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Special Issue

Aldo Leopold: Ethical and Spiritual Dimensions

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Editors' Introduction: Encountering Leopold

Bron Taylor

The (Religious) Naturalist's Eye: An Introduction to 'Aldo Leopold: Ethical and Spiritual Dimensions'

Gavin Van Horn

Aldo Leopold is remembered as a consummate nature writer, a scientist with a philosophical bent, a naturalist informed deeply by his ecological fieldwork, and as an active citizen and conservationist committed to bringing private and public land management into concord. While many of his contemporaries have faded into obscurity, Leopold's work continues to inspire scholars and conservation practitioners to think of social and ecological systems as necessarily integrated. The authors in this special issue probe why this is so by focusing on the ethical, religious, and spiritual roots and branches of Leopold's environmental philosophy and his understandings of land health. I suggest that Leopold's work continues to endure, and receive growing scholarly and popular attention, because he subtly traversed the realm of metaphysics in his writing, creating a challenging dialogue between the sciences and the humanities.

Feeding Green Fire

Jane Caputi

Aldo Leopold's experience with a dying wolf and vision of 'green fire' has led to green fire becoming a ubiquitous signifier of environmental concerns, while also understood as carrying a spiritual significance. To explore this conjunction, I put Leopold in dialogue with aspects of Native American philosophy and science, and ecologically minded theologians and philosophers Mary Daly and Val Plumwood, finding a common theme of integrity. To understand the symbolic significance of green fire, I employ a method drawn from Jungian studies, amplification, finding parallel references to green fire in the theology of Hildegard of Bingen, alchemical symbolism, contemporary art, poetry, and popular culture, the nature writing of Robin Wall Kimmerer, and discourses and practices around biotechnology. These parallels similarly reveal green fire to be a symbol of that integral life/death force, linked in turn to 'Mother Earth' or 'Mother Nature'.

Fire on the Mountain: Ecology Gets its Narrative Totem

Gavin Van Horn

Aldo Leopold's essay 'Thinking Like a Mountain' was more than a parable about a redemptive personal moment; it was the fruition of a larger effort on Leopold's part to effectively communicate the fundamentals of a 'land ethic'. I explore striking narrative antecedents to Leopold's 'green fire' moment, including writings by Henry David Thoreau and Ernest Thompson Seton, and articulate why wolves provided the quintessential totem animal for communicating a larger ecological 'drama'. Both these literary antecedents and the essay's ongoing—sometimes surprising—impacts are worth exploring, not just because of the high regard in which the essay itself is held but because Leopold succeeded in navigating a problem that persists in our own time: the gap between scientifically informed understandings of the world and effectively communicating those understandings to the public.

'Thinking like a Mystic': The Unacknowledged Legacy of P. D. Ouspensky's Tertium Organum on the Development of Leopold's 'Thinking Like a Mountain'

Ashley Pryor

Most Aldo Leopold scholars acknowledge P.D. Ouspensky's influence on both Leopold's proto-Land Ethic of the early 1920s and insight that the earth is more than inert material and is itself a 'living thing'. The possibility that Leopold's later philosophical, ecological, and spiritual development were influenced by his reading of Ouspensky, however, has received little attention. A close reading of Leopold's 'Thinking Like a Mountain', as well as key passages of A Sand County Almanac through the theoretical lens of Ouspensky's analysis in Tertium Organum, suggests that Leopold's frequent attribution of affective and psychological states, especially love, to nonhuman beings (and Leopold's most curious and haunting suggestion that dead things too might listen) is consistent with Ouspensky's theory if not a direct heir to it.

Building Receptivity: Leopold's Land Ethic and Critical Feminist Interpretation

Kathryn J. Norlock

Aldo Leopold's A Sand County Almanac emphasizes values of receptivity and perceptivity that appear to be mutually reinforcing, critical to an ecological conscience, and cultivatable through concrete and embodied experience. His priorities bear striking similarities to elements of the ethics of care elaborated by feminist philosophers, especially Nel Noddings, who notably recommended receptivity, direct and personal experience, and even shared Leopold's attentiveness to joy and play as sources of moral motivation. These commonalities are so fundamental that ecofeminists can and should see Leopold as a philosophical ally. The three ecofeminist scholars who have devoted the most concerted attention to Leopold's work argue that his Land Ethic is not, and does not provide a basis for, an ecofeminist ethic. I dispute the main criticisms of these scholars, and conclude that ecofeminists should attend more often to Leopold's work, which extends possibilities for excellent praxis.

The Worldview Concept and Aldo Leopold's Project of 'World View' Remediation

J. Baird Callicott

A Sand County Almanac has a single overarching theme and purpose—worldview remediation: to replace the biblical with an evolutionary-ecological worldview. The epistemological foundations of the worldview concept were established by Kant, who rendered 'reality' phenomenal and potentially plural. No worldview is true, but competing worldviews may be adjudicated by the application of three criteria of tenability: (1) self-consistency; (2) consistency with and comprehensive of all phenomenal experience; (3) aesthetical and spiritual satisfaction. A Sand County Almanac's 'Marshland Elegy' and 'On a Monument to the Pigeon' explore the aesthetic and spiritual potentiality of the theory of evolution. 'Odyssey', 'Thinking Like a Mountain', and 'Song of the Gavilan' explore the aesthetic and spiritual potentiality of ecology. 'The Land Ethic' explores the axiological and normative implication of the evolutionary-ecological worldview. Subsequent changes in ecology problematize the summary moral maxim of 'The Land Ethic'. Worldview remediation is now more challenging, but also more necessary than ever.

Book Reviews

Jane Caputi

Ann Dunskey, Steven Dunskey, and David Steinke (directors), *Green Fire: Aldo Leopold and a Land Ethic for our Time* (Baraboo, WI: Aldo Leopold Foundation, 2011), DVD, \$20.00.

From the Editors: Annual Profile of Reviewers

Joseph D. Witt

List of Reviewers

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