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Holistic Environmental Ethics and the Problem of Ecofascism

THE DARWINIAN ROOTS OF THE LAND ETHIC

Of all the environmental ethics so far devised, the land ethic, first sketched by Aldo Leopold, is most popular among professional conservationists and least popular among professional philosophers. Conservationists are preoccupied with such things as the anthropogenic pollution of air and water by industrial and municipal wastes, the anthropogenic reduction in numbers of species populations, the outright anthropogenic extinction of species, and the invasive anthropogenic introduction of other species into places not their places of evolutionary origin. Conservationists as such are not concerned about the injury, pain, or death of nonhuman specimens—that is, of individual animals and plants—except in those rare cases in which a species' populations are so reduced in number that the conservation of every specimen is vital to the conservation of the species. On the other hand, professional philosophers, most of them schooled in and intellectually committed to the Modern classical theories of ethics, are ill-prepared to comprehend morally such "holistic" concerns. Professional philosophers are inclined to dismiss holistic concerns as nonmoral or to reduce them to concerns about either human welfare or the welfare of nonhuman organisms severally. And they are mystified by the land ethic, unable to grasp its philosophical foundations and pedigree.

Without a grasp of its philosophical foundations and pedigree, however, it is difficult to know how the land ethic might be related to the more familiar moral concerns that loom large in the Modern era (roughly the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries)—such as human happiness, human dignity, and human rights—and how it might be applied to and illuminate cases other than those Leopold himself considers in his brief sketch of it in *A Sand County Almanac*. In this essay, I outline the philosophical foundations and pedigree of the land ethic and indicate how it might be related to more familiar Modern moral concerns and how it might be applied to those contemporary environmental concerns that Leopold himself could not have considered. In particular, I address the most serious and disturbing theoretical and practical challenge to the land ethic raised by professional philosophers—the problem of ecofascism.

To discover its philosophical foundations and pedigree, we may begin by looking for clues in the text of “The Land Ethic.” Leopold provides the most important clue in the second section of the essay, entitled ‘The Ethical Sequence.’ Having observed that ethics have grown considerably in scope and complexity during the three thousand years of recorded history in Western civilization, Leopold (1949, 202) writes,

This extension of ethics, so far studied only by philosophers [and, Leopold’s insinuation is clear, therefore not very revealingly studied] is actually a process in ecological evolution. An ethic, ecologically, is a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence. An ethic, philosophically, is a differentiation of social from anti-social conduct. These are two definitions of one thing. The thing has its origin in the tendency of interdependent individuals or groups to evolve modes of cooperation.

Leopold, I should hasten to point out, was no better a student of philosophy, than most professional philosophers are of conservation and its concerns. Hence his characterization of an ethic, “philosophically,” is, put most charitably, incomplete. In any case, what he hints at, rather insistently and unmistakably, is some sort of evolutionary interpretation of ethics. Leopold’s use here of such words and phrases as “evolution,” “struggle for existence,” “origin,” “evolve,” “social and anti-social conduct” evokes not only a general evolutionary context in which to locate an understanding ethics, it alludes, more particularly, to the classical evolutionary account of ethics in Charles Darwin’s *The Descent of Man*, the third

chapter of which is devoted to “the moral sense.” Doubtless, therefore, Darwin’s account of the origin and development of “the thing” is what mainly informed Leopold’s thinking about ethics.

THE EVOLUTIONARY ORIGIN OF ETHICS

The existence of ethics presents a problem for Darwin’s attempt to show how all things human can be understood as gradually evolved by natural (and sexual) selection, from traits possessed by closely related species, his project in *The Descent of Man*. Ethics demands that moral agents selflessly consider other interests in addition to their own. The theory of evolution would seem to predict, however, that the selfish would outcompete the selfless in the “struggle for existence,” and thus survive and reproduce in greater numbers. Therefore greater and greater selfishness, not selflessness, would seem to be selected for in any population of organisms, including those ancestral to *Homo sapiens*. But history indicates the opposite: that our remote human ancestors were more callous, brutal, and ruthless than are we. At least so it seemed to a refined English gentleman who, while serving as naturalist on the round-the-world voyage of the *H. M. S. Beagle*, had observed first hand what he and his contemporaries regarded as states of savagery and barbarism similar to those from which European and Asian civilizations were believed to have emerged. Absent a convincing evolutionary explanation of its existence and progressive development, Darwin’s pious opponents might point to ethics among human beings as a clear signature by the hand of Providence on the human soul.

To the conundrum presented him by the existence and putatively progressive development of ethics, Darwin’s resolution is straightforward and elegant. For many kinds of animals, and especially for *Homo sapiens*, life’s struggle is more efficiently prosecuted collectively and cooperatively than singly and competitively. Poorly armed by nature, as solitaries hominids would fall easy prey to their natural enemies or starve for lack of the wherewithal to obtain food. Together our primate ancestors might stand some chance of fending off predators and attacking prey larger than themselves. Like many other similarly situated species, evolving human beings thus formed primitive societies; or, stated more precisely, those hominids that formed primitive societies evolved. But without some rudimentary ethics,

human societies cannot stay integrated. As Darwin (1871, 93) puts it, "No tribe could hold together if murder, robbery, treachery, &c., were common; consequently such crimes within the limits of the same tribe 'are branded with everlasting infamy'; but excite no such sentiment beyond these limits."

Darwin's speculative reconstruction of the evolutionary pathway to ethics begins with altruistic "parental and filial affections" which motivate parents (perhaps only the female parent in many species) to care for their offspring and their offspring to desire the company of their parents. Such affectionally bonded nuclear families are small and often ephemeral societies, lasting, as in the case of bears, only until the next reproductive cycle. But the survival advantage to the young of being reared in such social units is obvious. Should the parental and filial affections chance to spill beyond the parental-filial relationship to that between siblings, cousins, and other close kin, such plurally bonded animals might stick together in more stable and permanent groups and defend themselves and forage communally and cooperatively. In which case there might also accrue additional advantages to the members of such groups in the struggle for life. Thus do mammalian societies originate in Darwin's account.

By themselves, the social impulses and sentiments are not ethics. An ethic is a set of behavioral rules, or a set of principles or precepts for governing behavior. The moral sentiments are, rather, the foundations of ethics, as David Hume and Adam Smith argued a century or so before Darwin considered the matter. In addition to the social sentiments and instincts, *Homo sapiens* evolved a high degree of intelligence and imagination and uniquely possesses a symbolic language. Hence, we human beings are capable of generally representing those kinds of behavior that are destructive of society ("murder, robbery, treachery, &c.") and articulating prohibitions of them in emotionally colored formulae—commandments—which today we call moral rules.

THE ALTERNATIVE MODERNIST ACCOUNT OF THE ORIGIN OF ETHICS

Darwin's account of the origin of ethics is quite different from the account of the origin of ethics inherited by most professional philosophers.

That account was originally advanced by thinkers contemporary with Socrates in the fifth century B.C.E., and was reasserted in the early Modern period by Thomas Hobbes in the seventeenth century. The social contract theory, as it is called, treats human society as discontinuous with animal societies—or, rather, animal societies are not acknowledged to exist at all—and to be something that was deliberately created by its members. In the "state of nature," with which the social contract theory begins, fully human human beings are imagined to roam the world as solitary individuals engaged in a war of each against all. In this circumstance of universal war, the life of each person is, in the famous characterization of Hobbes, not only "solitary, [but] poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Further, in such a circumstance neither agriculture nor industry is possible, because no enforceable property rights exist; no one would bother to sow, tend, and harvest crops or laboriously produce anything else that others might appropriate at will. Observing that such a rude condition of human life is untoward, at some point in time people are imagined, by social contract theorists, to decide to declare a truce, hold a convention, and hammer out some rules of behavior (moral codes and laws), and settle on some means to enforce them (a sovereign), thus hoping to make their lives more pleasant and predictable, less hazardous and capricious. Ethics thus are founded upon selfish rationality, not selfless sentimentality. Society, moreover, is an artifice, a deliberate *human* contrivance, not something rather common in nature that naturally evolved.

Because the social contract theory reduces morality to enlightened self-interest, one might argue that it is not a theory of *ethics* at all. A proper ethic, one might insist, requires moral agents to respect others or give due regard to the interests of others. In the utilitarian school, founded by Jeremy Bentham in the eighteenth century, happiness, defined in terms of pleasure and pain, is the summum bonum and a moral agent is required to act in such a way as to maximize happiness (pleasure) and minimize misery (pain), no matter whose happiness or misery is at stake, the agent's own or someone else's. In the deontological school, founded by Immanuel Kant also in the eighteenth century, a moral agent should never use another moral agent as a means only, but should treat other moral agents as intrinsically valuable ends in themselves. But to the hard question, Why should a moral agent give due regard to others or their interests?, both schools end by generalizing egoism. I demand that others consider my

happiness (if I am inclined to be a utilitarian) or my intrinsic value as a morally autonomous being (if I am inclined to be a deontologist) in choosing a course of action that might affect me; therefore, to be logically self-consistent, I must consider either the happiness or intrinsic value of others in choosing courses of action that might affect them. Though both utilitarianism and deontology, by far the two most pervasive and influential Modern schools of ethics, are putatively other-oriented, at the end of the day, they prove to be no less founded on rational self-regard than the nakedly egoistical social contract theory of ethics.

The social contract theory and its subtler and more palatable descendants, utilitarianism and deontology, were not useful to Darwin because they ground ethics in reason, the most advanced and delicate of animal capacities. From an evolutionary point of view, however, reason could only have emerged in an intensely social environment, complete with a fully articulate language. But the emergence, persistence, and development of such a social environment depends, in turn, on the existence of ethics—"no tribe could hold together . . . &c."—as already noted. Therefore, from an evolutionary point of view, the social contract theory and its variants put the cart before the horse. Indeed, from an evolutionary point of view, the hypothesized state of nature—the supposition that rational human beings ever actually lived as solitaries in a condition of universal war—is absurd and preposterous. Darwin, therefore, turned to the now nearly forgotten sentiment-based moral philosophies of the Scottish Enlightenment, citing Hume's *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* and Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in *The Descent of Man*.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ETHICS CORRELATIVE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY

So much, then, for the origin of ethics; Darwin goes on to account for the development of ethics. As human social groups competed with one another for resources, the larger and better organized outcompeted the smaller and less well organized. Hence, clans, firstly, merged into tribes; tribes, next, into nations; and nations, eventually, into republics. The emergence of each of these levels of social organization was attended by a corresponding

extension of ethics. Darwin (1871, 100–101) sums up this parallel growth of ethics and society as follows: "As man advances in civilisation, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races."

Quite remarkably, the influence of Hume, who lived long before evolutionary thinking was habitual, can be found even in Darwin's speculations about the development of ethics correlative to that of society. Compare the passage quoted from Darwin in the previous paragraph with this one from Hume ([1751] 1957, 23):

But suppose the conjunction of the sexes to be established in nature, a family immediately arises; and particular rules being found requisite for its subsistence, these are immediately embraced; though without comprehending the rest of mankind within their prescriptions. Suppose that several families unite together into one society, which is totally disjoined from all others, the rules which preserve peace and order, enlarge themselves to the utmost extent of that society. . . . But again suppose that several distinct societies maintain a kind of intercourse for mutual convenience and advantage, the boundaries of justice still grow larger in proportion to the largeness of men's views and the force of their mutual connexions. History, experience, reason sufficiently instruct us in this natural progress of human sentiments, and in the gradual enlargement of [them].

Further, with the emergence of each new level in the social hierarchy—the clan, the tribe, the nation, the republic, the global village—the content of the moral code changed or was supplemented to reflect and facilitate the novel structure of each newly emerged level. At the tribal level of society, "when the question is put . . . , is it worse to kill a girl of a foreign tribe, or to marry a girl of one's own, an answer just opposite to ours would be given," Darwin (1871, 91) observes. Since Darwin's day, matrimonial ethics have developed further still. In contemporary post-patriarchal society, we would still answer that it is certainly wrong to *kill* a girl of any ethnic group, but we would add that neither is it right to marry a *girl* of one's own ethnic group or, for that matter, any other. Among ourselves, mature men are allowed to marry only women some four to six

years beyond menarche—otherwise they would be guilty of “statutory rape”—and it is, though lawful, “inappropriate” for men to marry or sexually consort with women much younger than themselves.

THE LAND ETHIC AS THE NEXT STEP IN THE DARWINIAN SOCIETY—ETHICS PAS DE DEUX

During Darwin’s lifetime, as during Hume’s, a universal ethic of human rights was only dimly visible on the horizon. By the mid-twentieth century, when Leopold was gestating the land ethic, a universal human rights ethic may have seemed more nearly attainable. In any case, Leopold, often called a prophet, looked farther ahead than did Darwin himself, indeed farther ahead than Darwin could have looked in the absence of a well-developed ecological worldview. Leopold (1949, 203) summarizes Darwin’s natural history of ethics with characteristic compression: “All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts.” Then he adds an ecological element, the community model of the biota espoused most notably by Charles Elton (1927): Ecology “simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land” (Leopold 1949, 204). When we all learn to “see land as a community to which we belong,” not as “a commodity belonging to us” (Leopold 1949, viii), that same “simplest reason,” of which Darwin speaks, might kick in. And, when it does, what results will be a land ethic that “changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land community to plain member and citizen of it” (Leopold 1949, 204).

So, now the philosophical foundations and pedigree of the land ethic should be manifest. Basically, what Leopold did to cook up the land ethic was to take over Darwin’s recipe for the origin and development of ethics, and add an ecological ingredient, the Eltonian “community concept.” Darwin in turn had taken over a sentiment-based theory of ethics from Hume and Smith. Leopold may never have studied Hume’s or Smith’s moral philosophies; certainly he never cites them; indeed he may have known of Hume only as a historian and Smith only as an economist. But because he surely did read Darwin and allude in “The Land Ethic” to Darwin’s account of the origin and development of ethics, the philosophical

foundations and pedigree of his land ethic are traceable through Darwin to the sentiment-based ethical theories of Hume and Smith.

THE HOLISM OF THE LAND ETHIC AND ITS ANTECEDENTS

According to Leopold (1949, 204, emphasis added), “a land ethic implies respect for . . . fellow-members *and also for the community as such.*” The land ethic, in other words, has a holistic dimension to it that is completely foreign to the mainstream Modern moral theories going back to Hobbes. The holistic dimension of the land ethic—respect for the community as such, in addition to respect for its members severally—is, however, not in the least foreign to the Darwinian and Humean theories of ethics upon which it is built. Darwin (1871, 96–97) could hardly be more specific or emphatic on this point: “Actions are regarded by savages and were probably so regarded by primeval man, as good or bad, solely as they obviously affect the welfare of the tribe,—not that of the species, nor that of an individual member of the tribe. This conclusion agrees well with the belief that the so-called moral sense is aboriginally derived from the social instincts, for both relate at first exclusively to the community.” Gary Varner (1991, 179) states flatly that “concern for communities as such has no historical antecedent in David Hume.” But it does. Demonstrably. Hume ([1751] 1957, 47) insists, evidently against Hobbes and other social contract theorists, that “we must renounce the theory which accounts for every moral sentiment by the principle of self-love. We must adopt a more publick affection, and allow that the interests of society are not, even on their own account, entirely indifferent to us.” Nor is this an isolated remark. Over and over we read in Hume’s ethical works such statements as this: “It appears that a tendency to publick good, and to the promoting of peace, harmony, and order in society, does always by affecting the benevolent principles of our frame engage us on the side of the social virtues” (Hume [1751] 1957, 56). And this: “Everything that promotes the interests of society must communicate pleasure, and what is pernicious, give uneasiness” (Hume [1751] 1957, 58).

That is not to say that in Hume, certainly, and even in Darwin there is no theoretical provision for a lively concern for the individual members of society, as well as for society per se. The sentiment of sympathy being

so central to it, I should expressly acknowledge that in the moral philosophy of Adam Smith, one finds little ethical holism. *Sympathy* means "with-feeling." And that "all-important emotion of sympathy," as Darwin (1871, 81) styles it, can hardly extend to a transorganismic entity, such as society per se, which has no feelings per se. Hume and Darwin, however, recognized other moral sentiments than sympathy, some of which—patriotism, for example—relate as exclusively and specifically to society as sympathy does to sentient individuals.

In the Leopold land ethic, at any rate, the holistic aspect eventually eclipses the individualistic aspect. Toward the beginning of "The Land Ethic," Leopold, as noted, declares that a land ethic "implies respect for fellow-members" of the biotic community, as well as "for the community as such." Toward the middle of "The Land Ethic," Leopold (1949, 210) speaks of a "biotic right" to "continue" but such a right accrues, as the context indicates, to species, not to specimens. Toward the end of the essay, Leopold (1949, 224–25) writes a summary moral maxim, a golden rule, for the land ethic: "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." In it there is no reference at all to "fellow members." They have gradually dropped out of account as the "The Land Ethic" proceeds to its climax.

Why? One reason has already been noted. Conservationists, among whom Leopold counted himself, are professionally concerned about biological and ecological wholes—populations, species, communities, ecosystems—not their individual constituents. And the land ethic is tailored to suit conservation concerns, which are often confounded by concerns for individual specimens. For example, the conservation of endangered plant species is often most directly and efficiently effected by the deliberate eradication of the feral animals that threaten them. Preserving the integrity of a biotic community often requires reducing the populations of some component species, be they native or non-native, wild or feral. Certainly animal liberation and animal rights—advocated by Peter Singer and Tom Regan, respectively—would prohibit such convenient but draconian solutions to conservation problems. So would a more inclusive individualistic environmental ethic, such as that proffered by Paul Taylor (1896). Another reason is that ecology is about metaorganismic entities—biotic communities and ecosystems—not individuals, and the land ethic

is expressly informed by ecology and reflects an ecological worldview. Its holism is precisely what makes the land ethic the environmental ethic of choice among conservationists and ecologists. In short, its holism is the land ethic's principal asset.

Whether by the end of the essay he forgets it or not, Leopold does say in "The Land Ethic" that "fellow-members" of the "land community" deserve "respect." How can we pretend to respect them if, in the interest of the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community, we chop some down, gun others down, set fire to still others, and so on. Such brutalities are often involved in what conservationists call "wildlife management." Here again, to resolve this conundrum, we may consult Darwin, who indicates that ethics originated among *Homo sapiens* in the first place to serve the welfare of the community. Certainly, among the things that threaten to dissolve a human community are "murder, robbery, treachery, &c." However, as ethics evolve correlatively to social evolution, not only do they widen their scope, they change in content, such that what is wrong correlative to one stage of social development, may not be wrong correlative to the next. In a tribal society, as Darwin observes, exogamy is a cardinal precept. It is not in a republic. Nevertheless, in all human communities—from the savage clan to the family of man—the "infamy" of murder, robbery, treachery, &c. remains "everlasting." But the multispecies *biotic* community is so different from all our human communities that we cannot assume that what is wrong for one human being to do to another, even at every level of *social* organization, is wrong for one fellow member of the *biotic* community to do to another.

The currency of the economy of nature, we must remember, is energy. And it passes from one member to another, not from hand to hand like money in the human economy, but from stomach to stomach. As Leopold (1949, 107) observes of the biotic community, "The only truth is that its members must suck hard, live fast, and die often." In the biotic community there are producers and consumers; predators and prey. One might say that the integrity and stability of the biotic community depends upon death as well as life; indeed, one might say further, that the life of one member is premised squarely on the death of another. So one could hardly argue that our killing of fellow members of the biotic community is, *prima facie*, land ethically wrong. It depends on who is killed, for what reasons, under what circumstances, and how. The filling in of

these blanks would provide, in each case, an answer to the question about respect. Models of respectful, but often violent and lethal, use of fellow members of the biotic community are provided by traditional American Indian peoples (Callicott and Overholt 1993).

THE PROBLEM OF ECOFASCISM

Its holism is the land ethic's principal strength, but also its principal liability. Remember that according to Leopold, evolutionary and ecological biology reveal that "land [is] a community to which we belong" not "a commodity belonging to us" and that from the point of view of a land ethic, we are but "plain members and citizens of the biotic community." Then it would seem that the summary moral maxim of the land ethic applies to *Homo sapiens* no less than to the other members and citizens of the biotic community, plain or otherwise. A human population of more than six billion individuals is a dire threat to the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. Thus the existence of such a large human population is land ethically wrong. To right that wrong should we not do what we do when a population of white-tailed deer or some other species interrupts and threatens the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community? We immediately and summarily reduce it, by whatever means necessary, usually by randomly and indiscriminately shooting the members of such a population to death—respectfully, of course—until its numbers are optimized. It did not take the land ethic's critics long to draw out the vitiating—but, as I shall go on to argue directly, only apparent—implication of the land ethic. According to William Aiken (1984, 269), from the point of view of the land ethic, "massive human diebacks would be good. It is our duty to cause them. It is our species' duty, relative to the whole, to eliminate 90 per cent of our numbers." Its requirement that individual organisms, apparently also including individual *human* organisms, be sacrificed for the good of the whole, makes the land ethic, according to Tom Regan (1983, 262), a kind of "environmental fascism." Frederick Ferré (1996a, 18) echoes and amplifies Aiken's and Regan's indictment of the land ethic: "Anything we could do to exterminate excess people . . . would be morally 'right'! To refrain from such extermination would be 'wrong'! . . . Taken as a guide for human culture, the land ethic—

despite the best intentions of its supporters—would lead toward classical fascism, the submergence of the individual person in the glorification of the collectivity, race, tribe, or nation." Finally, Kristin Shrader-Frechette adds her voice to those expressing moral outrage at the land "ethic": "In subordinating the welfare of all creatures to the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community, then one subordinates individual human welfare, in all cases, to the welfare of the biotic community" (Shrader-Frechette 1996, 63).

Michael Zimmerman (1995) has defended the land ethic against the charge of ecofascism, pointing out that in addition to subordinating the welfare of the individual to that of the community, fascism involves other characterizing features, salient among them nationalism and militarism. And there is no hint of nationalism and militarism in the land ethic. But however one labels it, if the land ethic implies what Aiken, Regan, Ferré, and Shrader-Frechette allege that it does, it must be rejected as monstrous. Happily, it does not. To think that it does, one must assume that Leopold proffered the land ethic as a substitute for, not an addition to, our venerable and familiar human ethics. But he did not. Leopold refers to the various stages of ethical development—from tribal mores to universal human rights and, finally, to the land ethic—as "accretions." Accretion means an "increase by external addition or accumulation." The land ethic is an accretion—that is, an addition—to our several accumulated social ethics, not something that is supposed to replace them. If, as I here explain, Leopold is building the land ethic on theoretical foundations that he finds in Darwin, then it is obvious that with the advent of each new stage in the accreting development of ethics, the old stages are not erased or replaced, but added to. I, for example, am a citizen of a republic, but I also remain a member of an extended family, and a resident of a municipality. And it is quite evident to us all, from our own moral experience, that the duties attendant on citizenship in a republic (to pay taxes, to serve in the armed forces or in the Peace Corps, for example) do not cancel or replace the duties attendant on membership in a family (to honor parents, to love and educate children, for example) or residence in a municipality (to support public schools, to attend town meetings). Similarly, it is equally evident—at least to Leopold and his exponents, if not to his critics—that the duties attendant upon citizenship in the biotic community (to preserve its integrity, stability, and beauty) do not cancel or replace the

duties attendant on membership in the human global village (to respect human rights).

PRIORITIZING THE DUTIES GENERATED BY MEMBERSHIP IN MULTIPLE COMMUNITIES

This consideration has led Varner (1991) to argue that any proponent of the land ethic, Leopold presumably included, must be a moral pluralist. True enough, if by moral pluralist one means only that one tries simultaneously to adhere to multiple moral maxims (Honor thy Father and thy Mother; Love thy Country; Respect the Rights of All Human Beings Irrespective of Race, Creed, Color, or National Origin; Preserve the Integrity, Stability, and Beauty of the Biotic Community, for example). But if being a moral pluralist means espousing multiple moral philosophies and associated ethical theories, as it does in Christopher Stone's celebrated and influential *The Case for Moral Pluralism* (1987), then proponents of the land ethic are not necessarily committed to pluralism. On the contrary, the univocal theoretical foundations of the land ethic naturally generate multiple sets of moral duties—and correlative maxims, principles, and precepts—each related to a particular social scale (family, republic, global village, biotic community, for parallel example) all within a single moral philosophy. That moral philosophy is the one sketched here, beginning with the Humean social instincts and affections that evolve into ethics proper and grow more expansive and complicated apace with the Darwinian scenario of social evolution.

The land ethic involves a limited pluralism (multiple moral maxims, multiple sets of duties, or multiple principles and precepts) not a thoroughgoing pluralism of moral philosophies *sensu* Stone (1987)—Aristotelian ethics for this quandary, Kantian ethics for that, utilitarianism here, social-contract theory there (chapters 8 and 9). Thus, as Shrader-Frechette (1996, 63) points out, the land ethic must provide “second-order ethical principles and a priority ranking system that specifies the respective conditions under which [first-order] holistic and individualistic ethical principles ought to be recognized.” Leopold provides no such second-order principles for prioritizing among first-order principles, but they can be easily derived from the communitarian foundations of the land ethic. By

combining two second-order principles we can achieve a priority ranking among first-order principles, when, in a given quandary, they conflict. The first second-order principle (SOP-1) is that obligations generated by membership in more venerable and intimate communities take precedence over those generated in more recently emerged and impersonal communities. I think that most of us, for example, feel that our family duties (to care for aged parents, say, to educate minor children) take precedence over our civic duties (to contribute to United Way charities, say, to vote for higher municipal taxes to better support more indigent persons on the dole), when, because of limited means, we are unable to perform both family and civic duties. The second second-order principle (SOP-2) is that stronger interests (for lack of a better word) generate duties that take precedence over duties generated by weaker interests. For example, while duties to one's own children, all things being equal, properly take precedence over duties toward unrelated children in one's municipality, one would be ethically remiss to shower one's own children with luxuries while unrelated children in one's municipality lacked the bare necessities (food, shelter, clothing, education) for a decent life. Having the bare necessities for a decent life is a stronger interest than is the enjoyment of luxuries, and our duties to help supply proximate unrelated children with the former take precedence over our duties to supply our own children with the latter.

These second-order principles apply as well in quandaries in which duties to individuals conflict with duties to communities *per se*. In a case made famous by Jean-Paul Sartre in *L'existentialisme est un Humanisme*, a young man is caught in the dilemma of going off to join the French Free Forces in England during the Nazi occupation of France in World War II or staying home with his mother. Sartre, of course, is interested in the existential choice that this forces on the young man and in pursuing the thesis that his decision in some way makes a moral principle, not that it should be algorithmically determined by the application of various moral principles. But the second-order principles here set out apply to the young man's dilemma quite directly and, one might argue, decisively—existential freedom notwithstanding. SOP-1 requires the young man to give priority to the first-order principle, Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother, over the other first-order principle at play, Serve Thy Country. But SOP-2 reverses the priority dictated by SOP-1. The very existence of France as a transorganismic entity is threatened. The young man's mother has a weaker

interest at stake, for, as Sartre reports, his going off—and maybe getting killed—would plunge her into “despair.” His mother being plunged into despair would be terrible, but not nearly as terrible as the destruction of France would be if not enough young men fought on her behalf. So the resolution of this young man’s dilemma is clear; he should give priority to the first-order principle, *Serve Thy Country*. Had the young man been an American and had the time been the early 1970s and had the dilemma been stay home with his mother or join the Peace Corps and go to Africa, then he should give priority to the first-order principle *Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother and stay home*. Had the young man been the same person as Sartre constructs, but had his mother been a Jew whom the Nazis would have sent to a horrible death in a concentration camp if her son did not stay home and help her hide, then again, he should give priority to the first-order principle, *Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother, and stay home*.

THE PRIORITY PRINCIPLES APPLIED TO THE OLD-GROWTH FOREST QUANDARY

Let me consider now those kinds of quandaries in which our duties to human beings conflict with our duties to *biotic* communities as such. Varner (1996, 176) supplies a case in point:

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. . . . 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 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 still obligated to vote against the referendum.

The flaw in Varner’s reasoning is that he applies only SOP-1—that obligations generated by membership in more venerable and intimate communities take precedence over those generated in more recently emerged and impersonal communities. If that were the only second-order communitarian principle then he would be right. But SOP-2—that stronger

interests generate duties that take precedence over duties generated by weaker interests—reverses the priority determined by applying SOP-1 in this case. The spotted owl is threatened with preventable anthropogenic extinction—threatened with biocide, in a word—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. More important to the loggers, I am told, their lifestyle is threatened. But livelihood and lifestyle, for both of which adequate substitutes can be found, is a lesser interest than life itself. 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 in an economy that is already displacing them through automation and raw-log exports to Japan and other foreign markets. And the old-growth logging lifestyle is doomed, in any case, to self-destruct, for it will come to an end with the “final solution” to the old-growth forest question, if the jack-booted timber barons (who disingenuously blame the spotted owl for the economic insecurity of loggers and other workers in the timber industry) continue to have their way. 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 one Varner, applying only SOP-1, claims it indicates.

CONCLUSION

The holistic Leopold land ethic is not a case of ecofascism. The land ethic is intended to supplement, not replace, the more venerable community-based social ethics, in relation to which it is an accretion or addition. Neither is the land ethic a “paper tiger,” an environmental ethic with no teeth (Nelson 1996). Choice among which community-related principle should govern a moral agent’s conduct in a given moral quandary may be

determined by the application of two second-order principles. The first, SOP-1, requires an agent to give priority to the first-order principles generated by the more venerable and more intimate community memberships. Thus, when holistic environment-oriented duties are in direct conflict with individualistic human-oriented duties, the human-oriented duties take priority. The land ethic is, therefore, not a case of ecofascism. However, the second second-order principle, SOP-2, requires an agent to give priority to the stronger interests at issue. When the indication determined by the application of SOP-1 is reinforced by the application of SOP-2, an agent's choice is clear. When the indication determined by the application of SOP-1 is contradicted by the application of SOP-2, an agent's choice is equally clear: SOP-2 countermands SOP-1. Thus, when holistic environment-oriented duties are in conflict with individualistic human-oriented duties, and the holistic environmental interests at issue are significantly stronger than the individualistic human interests at issue, the former take priority.