

## Lecture Notes 12:

### *A Very Brief History of the Origins of for the Novice*

The inspiration for environmental ethics was the first Earth Day in 1970 when environmentalists started urging philosophers who were involved with environmental groups to do something about environmental ethics. An intellectual climate had developed in the last few years of the 1960s in large part because of the publication of two papers in **Science**: Lynn White's "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis" (March 1967) and Garrett Hardin's "The Tragedy of the Commons" (December 1968).

Most influential with regard to this kind of thinking, however, was an essay in Aldo Leopold's **A Sand County Almanac**, "The Land Ethic," in which Leopold explicitly claimed that the roots of the ecological crisis were philosophical. (Although originally published in 1949, **Sand County Almanac** became widely available in 1970 in a special Sierra Club/Ballantine edition, which included essays from a second book, **Round River**.)

Most academic activity in the 1970s was spent debating the Lynn White thesis and the tragedy of the commons. These debates were primarily historical, theological, and religious, not philosophical. Throughout most of the decade philosophers sat on the sidelines trying to determine what a field called environmental ethics might look like. The first philosophical conference was organized by William Blackstone at the University of Georgia in 1972. The proceedings were published as **Philosophy and Environmental Crisis** in 1974, which included [Pete Gunter](#)'s first paper on the Big Thicket.

In 1972 a book called [Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology](#), written by John B. Cobb, was published. It was the first single-authored book written by a philosopher, even though the primary focus of the book was theological and religious. In 1973 an Australian philosopher, Richard Routley (now Sylvan), presented a paper at the 15th World Congress of Philosophy "Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?" A year later John Passmore, another Australian, wrote **Man's Responsibility for Nature**, in which, reacting to Routley, he argued that there was no need for an environmental ethic at all. Most debate among philosophers until the mid-1980s was focused on refuting Passmore. In 1975 environmental ethics came to the attention of mainstream philosophy with the publication of Holmes Rolston, III's paper, "Is There an Ecological Ethic?" in **Ethics**.

Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher and the founding editor of the journal **Inquiry** authored and published a paper in **Inquiry** "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement" in 1973, which was the beginning of the deep ecology movement. Important writers in this movement include George Sessions, Bill DeVall, Warwick Fox, and, in some respects, [Max Oelschlaeger](#).

Throughout the 1970s **Inquiry** was the primary philosophy journal that dealt with environmental ethics. Environmental ethics was, for the most part, considered a curiosity and mainstream philosophy journals rarely published more than one article per year, if that. Opportunities for publishing dramatically improved in 1979 when [Eugene C. Hargrove](#) founded the journal [Environmental Ethics](#). The name of the journal became the name of the field.

The first five years of the journal was spent mostly arguing about rights for nature and the relationship of environmental ethics and animal rights/animal liberation. Rights lost and animal welfare ethics was determined to be a separate field. [Animal rights](#) has since developed as a separate field with a separate journal, first, **Ethics and Animals**, which was later superseded by [Between the Species](#).

Cobb published another book in the early 1980s, [The Liberation of Life](#) with coauthor Charles Birch. This book took a process philosophy approach in accordance with the philosophy of organism of Alfred North Whitehead. Robin Attfield, a philosopher in Wales, wrote a book called **The Ethics of Environmental Concern**. It was the first full-length response to Passmore. An anthology of papers, **Ethics and the Environment**, was edited by Donald Scherer and Tom Attig.

There was a turning point about 1988 when many single-authored books began to come available: Paul Taylor's **Respect for Nature**; Holmes Rolston's **Environmental Ethics**; Mark Sagoff's **The Economy of the Earth**; and [Eugene C. Hargrove's Foundations of Environmental Ethics](#). [J. Baird Callicott](#) created a collection of his papers, **In Defense of the Land Ethic**. Bryan Norton wrote **Why Preserve Natural Diversity?** followed more recently by **Toward Unity among Environmentalists**. A large number of books have been written by Kristin Shrader-Frechette on economics and policy.

In the 1980s a second movement, ecofeminism, developed. Karen Warren is the key philosopher, although the ecofeminism movement involves many thinkers from other fields. It was then followed by a third, social ecology, based on the views of Murray Bookchin. An important link between academics and radical environmentalists was established with the creation of the Canadian deep ecology journal, [The Trumpeter](#). In 1989, [Earth Ethics Quarterly](#) was begun as a more popular environmental publication. Originally intended primarily as a reprint publication, now as a publication of the [Center for Respect for Life and Environment](#), it is focused more on international sustainable development.

The 1990s began with the establishment of the [International Society for Environmental Ethics](#), which was founded largely through the efforts of Laura Westra and Holmes Rolston, III. It now has members throughout the world. In 1992, a second refereed philosophy journal, dedicated to environmental ethics, [Environmental Values](#), published its first issue in England. In 1996, a new journal was established at the University of Georgie, [Ethics and the Environment](#). (In 2001, it became a publication of [Indiana University Press](#).) In 1997 a second international association was created, the [International Association for Environmental Philosophy](#), with an emphasis on environmental phenomenology.

On the theoretical level, Taylor and Rolston, despite many disagreements, can be regarded as objective nonanthropocentric intrinsic value theorists. [Callicott](#), who follows Aldo Leopold closely, is a subjective nonanthropocentric intrinsic value theorist. [Hargrove](#) is considered a weak anthropocentric intrinsic value theorist. Sagoff is very close to this position although he doesn't talk about intrinsic value much and takes a Kantian rather than an Aristotelian approach. At the far end is Bryan Norton who thought up weak anthropocentrism but wants to replace intrinsic value with a pragmatic conception of value. The anti-intrinsic value pragmatic movement includes such philosophers as Anthony Weston and Andrew Light, although Ben Minteer has recently indicated that intrinsic value could be included in an environmental pragmatism.

THE NARRATIVE ETHICS OF LEOPOLD'S Sand County Almanac  
James Jakób Liszka

Although philosophers often focus on the essays of Leopold's Sand County Almanac, especially "The Land Ethic," there is also a normative argument present in the stories that comprise most of the book. In fact the shack stories may be more persuasive, with a subtlety and complexity not available in his prose piece. This paper develops a narrative ethics methodology gleaned from rhetoric theory, and current interest in narrative ethics among literary theorists in order to discern the normative underpinnings of the stories in Part 1.

The narrative ethics approach sidesteps the need to ground the land ethic in ethical theory--which has been a reconstructive and problematic task for the philosophical interpreters of Leopold--and suggests, instead, that it emerges in Leopold's very effort to narrate his, professional, personal, and practical experience with nature. The involves examining the stories in terms of their emotional, logical and performative aspects. The result is an analysis that shows not only how these stories express normative claims, but also justify them.

One conclusion of the analyses is that, in the narratives, there is less emphasis on the problematic notion of an over-arching "community" than in the prose pieces, and more emphasis on the metaphor of other living things as "fellow travelers" in the "odyssey of evolution." Second, the narratives take on an ironic attitude toward the ecological order, less discernable in the prose essays. The order itself may not be ethically admirable, but should be preserved since it makes possible any ethical relations within it. Thus, the narrative reading suggests some temperance to the usual holistic interpretation of his land ethic, and its concomitant criticisms, especially the charge of ecofacism. We should not take the land ethic imperative at its face value, in the sense that the good of the order itself is an intrinsic good. In the narratives, individuals are shown not merely to be means to the ecological whole, but the focus of sympathy and concern, in a manner that demands their good should also be an object of moral consideration.

EVERYDAY ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AS COMEDY & STORY: A COLLAGE  
Shagbark Hickory

In section I, I provide a brief historical sketch of tragedy and its relationship to Socratic philosophy and comedy. II focuses on one aspect of tragedy, namely, its view that morality transcends natural limitations. This understanding of morality is with us still. III

presents the central concerns of the world religions as evidence of a widespread feeling of alienation from the sacred and the wild, and contrasts world religions with indigenous spirituality. **IV** moves us away from the understanding of philosophy as argument and counterargument and toward an ecosystemic, or wild, conception of philosophy as story in the mode of comedy. **V** offers a Buddhist understanding of tragic alienation that sees it as expressive of something deeply problematic about humans.

This something is actualized throughout Western culture but seems to exist only as a potentiality in indigenous cultures. This is reason enough to take indigenous cultures—and comedy—seriously. **VI** brings us back to earth with a sketch of comedy in the lives of dear friends. **VII** sketches some of the attributes of functional communities that give support to comedy. I also point out a number of features of First Nations so-called worldviews that would greatly enhance the ability of comedy to displace tragedy in the West.

**VIII** portrays picaresque comedy as exemplifying the lessons of comedy taught by wilderness. Examples from indigenous cultures of Africa and Gary Snyder's *The Practice of the Wild* underscore the importance of picaresque strategies and understandings of comedy. A look at Tom Birch's enigmatic statement, "wilderness treats us like human beings," setting it alongside some lines from Thoreau's *Walden*, rounds out my discussion of comedy. **IX** poses a challenge: Can we survive "The News" that pours in upon us from tragic seats of power?