Ethical Arguments for Preserving Biodiversity

- Ethical arguments can complement economic and biological arguments for protecting biodiversity

Key Arguments

- Each species has an *(intrinsic)* right to exist; value for its own sake

*But what about humans versus non-conscious organisms?*

**Endangered Species Act** – An example of U.S. codified conservation; legal justification for protection is that species have “aesthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, and scientific value”
Ethical Arguments for Preserving Biodiversity

Ethical arguments can complement economic and biological arguments for protecting biodiversity

Key Arguments

- All species are interdependent, and thus all species (“the parts” as Leopold would say) are important to the function of ecosystems.
Ethical Arguments for Preserving Biodiversity

Ethical arguments can complement economic and biological arguments for protecting biodiversity.

Key Arguments

- **People have a responsibility to act as stewards of the Earth**
  - See pages 122-123 in Primack on major religions and attitudes toward nature.
  - But also a common belief of many secular humanists and other philosophies.
  - Some people, particularly in recent times and those of the Judeo-Christian and Muslim faiths, have argued that humans have a responsibility to be stewards/shepards/caretakers of the natural world like Noah in the Old Testament of the Bible (see next slide).
Ark Philosophy

How does this Biblical story of the Old Testament relate to conservation biology ethics?

Who is saving whom?
Ethical Arguments for Preserving Biodiversity

► Ethical arguments can complement economic and biological arguments for protecting biodiversity

Key Arguments

• People have a duty to their neighbors
• People have a responsibility to future generations
Ethical Arguments for Preserving Biodiversity

Ethical arguments can complement economic and biological arguments for protecting biodiversity.

Key Arguments

- Respect for human life and diversity is compatible with respect for biological diversity.

  - **Environmental Justice** – seeks to empower underrepresented, relatively powerless, and impoverished peoples to improve and protect their lives by caring for their environment. An example can be found below.

    - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htF5XEImyGI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htF5XEImyGI)

How are environmental and social justice related?
Ethical Arguments for Preserving Biodiversity

► *Ethical arguments can complement economic and biological arguments for protecting biodiversity*

**Key Arguments**

*Our enlightened self-interest depends on the preservation of biodiversity*

- Some argue that we should preserve biodiversity not for our material interest, but our **enlightened self-interest**. Essentially that biodiversity provides:
  - Aesthetic and Recreation Enjoyment
  - Psychological Support or Requirement
    - For example, E.O. Wilson, famous ant ecologist, coined the term “biophilia” meaning that humans have an innate love of and dependent connection to non-human life
    - Most recently, Richard Louv’s book “Last Child in the Woods” describes how humans are increasingly disconnected from the natural world which often leads to personal and societal dysfunction
  - Scientific Knowledge
  - Religious Inspiration
  - Historical Understanding and Perspective
  - Opportunities for Artistic and Philosophical Insight
    - For example, the human ecologist Paul Shepard argued that animals and our relationship to them in particular provide us with living, non-human organisms that give us context as to what and who we are (his book: The Others: How Animals Made Us Human).
The Assisi Declarations (1986)

To read these statements in their entirety go to:
http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/TH_E%20ASSISI%20DECLARATIONS.pdf

The essence of Islamic teaching is that the entire universe is God’s creation. Allah makes the waters flow upon the earth, upholds the heavens, makes the rain fall and keeps the boundaries between day and night. . . . It is God who created the plants and the animals in their pairs and gave them the means to multiply.

For the Muslim mankind’s role on earth is that of a Khalifah, viceregent or trustee of God. We are God’s stewards and agents on Earth. We are not masters of this Earth; it does not belong to us to do what we wish. It belongs to God and He has entrusted us with its safekeeping. . . . The Khalifah is answerable for his/her actions, for the way in which he/she uses or abuses the trust of God.

The encounter of God and man in nature is conceived in Judaism as a seamless web with man as the leader and custodian of the natural world. . . . Now, when the whole world is in peril, when the environment is in danger of being poisoned and various species, both plant and animal, are becoming extinct, it is our Jewish responsibility to put the defense of the whole of nature at the very centre of our concern.

We have a responsibility to life, to defend it everywhere, not only against our own sins but also against those of others. We are all passengers together in this same fragile and glorious world. Let us safeguard our rowboat—and let us row together.

“. . . and the rainbow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature . . . that is upon the Earth.”—Genesis 9:16
Aldo Leopold and the Land Ethic

A forester, game manager, scientist, teacher, and writer, Leopold was also a visionary, whose concept of a land ethic serves as the philosophical underpinning of the modern-day conservation movement.

Recognized the scientific need beyond sentiment for preserving natural areas and systems.

Pioneer of wildlife management, published *Game Management* (1933) considered the “Father of wildlife management” and “Father of conservation biology”.

Eloquent prose about the challenge of defending and promoting conservation land ethics in *Sand County Almanac* (1949).

Natural resource stewardship is largely responsibility of individual not government; advocated land ethic, and restrained use and light impact of natural areas; frowned on gadgetry (Leopold would unlikely have carried a GPS into the woods!).

Helped create 1st wilderness area (Gila), and his actions via the Wilderness Society and philosophy form the basis of the Wilderness Act. “Wilderness is the raw material out of which man has hammered the artifact called civilization.”

(1886-1948)
Aldo Leopold and the Land Ethic (cont.)

- Ecological-Evolutionary Land Ethic – Leopold believed that a land ethic should not just be based on religious or spiritual beliefs values, *but must be founded on ecological and evolutionary principles and concepts*.
- Leopold advocated for land management at large spatial scales and deep time and created the conceptual framework of what we now think of as ecosystem management.
- Biocentric Equality – He believed in the right of all organisms to achieve self-realization (live up to their full ecological and evolutionary potential). All members of biotic community, including humans, are what Leopold called “plain citizens”.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQED4YEMx9A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQED4YEMx9A)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqIp-lteQj4&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqIp-lteQj4&feature=related)

- **Important Questions to think about**
  - What is a land ethic?
  - What attribute(s) would Leopold consider as indicators of “healthy land”?  
  - In what way(s) did Leopold’s conservation philosophy differ from Muir or Pinchot?
  - The presence of what two apex predators might Leopold consider indicator species of a healthy ecosystem in the southwestern deserts of the U.S. and northern Mexico (consult the “Almanac”)

The “Shack” at Leopold’s farm, Baraboo, WI
Some important things that Leopold had to say about Ethics

“The extension of ethics...is actually a process in ecological evolution. It’s sequences may be described in ecological as well as in philosophical terms. 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 cooperation. The ecologist calls these symbioses. Politics and economics are advanced symbioses in which free-for-all competition has been replaced, in part, by cooperative mechanisms with an ethical content.” – A. Leopold, A Sand County Almanac

All ethics rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts.

The land ethic enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.

In short, a land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land community to plain member and citizen of it.
Community membership in the Leopold land ethic

Biotic community

Humanity

Country

Nation

Tribe

Extended family

Ethical concerns result in decreasing intensity of land use and consumption.
Deep Ecology

• Philosophy based on a view that to prevent environmental overload, environmental degradation, and resource depletion, there should be a consistent effort to control human population growth, reduce unnecessary use and waste of matter and energy resources, and prevent the premature extinction of any species.

• Coined by Arne Naess in 1973 work “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements” in his attempt to define the works of Leopold and Carson; “Living as if nature mattered.”

• Essence based on Socratic deep questioning of ourselves, and actions. Seeks to develop an ecological philosophy

• Based on a comprehensive religious and philosophical worldview of nature.
Deep Ecology is:

- a philosophy based on our sacred relationship with Earth and all beings
- an international movement for a viable future
- a path for self realization
- a compass for daily action
2 Dominant Themes of Deep Ecology

- **Self Realization** – actualization, awareness, and development that incorporates the nonhuman world. Technocratic-industrial consumerism diverts us from this (The Real “Matrix”).
2 Dominant Themes of Deep Ecology

• **Biocentric Equality** - right of all organisms to achieve self-realization. Rejects factionism (vegetarianism), all members of biotic community (Leopold “plain citizens”).
Sources of Deep Ecology

- Primal Peoples
- Judeo-Christianity
- The Perennial Philosophy
- American Naturalism and Pastoralism
- Feminism
- Ecology
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• Primal Peoples
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• Ecology
Uluru Rock
Black Elk (Lakota Tribe) (1863-1950)

- *Black Elk Speaks* (Neihardt 1931)
- emphasized connectivity between humans and the environment
- circular/cyclical nature of life, humans, and our relationship with other biota
- describes the destructive and constraining influences of Wasichus (whites) on biota and Native American way of life; reservations
Sources of Deep Ecology

- Primal Peoples
- Judeo-Christianity
- The Perennial Philosophy
- American Naturalism and Pastoralism (see history section of notes; Audubon, etc.)
- Feminism (see history section of notes)
- Ecology (see history section of notes; essentially this means that deep ecologists strongly believe in lifestyles that are based on ecological and evolutionary principles)
The Perennial Philosophy

• Aldous Huxley (1945) - survey of religion and philosophy in search of common themes.
• Found that most put humans into perspective of wider scheme of reality, actualization and maturity
• Realization that inner self is illusion and that we are in essence interconnected with all natural processes. Common theme in most Eastern traditions and religions and early Western philosophies (Plato). Quantum physics has been used to support the belief that matter itself cannot be fully understood because its behavior (state) is influenced by the observer.
Deep Ecology Worldviews

Dominant World View vs. Minority Tradition of Deep Ecology

• **DWV** - mental image of social reality that guides expectations in a society (“The Matrix”). Unrestrained individualism and consumerism powered by the technological juggernaut of modern western philosophy and the American Industrial Revolution. Unsustainable continued population growth and rising standards of living.

• **Minority Tradition** - self-regulating community, non-hierarchical democratic state based on biocentric and conservation principles, stressing vital needs of individuals and communities. Stabilize human population growth and live more simply.
Deep Ecology: Principles For Wilderness and Natural Resource Conservation

- Maintain vast tracts of wilderness and experience the “aboriginal reconnection to myth and self”
- Restore damaged ecosystems and maintain existing ones through stewardship based on the minority tradition and biocentric principles.
- Emphasize unmeasurable qualities of life.
- Reject consumer/commodity-driven, career-based educational systems that perpetuate global social and biological crises.
- Reject sustainable development and genetic improvement (Paul Shepard says reject agriculture and return to hunting culture).
- Live in mixed communities of humans and non-humans
- Practice ecological resistance based on deep ecological principles and nonviolent embracement of opponents.
Who dey?

Perspective