Pacific Northwest are threatened with destruction. These threats are the environmental-ethical equivalent of genocide and holocaust. The loggers, on the other hand, are threatened with economic losses, for which they can be compensated dollar for dollar. ... If we

faced the choice of cutting down millions of four-hundred-year-old trees or cutting down thousands of forty-year-old loggers, our duties to the loggers would take precedence by SOP-1, nor would SOP-1 be countermanded by SOP-2. But that is not the choice we face. The choice is between cutting down four-hundred-year-old trees, rendering the spotted owl extinct, and destroying the old-growth forest biotic community, on the one hand, and displacing forest workers. ... With SOP-2 supplementing SOP-1, the indication of the land ethic is crystal clear in the exemplary quandary posed by Varner, and it is opposite to the Varner, applying only SOP-1, claims it indicates (Callicott 1999: 75).

Let us examine Callicott's reasoning closely. As human beings we are members of various communities. If we consider community of mankind and of biotic community, our obligations to the former take precedence over those to the latter, according to SOP-1. But there is a limit to this principle. If a conflict of interests occurs, we are supposed to apply another priority principle. If the interest which makes us act for the mankind is smaller than the one which urges us act for the biotic community, we are expected to realize our duty to the biotic community rather than the one to the mankind, according to SOP-2. For instance, saving a species from extinction has priority over the possible economic predicament of some humans that may emerge as a consequence of that saving. Humans' loss can be paid "dollar for dollar." But it is not possible to have a species back, once it has gone. So SOP-2 countermands SOP-1: we are obliged to save the old-growth forest which is the natural habitat of the species in question.

But does SOP-2, or "strength of interest" talk, really provide a firm and practical moral ground to motivate us to realize our duties to the biotic community when these duties conflict with our duties to "inner" communities, such as family, mankind, etc.?

According to Callicott, "[i]f we faced the choice of cutting down millions of four-hundred-year-old trees or cutting down thousands of forty-year-old loggers, our duties to the loggers would take precedence by SOP-1, nor would SOP-1 be countermanded by SOP-2" (Ibid.). So, in his opinion, saving millions of old trees together with the species of spotted owl has a weaker interest than lives of thousands of human individuals. But why? What is the criterion behind this calculation? How would this calculation result if we had much lesser humans and much more trees and endangered species on the two sides of the equation of interests? For instance, could we sacrifice the Amazon Rainforest for the sake of a few hundreds of human beings, or vice versa?

Or let us think that the old-growth forest and the endangered spotted owl were in an undeveloped country where the loss of loggers cannot be compensated? Could we still say that SOP-2 countermands SOP-1?

Or inspired from Leopold's "Thinking Like A Mountain," let us try to think like nature (Leopold 1966: 137-141). If nature had a chance to choose, what would she prefer: saving a species from extinction or saving some humans who make their lives by performing a "natural genocide?"

If we take Leopold's motto in isolation and apply it conservatively, we might have to dispense with the interests of human beings in many cases. But we mostly cannot do this. Callicott's suggestion of land ethic as an accretion to the old human

ethics and delimiting land ethic with two priority principles do not seem to resolve the problem, either. A land ethic without being “ecofascistic” can either be an ethic without teeth or an ethic somewhat anthropocentric.

Indeed, Leopold was not a thorough nonanthropocentrist unlike Callicott likes to believe. Although Leopold does not like attributing a special value to human beings apart from non-human beings, he is always cautious to observe interests of human beings over non-human ones. Furthermore, Leopold often refers to the concepts of “good life,” “community welfare,” and “human welfare,” and relates the necessity of preserving nature with these concepts (cf. Leopold 1991b: 188; 1991d: 276-280; 1991f: 301; 1991g: 317; 1999: 193-194; 1966: 163). In his view, land is both a “food-factory” and a *means for* “self-expression” for human beings (Leopold 1991b: 191). Thus, for Leopold, *summum bonum* is good life, and preserving the integrity, stability and beauty of the land is a necessary means to this ultimate end. It is not possible to attain good life in a nature which lost its integrity, stability and beauty. As he says “[s]table (i.e. healthy) land is *essential to human welfare*. Therefore it is unwise to discard any part of the land-mechanism which can be kept in existence by care and forethought” (Leopold 1999: 194, emphasis added).

Therefore, Leopold's land ethic is not ecofascistic. It would be proper to say that it is *weak* anthropocentric, the aim of which is to attain harmony, rather than opposition, between human beings and nature.² Perhaps it has to be so. Otherwise, it would hardly be possible to persuade most human beings to accept the norms of an ethic which bind only themselves and which suggest, at times, dispensing with their own interests in favor of interests of non-human beings.

But how is anthropocentrism, even if “weak,” compatible with being a plain member of biotic community? How is it possible to preserve integrity, stability and beauty of biotic community while observing interests of human beings?

Being a plain member of nature has a symbolic significance. It reminds us of the fact that there are innumerable many other beings many of which are vital for our own existence and welfare. This is something only human species can be aware of. Human flourishing is not possible in a perverted nature devoid of integrity, stability and beauty. In this sense Leopold's motto, too, has symbolic value to underline the significance of nature for human beings. We need to preserve the stability of the land, simply because this is a requisite for our own well being.

On the other hand, even if land ethic can be saved from ecofascism accusation by a weak anthropocentric position, could it have a reasonable footing under existing mode of production? Capitalism provides diverse opportunities for human beings, most of which seem indispensable for individuals who are accustomed to live with them. Nevertheless, it is a fact that consumerism, individualism, need and demand for increase

² Leopold often describes conservation as “harmony between men and land” (1991c: 255; 1966: 189, 243). In 1991c, immediately after this description, he also adds that “[w]hen land does well for its owner, and the owner does well by his land; when both end up better by reason of their partnership, we have conservation. When one or the other grows poorer, we do not” (1991c: 255). These, too, indubitably show that humans and their interests are always at the center of Leopold's conception of conservation.

in production and profit, which are some of the driving forces of capitalism, have accelerated destruction of nature. Then, how is it possible to realize land ethical norms under existing and dominant mode of production?

Leopold does not seem to like capitalism. In his view, existing “educational and economic system is headed away from ... an intense consciousness of land,” and this is “the most serious obstacle impeding the evolution of land ethic” (Leopold 1966: 261). But he does not like posited alternatives, either. In his view, all modes of production, or “all the new isms, – Socialism, Communism, Fascism” are no better than Capitalism. They are “as identically alike as peas in a pod.” For all assume that good life will follow with the “distribution of more machine-made commodities to more people.” All suggest “*salvation by machinery*” (Leopold 1991b: 188, Leopold's emphasis).

Rather than establishing a new political system, he suggests an evolutionary transformation in the course of time. He sees conservation movement as an embryo, or nucleus of this transformation. As it develops, Leopold hopes, dormant consciousness of human beings about nature will be activated. In Leopold's view, one of the foremost questions of conservationists is to try to activate this supposedly widespread consciousness.

We are confronted ... by a contradiction. To build a better motor we tap the uttermost powers of the human brain; to build a better countryside we throw dice. Political systems take no cognizance of this disparity, offer no sufficient remedy. There is, however, a dormant but widespread consciousness that the destruction of land, and of the living things upon it, is wrong. A new minority have espoused an idea called conservation which tends to assert this as a positive principle. Does it contain seeds which are likely to grow?

...

The insignificance of what we conservationists, in our political capacity, say and do, does not detract from the significance of our persistent desire to do something. To turn this desire into productive channels is the task of time, and ecology (Leopold 1991b: 189-190).

Nevertheless, conservation movement is not an alternative to a social and economic order. If the driving powers of existing socioeconomic system do not support, but is in conflict with preservation of nature, how would raising consciousness about nature would help? However, one need not think that establishing a new ethic, and raising consciousness and conscience about environmental problems, and trying to establish a new social order are mutually exclusive issues. It is a fact that environmental problems are getting more and more complicated and harder through time. Under existing system or some other one, we will continue to have these problems. It might be true that, under existing system a new ethic might be ineffective to overcome them. But, on the other hand, we might be too late to save nature, if we spend all our effort to change the social and economic order. Furthermore, do we not need a mature conception and consciousness, or a proper mode of cooperation, thus an ethic that will guide our relations with nature under any socioeconomic system? In this sense, trying to raise consciousness about ecological problems via a new ethic is no less significant than trying to change the existing social order. These activities can very well coexist.

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