ABSTRACT: Environmental ethics assumes that humans are, at the core, environmentally "bad" because we are currently destroying nature. This operative assumption of environmental ethics as a field is what I want to term contemporary environmental morality, wherein humans and their industry, technology, and economy are considered to be "evil" in contrast to ecosystems, wilderness, or nature, which are valued as "good." More pointedly, environmental ethics as it stands presupposes that there is an entity called "nature" that we humans are differentiated from and have an obligation towards as outside actors. This is what I want to call environmental dualism, which holds humans as separate from, rather than a part of, nature; and, in keeping with contemporary environmental morality, as a force that is destroying this entity called "nature." Both the environmental dualism and the contemporary environmental morality that characterize environmental ethical thought are inaccurate for two reasons. Firstly, humans are a part of nature—we are organic beings and all of our actions occur within a larger ecological framework. Secondly, though humans could accurately be described as environmentally "bad" historically, our species can become a force for environmental "good," both industrially with respect to manufacturing processes and developmentally with respect to land use. If we reframe the basic story such that we humans, as an integral part of nature, can contribute positively as vital, productive parts of the whole, new ideas and possibilities emerge. Humans do not have to be detrimental to the environment; we are not fundamentally flawed in this respect despite what environmental moralists might say. By going beyond the environmental morality and dualism exemplified by modern environmental ethics as a field, we as ethical thinkers and activists can begin to be effective in our efforts to advocate for a more ecologically adapted society with environmentally conscious lifestyles.

"No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it."
—Albert Einstein

"But have you ever asked yourselves enough how dearly the erection of every ideal on earth has exacted its payment?"
—Friedrich Nietzsche

I. OVERTURE

Through my experiences as an environmental activist and thinker, I have been concerned that environmental ethics as a field in philosophy and as a strand of contemporary thought has been dominated by a discourse characterized by dismal moralizing. I contend that this moralizing discourse actually hinders environmentalist goals, both conceptually and practically.
Modern western environmental ethics assumes that humans are, at the core, environmentally “bad” because we are currently destroying nature. This operative assumption of environmental ethics as a field hitherto is what I want to term contemporary environmental morality, wherein humans and their industry, technology, and economy are considered to be “evil” in contrast to ecosystems, wilderness, or nature, which are valued as “good.” Environmental ethics calls us to renounce our anthropocentric worldview and modify our behavior to treat the environment in a way that is less “bad.”

More pointedly, environmental ethics as it stands presupposes that there is an entity called “nature” that we humans are differentiated from and have an obligation towards as outside actors. This is what I want to call environmental dualism, which holds humans as separate from, rather than a part of, nature; and, in keeping with the aforementioned contemporary environmental morality, as a force that is destroying this entity called “nature.”

Both environmental ethicist and activist worldviews operate on a narrative that is roughly as follows: “nature,” which we are despoiling, was at one point, prior to humans, a pristine wilderness where paradisiacal conditions reigned, a view critics refer to as the Arcadian myth. The story goes that this prelapsarian state where humans existed harmoniously with nature was thrown out of balance, firstly with the advent of agriculture and the resultant rise of civilizations. Later, the industrial revolution and the consumer capitalist economy served to exacerbate our situation, the unfettered greed and waste of which are currently imperiling all life support systems on planet Earth. If only we would begin to help the environment by reining in our species’ destructive tendencies, we could begin to reset the original balance. I hold that such views are textbook cases of the contemporary environmental morality and environmental dualism that are currently endemic to most members of our species, not excluding environmental ethicists and activists.

It is my view that both the environmental dualism and the contemporary environmental morality that characterize modern environmental ethical thought are inaccurate for two reasons. Firstly, humans are a part of nature—we are organic beings, all of our actions occur within a larger ecological framework, and we reside within these ecosystems. Our creations are natural—houses and factory dormitories are no less natural products than are birds’ nests and beehives. Our economy, to the extent that it stems from us as natural beings, is natural as well. Though our human creations and economies may operate by methods contra to “nature” or to life broadly speaking and compromise our fellow natural beings and their habitats in the process, these are historical contingencies that can, and I would argue must, be changed.

Secondly, though humans could accurately be described as environmentally “bad” historically, our species can become a force for environmental “good,” both industrially with respect to manufacturing processes and developmentally with respect to land use. I will explore in further detail what being environmentally “good” would practically mean in Section V of this essay. Rather than seeking to be less bad or have “zero impact,” we as a species can, and again I would argue must, alter our industries and patterns of development to become environmentally integrated and have a positive i. e. ecologically beneficial impact on the environment.
Both contemporary environmental morality and environmental dualism result from contingent historical factors—the former because of the way the industrial revolution happened to evolve, and the latter based on outdated anthropocentric worldviews (or lazy colloquial dualisms of "nature" vs. "culture"). However, there is no reason that these conditions will or even can remain the same. Modern environmental ethics, therefore, to the extent that one or both of these faulty attributes characterize it, is also contained within these historical realities and confined to that particular framework.

What, then, does it mean to have a systematized ethics cemented within these contingent historical realities? How will we transcend our heretofore-detrimental environmental beliefs and behaviors while keeping our ethics in that same historical context and resulting self-view as a species? Moreover, why would we try to solidify unchanging, universal environmental ethical theories within a dynamic, evolving, complex environment? By applying modern moral philosophy to environmental issues, we inherit a problem of static environmental ethics within dynamic cultural and environmental frameworks.

What is wrong with environmental ethics? Who could impugn such an ostensibly noble thing? I hold that modern environmental ethics is foremost among the forces that keep our species from evolving to be more ecologically adapted or "environmentally friendly." The dialectic is approximately this: unwittingly, in fighting the actions and institutions that are degrading the environment, environmental activists, employing our modern environmental ethics, merely oppose the consciousness that created environmental problems to begin with—namely, that humans are separate from "nature" and can use it however they wish. Activist remedies, therefore, will merely react negatively to this state of affairs; thus, we get the picture that humans and their economy are evil, nature and its economy is good, and that if we do not completely leave nature alone then we should at least inflict as little damage as possible.

However, it is my view that morality is a failed vehicle for handling environmental problems. Though we know that our burning of fossil fuels is environmentally destructive and bad for our health, we are forced to do so anyway because our current industrial system has evolved upon this premise. Moralize as much as we like, finger wagging and admonishment will not change the basis of our economy—we still drive our cars, use our coal-fired power, and rely on extractive industries. Decrying such activities as evil merely opposes these practices and contributes nothing to forward a fundamentally different alternative, neither intellectually nor practically.

But what if we reframe the basic story and approach such that we humans, as an integral part of nature, can contribute positively as vital, productive parts of the whole? This would represent an explosion of the superstructure of what is presently considered possible. Once we transcend environmental dualism and contemporary environmental morality, all manner of ideas and possibilities emerge, as if on the dawn of a new day. Humans do not have to be detrimental to the environment; we are not fundamentally flawed in this respect despite what environmental moralists might say. By going beyond the contemporary environmental morality and environmental dualism exemplified by modern environmental ethics as a field, we as ethical thinkers and activists can begin to be effective in our efforts to advocate for a more ecologically adapted society with environmentally conscious lifestyles.
Given the failure of morality as an approach for going beyond our problematic environmental status quo, the question becomes what the content of a viable environmental ethic would be, and what the narrative of a viable environmental ethics would sound like. For guidance on this, I turn to conservationist Aldo Leopold, the progenitor of the famous land ethic that engendered or at least inspired modern environmental ethics. Though philosophically naïve and somewhat prone to moralist discourse himself, on my reading he opens new possibilities for what an environmental ethic might be—something based on ecological conscience, assessment, and intuition rather than rules, principles, and theories: something based on ethics, rather than morality.

The land ethic, which will be analyzed in Section III of this essay, points to a direction that subsequent literature has not taken. Environmental philosophers such as J. Baird Callicott subsume Leopold, building a theoretical framework around the land ethic in the fashion of modern moral philosophy, making it into somewhat of a “green” categorical imperative. I offer alternative readings of the land ethic to show that it need not be read through the modernist moral lens.

Through an investigation of environmental ethics as it stands, with particular emphasis on interpretations and uses of Aldo Leopold’s classic land ethic, I hope to show that it is possible to go beyond environmental morality to change the content and narrative of environmental ethics such that it can effectively guide environmental praxis.

II. A BRIEF LOOK AT THE EVOLUTION OF (MODERN, WESTERN) ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

I will begin by substantiating some of the claims made in the overture by way of introduction to and brief analysis of some of the dominant strands of environmental ethical thought. At the outset, I should note that this is a sketch of ethical work by contemporary environmental philosophers in America; there are traditions of environmental ethics worldwide that are of older provenance.

Firstly, what is environmental ethics? According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Environmental ethics is the discipline that studies the moral relationship of human beings to, and also the value and moral status of, the environment and its nonhuman contents.” Notwithstanding the fact that this definition seems to hold humans as separate from the environment, and that the open question of the moral status of the environment implies an oppositional historical way of viewing and treating the environment, the definition discusses a discipline that is relatively nascent.

Environmental ethics arose out of 1970’s environmental crisis consciousness, a time when concerns about overpopulation, the phenomenon of “global cooling,” and a maelstrom of other environmental issues spawned the first Earth Day in 1970. Noting and bearing in mind this context is crucial: the raison d’être and goal of environmental ethics as a field was to avert the specter of environmental disaster. This context colors the narrative employed by the seminal environmental ethical writers, a narrative that presupposes both environmental dualism and contemporary environmental morality, and that continues to color the discourse in the field and on the streets today.

The idea that an environmental ethic aims to avoid destruction assumes that the
default behavior of the species who enlists such an ethic is environmentally destructive, which is exactly the type of assumption that I want to impugn. Though such a characterization is historically accurate, it is contingent; this state of affairs could be otherwise, as I will sketch in Section V. My argument relies on the open possibility of a different human relationship to the environment, one that is not fundamentally adversarial. A second industrial revolution, for example, could alter industry such that it is de facto beneficial to the environment, being ecologically integrated by design.

As it stands, environmental ethics seeks to mitigate damage or prohibit destruction of the environment. For prominent environmental ethicist J. Baird Callicott, we need an environmental ethic, or else we are doomed: "The point is this: Unless we evolve a non-anthropocentric environmental ethic, *Homo sapiens* may not be around for very much longer" (Callicott 1994, 206). This is a prime example of contemporary environmental morality. The assumption is clear—unless we rein in our destructive behavior by employing an environmental ethic, we will vanquish ourselves along with much of the biotic community that we have decimated. "Stop doing harm" hardly seems to be satisfactory content for an environmental ethic, nor an example of effective discourse to inspire people to adopt such an ethic. Yet, it is the starting point and tacit narrative that engendered the discipline of environmental ethics.

Callicott writes that three 1973 papers effectively started environmental ethics in professional philosophy—Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, Arne Naess's *Deep Ecology*, and Richard Sylvan's "Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?" (Zimmerman, 5) Then, in 1979, Eugene C. Hargrove established the quarterly journal *Environmental Ethics*. From there, articles and inquiry in environmental ethics poured forth, making it into a completely new field of philosophy (5). Singer, in *Animal Liberation*, worked to allow a lower entry requirement for the moral base class. His guideline was sentience, or the capacity to experience pleasure and pain. Singer can be said to be consistently applying the value theory of classical utilitarianism—extending traditional ethics to include sentient nonhuman animals (8). Tom Regan first endeavored to assign animals "rights" in the sense that humans enjoy. These philosophers primarily focused on applying ethics to individual animals, which is quite different from environmental ethics that must take collectives into account (8).

In 1978, "On Being Morally Considerable" by Kenneth E. Goodpaster took moral philosophy beyond animal rights/ liberation and into environmental ethics proper (Zimmerman, 9). "Being alive" was established as the criterion for moral considerability. This was a preliminary "life-principle" or a biocentric ethic but was purposely minimalistic in its enumeration of practical details of ethical application (9). Then, in 1981 Paul W. Taylor's *Ethics of Respect for Nature* offered a stronger version of biocentrism ("life-centered" ethical theory), wherein all living things are "teleological centers of life," wherein an organism's *telos* is to reach a state of maturity and to reproduce (9). Preventing the fulfillment of an organism's *telos* is to harm it. Taylor agreed with Goodpaster that all living things have a good of their own beyond utility, whether they are sentient or not. He argued that all *wild* organisms have equal inherent worth, though not rights (9).

According to Callicott, both environmental ethics and animal rights develop moral philosophies that ground ethical theories, which in turn imply practical precepts—in the
methodological tradition of Western philosophy (Zimmerman, 6). In Callicott's view, “Singer, Regan, Goodpaster, and Taylor all provide variations on a common theoretical theme that could be called the standard paradigm of traditional moral philosophy,” which “identifies and justifies a property or characteristic that entitles the possessor to moral considerability” (10). Biocentrism stretches this familiar pattern of moral reasoning to its limit because it seems absurd to argue that bacteria and charismatic megafauna are of equal inherent value (10). Already, we see that morality is a limited way to go about conceptualizing environmental concerns.

For Callicott, environmental ethics needs to include all entities in the environment: air, water, land, and ecosystems collectively, in addition to individual member organisms of the biosphere. A holistic approach to environmental ethics therefore requires a different theoretical paradigm (as Callicott envisions himself offering). In Callicott's eyes, Goodpaster and Taylor's biocentrism may be exclusively individualistic, while his own and Leopold's ecocentrism (ecosystem-centered ethic) may be excessively—though not exclusively—holistic (Zimmerman, 10). A look at the history of environmental ethics would not be complete without careful discussion of Aldo Leopold's land ethic, which I will analyze in the next section.

III. ALDO LEOPOLD'S 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” - the famous land ethic formulation from *A Sand County Almanac*, 1949 (McKibben, 293).

One could plausibly say that the history of western environmental ethics is a running footnote to Aldo Leopold's land ethic. Virtually every environmental ethics article or book quotes the above land ethic formulation, if not in the inscription then somewhere in the text. Environmental writer Bill McKibben notes, “Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) is often described as the father of environmental ethics, and his “land ethic” is a landmark in American philosophical thought…” (McKibben, 265) As Callicott notes, the holism of the land ethic is what makes it the environmental ethic of choice among conservationists and ecologists (Callicott 1999, 69), not to mention many environmental ethicists (especially Callicott himself).

Yet this is somewhat ironic because Leopold was a forester by training and a wildlife ecologist by profession, not a philosopher (Zimmerman, 11). Upon first reading, the land ethic formulation is indeed an alluring, inspiring statement. Its formulaic simplicity offers a way of overcoming the challenges of the complex global environmental situation that we find ourselves in. With a stroke of Leopold's pen, we are seemingly able to condemn the complicated, often atrocious environmental situations that occur in industrial society.

However, many interpretive questions are raised solely from a penetrating reading of the formulation. What does “a thing” refer to—an event? A state of affairs? A relationship? An action? What does it mean for the biotic community to have stability—is nature not dominated by the transformative processes of biological evolution? What does it mean to have integrity in a biotic community? Perhaps it means the absence of humans, as in the definition of wilderness offered in the Stanford Encyclopedia of
Philosophy’s entry on the Wilderness Act of 1964: “A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” What is the human place in the biotic community? Surely, we too are organic beings just like the other animals; we inhabit ecosystems and share the same water, air, and land as other organisms.

Moreover, what does it mean to “preserve” the integrity and stability of the biotic community—should we freeze nature in its contemporary manifestation, never allowing it to progress, reorder, or change? On the other hand, with beauty in the equation, do we have a purely aesthetic relation to the biotic community? Affluent wilderness advocates, historically, have preserved nature in large part to be able to vacation there and appreciate its beauty. Perhaps there is nothing moral to saving the environment after all—doing so is just an aesthetic preference we want to preserve, more sensorily pleasing than strip malls and sub-developments and concrete grids.

Before getting into questions of interpretation and analysis, however, it is important to read Leopold’s land ethic on its own terms, in its own context. The Land Ethic is a series of essays on conservation that comes at the end of his final and most famous book, *A Sand County Almanac*, wherein he celebrates the natural wonders of each month of the year from January through December in his home county in Wisconsin. In the Land Ethic essays, his overarching project is to articulate the need for and outline some aspects of an environmental or “land” ethic that will guide our view of and relationship to the environment.

The problem, as Leopold frames it, is that “There is as yet no ethic dealing with man’s relation to land” (McKibben, 277). Put differently, keeping in mind Leopold’s expanded definition of land as “soils, waters, plants, and animals” (278) collectively, we do not yet have an environmental ethic. The task, then, is for society to evolve a land ethic.

An important dimension of this problem is that “Land, like Odysseus’ slave-girls, is still property. The land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations” (McKibben, 277). This apprehension of the land as property/ utility for human economic gain dominates Leopold’s thinking about the need for a land ethic. The problem for Leopold is roughly twofold: 1) we do not have a land ethic, and 2) we hold a purely economic apprehension of the land.

The essay next proceeds to a section entitled *The Community Concept*. Here, Leopold lays out a few important aspects of a would-be land ethic. He begins by asserting,

all ethics so far evolved upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts... The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land. (McKibben, 278)

Working off the insights of the emerging field of ecology in his time, Leopold is making an early attempt to open people’s eyes to the larger ecological systems of which we are a dependent part. He is seeking to expand our intellectual, ethical, and perhaps physical boundaries to include what we might today call the environment (though his definition of “land” seems devoid of air/ the climate) in the definition and domain of the human
community. By extending the boundaries of our community, we will ostensibly treat the composite non-human members as ethically as the human ones.

He elaborates that “A land ethic of course cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these “resources,” but it does affirm their continued right to existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state” (McKibben, 278). Here surfaces a central complication in Leopold’s writing between conservation and preservation. On the one hand, he decries the solely instrumental use of the natural world; on the other hand, he says that a land ethic cannot prevent utilitarian outlooks on and appropriations of the environment. He puts “resources” in quotation marks because he tacitly acknowledges the land-as-purely-economic dimension of his twofold environmental problem, but in this quote he almost apologizes for this reality. For Leopold, we will always rely on using “natural resources” for our gain, as a means to an end, without changing their status as “resources.”

Yet, in another way, with a land ethic we are supposed to allow these “resources” to continue to exist because they are valuable as ends in themselves. Furthermore, in some areas we are to allow them to remain in a “natural state” or “wilderness.” With this, he points to a non-instrumental apprehension of and way of existing with the environment, wherein nature is intrinsically valuable and has a right to existence on its own terms, free of human meddling. This tension explains why Leopold had qualms with the conservationists of his day such as Gifford Pinchot—these men wanted to conserve natural areas, but only so that humans could continually use the “resources” for human ends and never exhaust them. Leopold, as he matured in his life, evolved to desire and promote something different—preservation of land for its own sake, i. e. wilderness. From the preceding paragraph, however, it is clear that he recognizes the necessity of conservation in addition to preservation.

Leopold goes on to establish that “a land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it” (McKibben, 278). Rather than being the monarch of the natural world, exploiting and controlling nature for human expediency, we can hold a more democratic relationship to nature, given that we are kin to all things natural and we are as reliant on the Earth and its processes as is the rest of life. The democracy metaphor is appropriate, too, with its implication of duties and obligations to accompany rights and freedoms, in contrast with the conveniences and privileges that a sovereign head of state feels entitled to without reciprocity.

The next section of the essay, The Land Pyramid, elaborates Leopold’s complex (for the era) views on ecosystems. He begins with an interesting statement:

An ethic to supplement and guide the economic relation to land presupposes the existence of some mental image of land as a biotic mechanism. We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in. (McKibben, 286)

Oddly, the land ethic here seems proffered merely to temper the effects of economic appropriation of the land, rather to replace the economic relation. This is in contrast to the biotic community that he begins to describe, which offers us a different way of seeing the land. The above quote, paradoxically, both suggests to us a different relation to the land stemming from a more holistic environmental worldview and an ethic that is merely a
guide for the current utilitarian ways of relating to the land. The paradox perhaps arises from Leopold’s conflict between conservation and preservation, an inconsistency that is never fully resolved in this text. In Section V, however, we will see how he began to transcend this dichotomy.

Regardless, this section is intended to flesh out a more detailed picture of the functioning of “biotic mechanisms” or ecosystems. The reader, with a more intimate understanding of the environment and nuanced appreciation of its complex functioning, can then see differently and act in an ecologically informed manner. The “biotic pyramid” (McKibben, 286) is the image Leopold employs to describe the interconnectivity of the various aspects of ecosystems. The details of Leopold’s ideas of ecosystem functioning are not especially important to this project nor are they necessarily resonant with contemporary ecology; however, it is important to note his systems-thinking, holistic apprehension of biotic communities:

Land, then, is not merely soil: it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals. Food chains are the living channels which conduct energy upward; death and decay return it to the soil. The circuit is not closed... but it is a sustained circuit, like a slowly augmented revolving fund of life. (287)

There is interdependence between the complexity of the component parts of the biotic community and its smooth functioning as an energy unit, which is likely what Leopold means by “stability” in the famous formulation.

Of course, change does occur in the biotic community, which means the component parts of the community must adjust to the change. “Change does not necessarily obstruct or divert the flow of energy; evolution is a long series of self-induced changes, the net result of which has been to elaborate the flow mechanism and to lengthen the circuit” (McKibben, 287). He continues to draw a contrast between evolutionary or “natural” changes, which typically occur slowly and locally, with human-induced changes that are “of unprecedented violence, rapidity, and scope” (287) and have “effects more comprehensive than is intended or foreseen” (289). At first blush, this claim smacks of environmental dualism, but environmental historians would likely confirm this account as a matter of fact—humans simply have had a more enormous impact on the planet than any species hitherto in the Earth’s history.

Leopold’s main concerns with human changes to the biotic community are: “Can the land adjust itself to the new order? Can the desired alterations be accomplished with less violence?” (McKibben, 289) To the first question, the answer is yes:

[The] almost world-wide display of disorganization in the land seems to be similar to disease in an animal, except that it never culminates in complete disorganization or death. The land recovers, but at some reduced level of complexity, and with a reduced carrying capacity for people, plants, and animals. (290)

Thus, we get the familiar warning from ecology that there may be a “tipping point,” past which the precariously interconnected web of life cannot continue normally, which would mean a chain reaction of extinctions resulting in failure for the whole ecosystem or collapse of the “biotic pyramid. “ The question then becomes how much disruption ecosystems can tolerate before being irrecoverably damaged, which ecologists still grapple with today.
The second question, with regard to industry and development being less ecologically disruptive, is left open until it is again posed as somewhat of a challenge at the very end of the essay: “We shall hardly relinquish the shovel [industry], which after all has many good points, but we are in need of a gentler and more objective criteria for its successful use” (McKibben, 294). Objective here seems to mean a way of acting that corresponds to promoting the health of ecosystems, rooted in the science of ecology. Leopold is optimistic about our capacity to achieve our desired alterations with less violence—in fact, he thought that human presence could actually enhance the quality of biotic communities through our actions, as will be shown in Section V. As posited in the Overture, I, too, think this ecologically informed and environmentally beneficial way of being is possible for humanity, which will be substantiated in Section V of this essay.

The penultimate section of the Land Ethic is entitled Land Health and the A-B Cleavage. He begins by writing,

> a land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land.

Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. (McKibben, 291)

This represents what is possibly an important turn—the land ethic is now framed in terms of individual responsibility for promoting the health of the land, where before it was more of a collective societal sentiment. As we proceed towards the famous land ethic formulation, we see that the individual human actor plays an increasingly vital role in the land ethical calculus. In addition, for the first time, with the employment of the health metaphor, the land ethic is tied to supporting the vitality of an entity—in this case, the health and flourishing of the biotic community as a whole, ecologically speaking.

Leopold goes on to draw a contrast between two different types within various human communities including conservationists, foresters, game managers, and farmers: ‘A’s who regard the land as object and its function as utilitarian/commodity, and ‘B’s who regard the land as biotic community, with a broader function. To his mind, the “Group B feels the stirrings of an ecological conscience” (McKibben, 291) and thus is closer to land ethical existence. Leopold summarizes the A-B cleavages as follows:

> In all of these cleavages, we see the same repeated basic paradoxes: man the conqueror versus man the biotic citizen; science the sharpener of his sword versus science the searchlight on his universe; land the slave and servant versus land the collective organism. (292)

Leopold seems to call on us to choose one side of these various dichotomies, most probably the B side to the extent that we are able. Interestingly, his own conception of the role of a land ethic seems cleft by an A-B cleavage: A(s) who will use a land ethic to guide their use of “resources” (perhaps conservationists?), and B(s) who will use a land ethic to adopt a more holistic environmental worldview that goes beyond the utilitarian “resource” paradigm (perhaps preservationists?).

His rhetoric here, as he moves to the concluding section of his essay, is sober. He concludes the penultimate section of the essay by writing,

> Robinson’s injunction to Tristam may well be applied, at this juncture, to Homo sapiens as a species in geological time:
> Whether you will it or not
> You are a King, Tristam, for you are one
Of the time-tested few that leave the world,
When they are gone, not the same place it was.
Mark what you leave. (McKibben, 292).

Our species is the unwitting, unwieldy ruler of this planet; Leopold calls on us to choose what our role in it will be with an eye to our environmental legacy. We have a footprint that can be as harmful, neutral, or beneficial as we choose—by choosing less ecologically disruptive *modus vivendi* we step into a different role than the one we have heretofore occupied. Leopold’s injunction to humanity is as much metaphysical as it is ethical—he is asking what kind of species we want to be.

Finally, Leopold continues to the famous paragraph in which he offers the oft-quoted formulation of the land ethic, in the final section entitled *The Outlook*:

The ‘key-log’ which must be moved to release the evolutionary process for an ethic is simply this: quit thinking about decent land-use as solely an economic problem. Examine 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. (McKibben, 293)

Viewed in this context, coming at the very end of the entire essay, the land ethic does not enumerate an action-guiding principle. Leopold is concerned with the unleashing of a process towards a land ethic rather than providing a pithy summation of the content of his envisioned environmental ethic. This process is merely a step towards evolving a land ethic, which cannot be summed up with all-encompassing specificity by the last two sentences in the quote. We merely are supposed to add ethical as well as aesthetic dimensions to economic concerns in our environmental ethical calculus. Furthermore, examining “each question” suggests a case-by-case analysis that must take place within an individual actor, which is more similar to virtue ethics than to deontology or consequentialism. Most importantly, in light of the health metaphor and the discussion of biotic communities, right and wrong comes in terms of ecological *benefit and detriment* rather than moral *good and evil*.

This does not mean relinquishing our economic apprehension and use of the land altogether: “It of course goes without saying that economic feasibility limits the tether of what can or cannot be done for the land. It always has and it always will” (McKibben, 294). When it comes to cutting down a tree or a poor farmer being able to feed his children through subsistence agriculture, the tree will and possibly should fall. This does not mean that the farmer is land ethically wrong, especially if he weighs his decision carefully with the aforementioned expanded parameters and proceeds to carry out the desired alterations in the least ecologically disruptive way possible.

**IV. RETHINKING ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS, STARTING WITH THE LAND ETHIC**

In the Overture, I alluded to environmental philosophers such as J. Baird Callicott who attempt to subsume the land ethic in the familiar structure of modern moral philosophy. His essay “Holistic Environmental Ethics and the Problem of Ecofascism” attempts to “outline the philosophical foundations and pedigree of the land ethic and indicate how it might be related to the more familiar Modern moral concerns” (Zimmerman, 117). His definition of an ethic is revealing for this project: “An ethic is a
set of behavioral rules, or a set of principles or precepts for governing behavior” (118). Callicott reads the land ethic as having both of these properties.

For Callicott, the land ethic is premised upon univocal theoretical foundations that generate sets of duties to multiple communities—it is not a form of moral pluralism (Zimmerman, 126). Callicott argues that Leopold, who consciously adopted Darwin’s thinking on the origin and development of ethics and merely added an ecological dimension to the Darwinian characterization, unconsciously adopted the theories of moral sentiments of Hume and Smith that had shaped Darwin’s thinking about morality (122). Hume and Smith, according to Callicott, thought that morality arises from a feeling of sympathy for others in a given community (118). The land ethic, then, falls into a single moral philosophy, one rooted “in the sentimental communitarianism first advocated by David Hume and Adam Smith and later biologicized by Charles Darwin” (Callicott 1999, 13).

Callicott admits that he first saw the famous land ethic formulation quoted in Section III as a single moral principle, a “green” golden rule through which to assess the rightness and wrongness of all action and behavior (Callicott 1999, 12). Even after modifying his view to see the land ethic as an accretion that co-exists with our many extant duties to human communities rather than being “moral monism at the level of principle” (12) through which we assess all of our actions, he still reads the land ethic as being rooted in the aforementioned overarching moral philosophy. He consistently refers to the land ethic formulation as “the summary moral maxim—the golden rule—of the land ethic” (Callicott 1994, 205).

Callicott rejects moral pluralism if it means abiding by inconsistent moral philosophies (Callicott 1999, 11). Concordantly, Callicott claims a modified land ethic “maxim” (“we should disturb the biotic community only at normal spatial and temporal scales”) is but one of a multiplicity of community-generated human and non-human duties, unified by the single moral philosophy of sentimental communitarianism (13). This is the alternative theoretical paradigm he offers for a holistic environmental ethic, as alluded to at the end of Section II.

A reading of the land ethic as a traditional moral maxim and action-guiding principle is indeed alluring. Doing so would seem to suggest that adopting this ethic, individually and collectively, would put an end to the debates about how much mining and logging ought to be allowed, how much pollution and toxin and poisons permitted, and other qualms over acceptable levels of environmentally destructive actions and behaviors both by people and corporations alike. Under the land-ethic-as-categorical-imperative, any of these actions is wrong—and perhaps, by extension, prohibited. This would imply a zero-tolerance policy that surpasses even the precautionary principle in the types of actions it circumscribes and would seem to put an end to interminable debates about the human relationship to nature and our duties to the natural world.

Of course, how to balance competing interests is a problem for the land ethic, as with any other holistic environmental ethic. For Callicott, the land ethic is not intended to replace all community-related ethics that preceded it—it is an accretion onto the duties already held towards the various communities of which we are a part (Callicott 1999, 71). Thus, it is conceivable that there will be conflicts between human good and non-human good. He constructs two second-order principles in order to sort out the details of
conflicting interests in individual cases, responding to the worry called "ecofascism," in which the land ethic might involve "natural" interests trumping human ones, entailing monstrous consequences such as killing humans en masse to alleviate ecological burdens from the Earth.

The ecofascism claim rests on the idea that killing humans en masse would be land-ethically justified in promoting the well-being of the Earth—after all, some scientists like James Lovelock contend that Earth's physical systems can only comfortably support no more than 1 billion humans. The eco-fascism charge is outlandish because humans are undeniably a part of the biotic community; harming any part of the community, including humans, is tantamount to harming the community as a whole. Assuming that the biotic community and we as organic beings could have separate interests is false—we are inextricably biologically integrated, though our current modes of production and land philosophies may put us at odds. However, we can streamline these interests by making the kinds of physical and intellectual advances outlined in Section V of this essay.

Therefore, such a claim rests on both a) environmental dualism, because it assumes humans are not a part of the biotic community, and b) contemporary environmental morality, because it assumes that humans are inherently detrimental to the environment. A) is patently false, and b) is contingent, because it could be otherwise; in any case, it is not universally true of each individual member of our species. That someone like Callicott takes the charge of eco-fascism seriously and amends his theoretical construction of the land ethic to include second-order principles to deal with this "problem" shows his commitment to one or both of the a) and b) assumptions.

Practical questions of implementation aside, it is problematic and possibly irresponsible to read the land ethic as stemming from a moral philosophy in the modern philosophical tradition. One must remember that Leopold was not a philosopher, nor was *A Sand County Almanac* an ethical treatise—the land ethic occurs towards the end of a text that is celebrating the natural beauty of Leopold's home county in Wisconsin. Perhaps the land ethic is purely an observation, or a musing on Leopold's part. As Bill McKibben notes, the land ethic "is as much a pragmatic insight as an ethical one, and it grew from a lifetime out in the natural world" (McKibben, 265).

I think it is more accurate to read the "maxim" as a statement of a generalized sentiment whereby utilizing ecological conscience in a given circumstance, one can have a feel for whether an action is ecologically beneficial or detrimental. Contrary to Callicott and many other readers of the land ethic, I think that Leopold is neither working from a single moral philosophy nor offering a moral rule to apply definitively to specific situations, but rather proposing a guide or possibly heuristic through which we can get a general sense of what to do through ecologically seeing, feeling, and reasoning. On my reading, Leopold's land ethic concept is a non-moral environmental ethos that represents a more viable approach to environmental ethics than does morality—it is more like ethics, which involves conscience, intuition, and case-by-case analysis that is incumbent upon the individual actor to perform.

There is a crucial line that Callicott and other environmental ethicists seem to ignore, both in reading Leopold and in doing environmental ethics generally: "I have purposely presented the land ethic as a product of social evolution because nothing so
important as an ethic is ever ‘written’” (McKibben, 294). This line is critical because Leopold almost explicitly states that even his statement, which is predominantly read as the “summary moral maxim” of an environmental ethic he is espousing, is not actually a codified formulation of a land ethic. A land ethic continually evolves in the minds of a “thinking community” (294), so it changes along the way and never stops with one fixed formulation legislating for all places in all times with all actors.

Anthony Weston, in his essay “Before Environmental Ethics,” reminds us that Leopold viewed ethics as an evolutionary process that never stops. As such, Weston urges that we view environmental ethics as an evolutionary process in its formative stages. He ponders,

Suppose instead that we took the more evolutionary Leopold—the tentative, provisional, non-formulaic Leopold—more seriously. Suppose that we view new sets of values as only gradually taking shape, as deeply interwoven with constantly evolving institutions, experiences, and practices. How would environmental ethics look then? (Armstrong and Botzler, 96)

Doing such would certainly allow environmental ethics to deal with the complexity of the real world. This approach would also allow the possibility of a land ethic evolving in real time in the minds of society instead of having been hatched in a final, complete manner by Leopold in 1949. He rightly notes of the famous Leopold formulation, “Today that proposal is perpetually quoted as if it were a formula for a final and complete environmental ethic. Other philosophers have their own favorite formulae” (96). Yet, it seems that most readers have not closely considered this formulation in its complete original context.

Weston goes on to write that environmental ethics is in its early stages. As such, we cannot be seeking grand unification theories in the vein of Callicott:

Exploration and metaphor become crucial in environmental ethics... The force of these arguments [towards rights for wholes] lies in the way they open up the possibility of new connections, not in the way they settle or ‘close’ any questions... Their work is more creative than summative... Their chief function is to provoke, to loosen up the language and correspondingly our thinking, to fire the imagination: to open questions, not to settle them. (Armstrong and Botzler, 98-99)

Weston wants to reclaim Leopold from theorists such as Callicott, who thinks we need a complete, unified, “closed” theory of environmental ethics (99). He thinks the early stages of environmental ethics as a field is a bad time for this—it takes a long time for environmental values to develop and then to percolate through culture. He concedes that Callicott is right that systemic ethical theory is necessary at late cultural stages, but that environmental values are not yet there (99). He urges us to read Leopold differently:

It would be better to regard Leopold not as purveying a general ethical theory at all, but rather as simply opening up some questions, unsettling some loose assumptions, prying the door loose just far enough to lead, in time, to much wilder and certainly more diverse suggestions or ethical standards. (99)

Weston reminds us of Bryan Norton’s point that the land ethic formulation occurs in *A Sand County Almanac* during a discussion of purely economic constructions of the land and is thus read best as “a kind of counterbalance and challenge to the excesses of
pure commercialism, rather than as a grand criterion for moral action all by itself” (Armstrong and Botzler, 99). John Rodman agrees, saying that the land ethic should be read as an environmental ethic in progress, complicating the anthropocentric picture “from within, rather than as a kind of proto-system, simplifying and unifying an entirely new picture, that can be progressively refined in the way that utilitarian and deontological theories have been refined over the last century” (99).

Weston raises an important issue through Rodman. Environmental ethics can ignore neither the evolutionary nature of values nor the dynamic nature of the environment and society in which we live, even if traditional ethics in its philosophical vacuum and thought experiments attempts to do so. A universalizing Kantian or maximizing Millian attitude will no longer do in our complex situation. Traditional moral philosophy seems unfit to extend itself to nature—it is too linear and isolated to deal with the thriving complexity of both human and non-human life. Classical ethical theory seems inept to deal with the grandiose scale of life, biologically speaking—life seems to flaunt itself beyond morality.

V. AN ELABORATION ON HOW EXACTLY WE HUMANS CAN BE ENVIRONMENTALLY “GOOD”

As mentioned in the Overture, I think that our species can actually be environmentally “good” in two ways, both industrially with respect to manufacturing processes and developmentally with respect to land use. Accepting this possibility entails dire consequences for the contemporary environmental morality that has thus far dominated the environmental ethical discourse. With this alternative idea as a starting point, we are freed to employ an entirely different environmental ethical narrative, one that opens new perspectives on long-standing impasses and permits creative thinking for alternative solutions rather than one that is entrenched in the past and sanctimoniously seeks to curb global destruction. However, this is a view that certainly requires a bit of explanation. For these ideas I am indebted to William McDonough and Michael Braungart, authors of the 2002 groundbreaking book on ecological design, Cradle-to-Cradle. The philosophical significance of this book cannot be understated.

McDonough and Braungart begin their book by discussing the possibility of a new industrial revolution. They address contemporary environmental morality:

We are accustomed to thinking of industry and the environment as being at odds with each other, because conventional methods of extraction, manufacture, and disposal are destructive to the natural world. Environmentalists often characterize business as bad and industry itself (and the growth it demands) as inevitably destructive. (McDonough and Braungart, 6-7, emphasis mine)

We see that the operative contemporary environmental morality we currently hold is merely a product of the way that industrialization has happened to evolve. This historical contingency has led to a dichotomy/dualism that is a bane for both environmental activists and industry. The message activists broadcast to the public in order to become more environmentally friendly is cast in solely negative terms—stop doing X, do less of Y, be less environmentally “bad.”

Such messages are problematic in McDonough and Braungart’s eyes for two reasons. Firstly, these messages are based on a historical contingency that environmentalists are seeking to change—namely, that of industrialization as it is.
However, in trying to change this, the message is merely cast in opposition to that reality from within its very paradigm. We quickly come to a moot point, because the only way for us to be environmentally good is to restrict the bad modus operandi—but in so doing, we keep the very same systems in place, merely with restraints and regulations. Thus, we perpetuate the destructive processes and systems, but allow their operation to extend over a longer time as we make them more efficient and less destructive, though they are fundamentally destructive nonetheless. As the authors write, “being ‘less bad’ is no good” (McDonough and Braungart, 45). Secondly, the negative messages are not inspiring—making people feel bad is not an effective way to inspire creative, positive change.

For McDonough and Braungart, destructive processes of industrialization dominate our current relationship to the environment. However, there is nothing morally bad or intentionally pernicious about the way that things are now:

Just as industrialists, engineers, designers, and developers of the past did not intend to bring about such devastating effects, those who perpetuate these paradigms today surely do not intend to damage the world. The waste, pollution, crude products, and other negative effects that we have described are not the result of corporations doing something morally wrong. They are the consequence of outdated and unintelligent design. (McDonough and Braungart, 42-43)

The industrial revolution was a process of evolution like any other—it took place without a teleology or plan; lots of things just happened and developed that brought about more happenings and developments, a direction that led to the way things are presently. If we take a step back and look at the way things are now, we can recognize the deleterious patterns, but this is only a luxury we now have in hindsight. Our current systems and approaches are not immoral, but ecologically uninformed. At this point in our cultural evolution, we can choose a conscious, intentional, intelligent approach to our human ecosystems that includes the knowledge we now have as a result of doing things in a way that damages human and ecological vitality.

McDonough and Braungart offer quite a different vision for industry, and by extension environmentalism:

We see a world of abundance, not limits. In the midst of a great deal of talk about reducing the human ecological footprint, we offer a different vision. What if humans designed products and systems that celebrate an abundance of human creativity, culture, and productivity? That are so intelligent and safe, our species leaves an ecological footprint to delight in, not lament? (McDonough and Braungart, 15-16)

The rest of the book goes on to elaborate the ways in which we can evolve our industrial processes to fit in with these outlooks. Unfortunately, modern environmental ethics seems to be unaware of the almost Nietzschean shift in environmental thinking represented by McDonough and Braungart’s paradigm. The authors turn contemporary environmental morality on its head—what was “good” (efficiency, doing-less-bad) becomes bad (or ineffective), and what was “evil” (human industry) can become good (or effective), ecologically speaking.

Our environmental ethical theories are still stuck in the dualism and morality so finely glossed by the Cradle-to-Cradle authors:
Even today, most cutting-edge environmental approaches are still based on the idea that human beings are inevitably destructive toward nature and must be curbed and contained... This approach might have been valid two hundred years ago, when our species was developing its industrial systems, but now it cries out for rethinking. (McDonough and Braungart, 155)

No longer should we take a slave morality approach to apprehending the dominant institution of our time, the corporation. Rather, as the Cradle-to-Cradle authors suggest, we should move towards a new industrial method that aligns itself with ecological realities and possibly even mimics nature's own abundant, life-giving, and nurturing designs. The central idea to glean is that humans and their processes are not by default "bad"—this state of affairs, while historically accurate, can become otherwise. Environmental activists must let go of the eco-slave morality in order for industry to evolve.

What of our philosophies, our ethics, and our worldviews—surely these must evolve to be ecologically adapted as well? We cannot merely overhaul our lifestyles and physical systems without metaphysical work. As Bill McKibben writes of our global environmental status quo, we are in "a race between physics and metaphysics" (McKibben, 293)—we are attempting a cognitive climate change in order that we might ameliorate anthropogenic meteorological climate change. Overcoming contemporary environmental morality represents a huge stride in this direction. Realizing that our ways of being do not have to be by default "bad" is an important first step in rethinking environmental ethics.

Another important stride is to begin to defuse environmental dualism. As mentioned at the outset, our species can also be environmentally "good" developmentally with respect to land use. For this, we must consult Callicott to provide us with little-known biographical information about Aldo Leopold. Leopold is well known for being an advocate of wilderness. He helped to found the Wilderness Society, which has preserved millions of acres of wilderness in the United States. However, he was not necessarily a wilderness purist. Callicott, in his essay "Whither Conservation Ethics?" writes,

Leopold's vision went beyond the either sufficiently develop [conservation] or lock up and reserve [preservation] dilemma of the modern conservation problematique. Indeed, Leopold himself was primarily concerned, on the ground as well as in theory, with integrating an optimal mix of wildlife—both floral and faunal—with human habitation and economic exploitation of land. (Callicott 1999, 328).

As Callicott argues, Leopold "quietly formulated a third conservation ethic envisioning the ideal of human harmony with nature that fosters both economic and ecosystemic health" that goes beyond the conservation vs. preservation dichotomy (22). This human harmony must be such that it complements and contributes positively to the non-human elements of the landscape, as the example Leopold writes about of an ecologically integrated family farm that must thoughtfully and skillfully execute scores of modifications to improve the biota it inhabits (329).

Callicott suggests that "the only viable philosophy of conservation is, I submit, a generalized version of Leopold's vision of a mutually beneficial and enhancing integration of the human economy with the economy of nature—in addition to holding
onto as much untrammeled wilderness as we can” (Callicott 1999, 329). Hereafter, significantly, he defuses environmental dualism:

Lack of theoretical justification complements the sheer impracticability of conserving biodiversity solely by excluding man and his works. Change—not only evolutionary change, but climatic, successional, seasonal, and stochastic change—is natural (Botkin, 1990). And ‘man’ is a part of nature. Therefore, it will no longer do to say, simply, that what existed before the agricultural-industrial variety of Homo sapiens evolved or arrived, as the case may be, is the ecological norm in comparison with which all anthropocentric modifications are degradations. To define environmental quality—the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community—dynamically and positively, not statically and negatively, is part of the intellectual challenge that contemporary conservation biology confronts. (329, emphases mine).

Not only contemporary conservation biology, but also, as we have seen, contemporary environmental ethics faces these challenges. The point is not to leave nature completely untouched, statically “preserving” the environment, but rather to make our modifications in a way that is ecologically integrated, aesthetically pleasing, and economically expedient. This is not to say that we should transform everything, but that the transformations we do make need not be desecrations, despoliations, or heinous environmental violations. For some reason, most of Callicott’s writing seems to fall into negative definitions of environmental quality when talking about the human relationship to the environment, as we saw in Section II.

Nonetheless, Callicott helps us to move forward with respect to the contemporary environmental morality latent in the wilderness debate:

It is often possible for people to make a good living—and, in some cases, even the best living to be had—coexisting with rather than converting the indigenous biotic community… I am urging that we think in terms of ‘win-win’ rather than ‘zero-sum’… Further, I would like explicitly to state Leopold’s more heretical, from the preservationist point of view, implied corollary proposition, viz., that human activities may not only coexist with healthy ecosystems, but that they may actually enhance them. (Callicott 1999, 330)

This is a move very similar to the one that McDonough and Braungart make with respect to industry. Rather than aim for minimal or zero impact on ecosystems by taking little from or staying out of them altogether, we can inhabit them in a way that is mutually productive and mutually beneficial to both human and non-human parts of the ecosystem.

The example he provides is traditional Papago Indian farming, where in Arizona and Mexico there are two farming oases 30 miles apart. The U.S. government stopped the traditional farming in 1957 to create a National Park bird sanctuary, while farming continued as it had since prehistory in Mexico. There were fewer than 32 species at the National Park, while there were more than 65 species where farming continued (Callicott 1999, 330-331). Biologist David Ehrenfeld concludes from the Papago “parable of modern conservation” that “the presence of people may enhance the species richness of an area, rather than exert the effect that is more familiar to us” (331).

Taken together, the above two block quotes unambiguously illustrate that Callicott has a more nuanced outlook than his theorizing tendencies suggest. He radically undermines both the environmental ethicist and activist narratives glossed in the
Overture. Hidden in this relatively obscure essay, we find a fresh, innovative approach to environmental ethics that Callicott has nested in terms of a philosophy of conservation. He anticipates the thrust of my objections to both contemporary environmental morality and environmental dualism.

Callicott is a complicated figure. Explicitly, in the above quotes, he appears to be immune to contemporary environmental morality and environmental dualism, though elsewhere he is both implicitly and explicitly saturated by these phenomena. Although he acknowledges the potential for humans to be good, his ethical writing both presumes and sets out to prevent the bad. It is difficult to reconcile the heavy-handed Callicott with the more sophisticated Callicott quoted in this section. Callicott himself thinks that his essays are mutually consistent and complimentary (Callicott 1999, 24). Perhaps the only way to account for his apparent contradiction is that he is unaware that what he establishes as a viable philosophy of conservation is also the groundwork for a viable environmental ethic(s).

From all of the above, it seems that environmental ethics can go beyond nay saying and whistle blowing. Rather than being a gadfly on the sidelines trying to rein in or rain on the human parade, proscribing various courses of action, environmental ethics could instead be an active force in proactively prescribing a different course for humanity. Different apprehensions of and comportment to the land can have positive effects on ecosystems, ecologically speaking. This can be achieved not only by a cradle-cradle type evolution in industrial processes, but also by rethinking our land philosophy and praxis, or, put differently, our environmental ethic(s) and resulting action(s). With a different framing and starting point, environmental ethics could be in accord with the flourishing splendor of life (biologically speaking) instead of the jaded, morose, moralizing asceticism that so often characterizes environmental discourse.

VI. COMMENCEMENT: CHANGING THE CONTENT, NARRATIVE, AND ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Environmentalism, which draws on modern environmental ethics for its conceptual foundations, is in need of a new narrative. Hitherto, the story has been framed primarily in terms of curbing destruction. The story goes that we have a moral imperative to act now so that we do not kill species, so that we do not keep poisoning the water, polluting the air, sterilizing the land, and so that we do not wreck the world for our children. These claims are undoubtedly true, although being cast in such negative, prohibitive terms creates an impasse for their actualization both conceptually and in practice. With such a guiding lens, it is little wonder that we as a species have yet to adopt environmentalist theory and praxis.

Environmental activists and ethicists, afflicted by the contemporary environmental morality, believe they must inflict the environmentalist burden on as many others as possible to reach a critical mass/ turning point in consciousness to enlighten humankind about the environment. Again, it is probably true that a critical mass needs to adopt and embody environmental consciousness to affect genuine change, though doomsday forecasting and gloomy outlooks are not exactly the kind of narratives that are likely to light an inspirational fire for collective action to save the planet and its life forms. More pointedly, a merely oppositional consciousness cannot go far enough
beyond the current industrial realities and milieu to envision a completely different alternative.

Unfortunately, our present environmental ethos is not very enlightened or inspired itself; it merely labels the current modus operandi of civilization as "evil" and says "no" to its direction without having a completely different, appealing alternative to point to and adopt. Many environmentalists have given up mainstream life altogether to go live on eco-villages, organic farms, transition communities, permaculture homesteads and the like, which arguably embodies the change they want to see and represents a completely different alternative. However, the vast majority of environmental activists are tinkering with making the current system more efficient and less environmentally devastating. Despite recent advances in "green" public appeal, environmentalists are generally left preaching to their converted choir while the skyscrapers, highways, and factories go about business as usual.

We do need different patterns of development, along with a *Cradle-to-Cradle* type of second industrial revolution in order to become a sustainable, ecologically viable species. However, such physical changes are not enough: we need a value shift such that the environment is more intimately rooted in our psyche, a worldview shift such that we are a part of an ecological whole, a systems-thinking view of the larger processes of life that we contribute to and upon which we are dependent. These intellectual, ethical, and metaphysical shifts, though, cannot be guided merely in terms of *not* doing what we are currently doing that is environmentally "bad"—as we have seen, this is conceptually bankrupt and practically infeasible.

Perhaps we will need a protean ethics suited to variability of context, the content of which will depend on that context. It seems remiss to focus on the content irrespective of the context of an ethic; in environmental issues, as with other ethical issues, one needs to determine the right course of action for this place in this time in these circumstances with these actors. The full meaning of an evolutionary ethic, then, is not merely one that develops as part of a process, but one that itself is capable of changing content to adapt to context, rather than the forced universality of deontology or the majority vote of classical utilitarianism. Climate change, peak oil, pollution, deforestation, and all of the environmental crises we face are real problems, in real time: they can be addressed, but not without contextualized adaptations of our cognitive, ethical, and metaphysical climates that will accompany our new industries, economies, and technologies.

Environmental ethics may not be able to prescribe the practical implications for the evolution towards sustainability, but it should not constrain the possible. We have no idea what the future will look like short of what we can imagine creating it to be; confining our ethics to the contingences and exigencies of now limits our imagination for a different future by keeping us rooted in the consciousness of the present. A land ethic or any similar evolutionary/ecological ethic opens a possibility for new forms of human life, not merely "moral" forms of our current ways of life where "moral" essentially means less disruptive behavior in a fundamentally detrimental system.

Seeing otherwise changes the world. Rather than employing an ethics that tempers the effects of our contemporary economic-centric and anthropocentric worldview, we can shift the worldview itself. With a new (or perhaps much older) way of viewing the land, a different resulting environmental ethic(s), and a fresh narrative through which we
describe both the environment and our relation to it, new possibilities for human life on planet Earth emerge.
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