

The Greening of Heart and Mind: A Love Story

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Some environmentalists have argued that an effective ecological conscience may be rooted in a perspective that is either anthropocentric or sentiocentric. But, neither seems to have had any substantial effect on the ways in which our species treats nature. In looking to successfully awaken the ecological conscience, the focus should be on extending moral consideration to the land (wherein doing so includes all of the soils, waters, plants, animals, and the collectivity of which these things comprise) by means of coming to love the land. Coming to love the land involves coming to view the land's interests as our own—and, conferring upon the land a kind of moral patient-hood. In order to perceive the land's "subjectivity," and so, to come to love the land, we must relearn the way to look at the land by viewing its personality through the lens of he or she who can already do so, i.e., the nature writer.

It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value.

—ALDO LEOPOLD¹

True union, or love proper, exists only between living beings who are alike in power and thus in one another's eyes living beings from every point of view; in no respect is either dead for the other. This genuine love excludes all oppositions. It is not the understanding, whose relations always leave the manifold of related terms as a manifold and whose unity is always a unity of opposites [left as opposites]. It is not reason either, because reason sharply opposes its determining power to what is determined. Love neither restricts nor is restricted; it is not finite at all. It is a feeling, yet not a single feeling [among other single feelings]. A single feeling is only a part and not the whole of life; the life present in a single feeling dissolves its barriers and drives on till it disperses itself in the manifold of feelings with a view to finding itself in the entirety of this manifold. This whole life is not contained in love in the same as it is in this sum of many particular and isolated feelings; in love, life is present as a duplicate of itself and as a single and unified self. Here life has run through the circle of development from an immature to a completely mature unity: when the unity was immature, there still stood over against it the world and the possibility of a cleavage between itself and the world; as development proceeded, reflection produced more and more oppositions (unified by satisfied impulses) until it set the whole of man's life in opposition [to objectivity];

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¹ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac And Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 233.

finally, love completely destroys objectivity and thereby annuls and transcends reflection, deprives man's opposite of all foreign character, and discovers life itself without any further defect. In love the separate does still remain, but as something united and no longer as something separate; life [in the subject] senses life [in the object].

—G. W. F. HEGEL²

I

In the summer of my thirteenth year I, like I had done the previous couple of summers, spent the month of June working with my father as a rice hand. I made for quite an embarrassingly ineffectual hand, looking back. It's not that I was lazy—not especially. I was willing to do the work, if, in a less than enthusiastic manner. At the same time, my ability to effectively yield a shovel was, put as charitably as possible, not on par with that of my coworkers; I'm thinking of my father in particular, here, who was then—and, is now—by all accounts, a veritable dragline with legs. Nor did I come close to matching up with respect to strength, endurance, understanding of the nature of the job—I could go on and on about my shortcomings as a hand, actually. In hindsight, I was quite fortunate in that the foremen allowed me to put in my hours, irrespective of such impoverished skill and insight; set a line of levee gates here and there; and earn a little spending money. Of course, it helped that I'd known these employers all of my life.

My paternal uncles collectively own and operate a fairly lucrative family farm—rice, soybeans, and cotton—which comprises, for all intents and purposes, the whole of the southeastern panhandle of Jefferson County, Arkansas; the county, itself, is located in the southeastern quarter of the state. The nearest township (if you can call it that, since it more or less consists of my uncles, their families, hired hands, and a smattering of other independent farmers, exclusively) is called Reydel; and, Reydel is some twenty miles due southeast of Stuttgart, Arkansas: the proverbial buckle of this nation's "Rice Belt."

My father was working that summer—as he had for the previous ten summers, and as he would for ten more to come—in order to supplement the salary that he earned as a public school teacher. These were the days of "Reaganomics," after all, and the luxury of working a single job was one which most, especially those who had a family to support, simply could not afford. In addition to teaching, and working summers on the farm, my father worked weekends at Fred's Discount Store, stocking shelves; my mother, also an educator, served as the Dean of Students at our local high school, taught adult education courses at the community college, and worked the service desk at Wal-Mart during the evening. I say this only to point out that, while my father was perhaps the most willing of waged workers I'd ever, up until that time, or since, encountered, he was not working the rice

² G. W. F. Hegel, *The Hegel Reader*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p. 31.

fields merely for its own sake, but to support his family. I, on the other hand, was working that particular summer because I simply “*had to have*” a pair of Nike Air Jordan sneakers when school resumed in the fall—if I couldn’t have these shoes, I’d convinced myself, I might just as well die.

As stated, I worked. But I *hated* the work. There was the heat. There was the constant swatting of myriad mosquitoes. There was the marching for miles across sloughs of buckshot mud, shovel in tow; and, the wading for miles more in warm, stagnant water just deep enough to spill over the top of a pair of hip boots, and ruin one’s day. The hours were long—from sunup to sundown. Again, there was the heat. I *hated* the work.

To suggest that I made little attempt to hide this fact from my father would probably be to state the obvious; and, in so doing, to deflate, beyond recognition, the selfishness which informed much of my behavior that summer. I hated the work, and I made sure that the world heard about my hating it on a daily basis. That said, I suspect—and most certainly regret, today—that my presence during those summers added to my father’s already tremendous burden, in a significant way. Not that I could see past my own interests back then, of course. I had yet to come to the Copernican epiphany made mention of by J. Baird Callicot, wherein one realizes that he is not, in even the most local of respects, “the center of the universe.”³ My moral philosophy was of a piece with solipsism.

My father, on the other hand, had outgrown any residual egoism which might have tempered his moral deliberation and resultant actions many moons ago; and, at a much younger age, I would wager, than I will, myself. (I’m still working on it; and, the project more often than not gets the better of me.) Again, my father was working the rice fields in order to provide for our family; in order to provide for *me*. Still, he never once complained about his own lot, even casually; he seemed to enjoy his toil for toil’s sake, the way, I imagine, only a spiritual descendent of Epictetus might. This, while it inspired me at times, absolutely infuriated me at others. Misery loves company; but, not necessarily that interlocutor who is overly cordial—as, this good humor interrupts the miserable party’s humbugging. I *hated* the work. My father didn’t. So, on my more self-absorbed days (which, I’m embarrassed to say, numbered more than a handful), aside from hating the work; and making sure that my father knew good and well that I hated the work; I hated that he didn’t hate the work—and, I made this quite apparent, too.

In addition to providing a sterling example of what it means to appreciate one’s circumstances, my father offered much in the way of encouragement to me, more directly. I surmise that this is so because, firstly, the last thing he wanted to see was any needless suffering on my part—even if, as was the case here, it, and its exacerbation, was of my own making entirely; secondly, I believe that he likely saw through to the core absurdity of my “mission,” and wanted, where possible,

³ J. Baird Callicot, *Companion to A Sand County Almanac* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp. 194–95.

to facilitate my efforts as best he could: I'd committed myself to the belief that I had to work outside in the heat which I hated, when I would have given almost anything to have spent those brutally hot afternoons inside, drinking lemonade and playing Nintendo in the air-conditioning; I'd chosen to spend my summer this way in order to purchase shoes designed for use outside—shoes that I would only ever actually wear inside; because, after having spent my summer vacation in the rice fields of southeast Arkansas earning the money to buy these very shoes, I would be forever reminded that they must be “too nice to wear outside.” After all, I might get them “dirty”—and, one oughtn't to “dirty” his \$100 Air Jordans. (Rousseau never spoke truer words than when he suggested that the creation of need, and the various neuroses which accompany it, is the blight of the Modern; even Sisyphus was not so foolish as to manufacture his own boulder—but, I digress.)

One morning, after having spent the first few hours of the day patching a series of unexpected blowouts (gaping holes in the levees, caused, in most cases, by the improper regulation of the pumps and gates which water the fields), I commenced to let the universe have it, in typical fashion: “*Why is it so hot, here? Why are there so many mosquitoes, here? And, this heat—God!*” Translation: Why is it not the case that Air Jordans rain down like manna, from heaven, into the faithful hands of the righteous and sanctified?

After patiently allowing me to settle my accounts with creation for the umpteenth time, my father, as he often did, consoled me; and, in addition, he offered me some advice. “You know, son—this work isn't for everyone. There are other ways to make a buck.” Then he pointed, one-hundred yards or so, to the flora growing atop the reservoir that watered the field in which we were working. “See those? You could sell those. Instead of setting gates, with me, you could earn some money for your school clothes by selling those to local florists. You could gather as many, or as few as you wanted at a time, and take a break in the shade whenever you felt like it. I'm sure your uncles would have no problem with this—and, to sweeten the pot, you could offer them a percentage of your overall profit. [Pointing again, and nodding affirmatively,] I've known people who've sold them.” See what? Sell what? All I saw were lily pads; surely he didn't mean *those*.

My father told me that they're called “Yonkeypins”—a species of water lily which grows in delta marshlands. As the Yonkeypyn matures, its stigma hardens into a ligenous protrusion that resembles a varnished brown honeycomb, roughly three inches in diameter. Florists use this portion of the plant in many of their arrangements.

Was he serious? I can sell *those*? But, no person even *planted* those? They're just . . . just. . . . *There*. How is it, then, I wondered, that they might have any value? I was skeptical. “No, really,” my father contended, “florists will buy them. Make some calls; you'll see.” I looked back across the reservoir and saw literally thousands of lilies, just waiting to be gathered and taken to market; and, potentially, a brand-new pair of Air Jordans—“maybe two pairs, if I'm lucky!”

That night, after dinner, I crunched some numbers. Planned. Plotted. And,

considered—given a rough estimate of what I might earn by harvesting the Yonkeypines in order to sell them wholesale to local florists in Stuttgart, DeWitt, and other local communities—what my bottom line might approximate if I were to spend the next few weeks clearing a section of the reservoir *vis-à-vis* setting gates, with my father, as I'd originally planned. (The farm, I assure you, would survive without my shovel's nominal contribution.) Unable to settle upon the logistics of such an operation, however, and lured away from this essentially risky enterprise by the guarantee of monies made working in the fields, I quickly scrapped the idea. So, the next morning, it was back to patching levees. Back to the rice fields. Back to the heat. Back to work. I hated the work. "Why is it so *hot*, here? *Stupid* rice. *Stupid* Yonkeypines."

II

This account and others like it are extremely difficult to retell in the first person, for reasons which are likely as obvious as they are varied; however, such recollection has unique and powerful utility. I—like most, I imagine—cannot help but become humbled, to put it mildly, in reconsidering such events. Likewise, I often cannot help but to reconsider my own previous moral transgressions whenever I feel myself becoming impatient with persons who have yet to, to borrow from Bill DeVall and George Sessions, "mature," morally speaking, in some respect.⁴ By "moral immaturity," I take DeVall and Sessions to mean that character displayed by persons whose actions make the lives of others (broadly construed) difficult, due to some form of selfishness. Specifically, I have in mind those persons whose actions make the lives of others difficult in ways similar to those in which I made my father's, persons who mistreat others, and fail to take the interests of others into consideration, including those whom they purportedly love; and, who do so without as much as a second thought. Consider the hypothetical relationship of a man ("he") and a woman ("she"). The morally immature person is "he" who is the perpetual thirteen-year-old; the morally immature person is the moral solipsist.

Recollection of past first-person moral transgression fuels the moral imagination, and thus cultivates empathy and patience as regards one's dealings with the morally immature. It also provides the impetus for encouraging others to develop their own sphere of moral consideration; so too, to nurture their own moral sensibilities, and to become cognizant of the needs and interests of others. On the one hand, this is due to the fact that facilitating morally upright action simply seems to be the ethical thing to do, and obviously so—this understood, the morally mature, in virtue of being morally mature, will look to propagate a sense of morality in others, where this is lacking or underdeveloped; on the other hand, this is because, in so doing, "she" who instructs the morally immature is, potentially, saving this

⁴ Bill DeVall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as If Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1985), pp. 179–91.

individual from grief that he might have otherwise suffered down the road when looking back upon what would have been his own less than glowing moments as a moral agent. Here, fostering moral sensitivity in others is the upshot of having attained moral sensitivity, itself.

Put another way, the sooner the moral agent learns to empathize with and respect others, the fewer his own moral transgressions will be; hence, it is only right that the morally mature should steer the morally immature in the right direction whenever “she” witnesses him acting from some attitude wherein “he” may wrong another, as doing so will reduce his chances of becoming crushed by regret during his own forthcoming hours of moral retrospection. The morally mature doesn’t want the morally immature to feel this regret—“she” knows its sting all too well.

Perhaps, though, the morally mature cannot completely protect the immature in this manner. Given what’s been said, the recollection of one’s own moral immaturity—which involves one’s recognition of this state as such—seems to coincide with the birth of the faculty of empathy. One perceives herself as “she” who was once morally immature (i.e., one who, due to her moral solipsism, failed to empathize with some Other, and to act accordingly), and chooses, in virtue of not wanting to preserve the character and consequences which accompanies this immaturity, to grow—to extend moral consideration; thus, assuming a Humean account of ethics, morality itself flows from this recognition; from the recognition of, and a “no”-saying to, moral immaturity; from a “yes”-saying to empathizing with others, and acting from this empathy—a shift which is, if in the end guided by reason, certainly rooted in the passions.

For these reasons, one’s ability to recall his or her moral transgressions is, at times, invaluable. However, the function that such recollection plays, here, far from makes these experiences any easier to digest, even as time goes on. One might argue, in fact, that as one becomes more mature, morally speaking, such recollection becomes all the more difficult for the agent. I hate recalling the manner in which I treated my father that summer. I hate it exponentially more than that selfish thirteen-year-old whom I’ve sketched above ever actually hated the work that he was doing in those rice fields.

The melancholy, shame, and derision that adjoins these recollections is generally, eventually stymied by an appreciation for having had the opportunity to grow; to supplant the self in the account remembered with one which has overcome his, to return to the cosmological metaphor, “Ptolemaic” moral outlook (i.e., one who has become morally mature). Speaking from my own vantage, this temporary relief from self-judgment consists in mentally plotting the proliferation of my consideration of the Other as its reach has extended, first, beyond myself to my family; then on to my friends; to my community; and finally to . . . all sentient entities. With each of these moments of expansion comes the dissolution of that which formerly partitioned, however artificially, some apparent subject and object; and this, followed by the subsumption of one within the other via love and respect, empathy,

and sympathy. To borrow from an African proverb: as the moral sphere eclipses horizon after horizon, I becomes we—and, then, additional I's become we's.

But, of course, as the dialectic totters, regret soon regains the reins, and I—again, like most, I imagine—resume a posture of judgment with respect to my former self (or selves), however long-gone the instantiation(s) in question may be. At t_1 , “How could I have been so selfish and thoughtless towards my own father?” / At t_2 , “. . . toward other persons?” / At t_3 , “. . . toward my own community?” / At t_4 , “. . . toward other sentient beings?” Again, recalling those instances involving others that we've wronged due to moral immaturity is excruciating—but, as such recollection leads to further moral growth (insofar as moral growth is coextensive with the increase in one's scope of empathy), such discomfort, however deserved or undeserved, seems a necessary evil. Still, it goes without saying, the regret hurts just the same.

This, however, is somewhat beside the point. I've opened with the recollection above not in order to enumerate my more salient vices, childhood or otherwise; nor to consider the function of remorse as regards empathy; nor, even, to take stock of the specific times that my moral consideration was extended to some additional, perceived Other. Rather, the story's provision was intended, primarily, to introduce the reader to a misdeed that—much like the contemptible and selfish manner in which I treated my father, all those summers ago—I was once guilty of; and, like the behavior that I displayed that summer, something of which I am now quite ashamed; but, something of which, even one year ago, I was not: I'm speaking of the fact that, that summer, I never considered the Yonkeypin.

In calling attention to this fact, I certainly do not intend to suggest that I now feel as though my mistreatment of my father is in *any* respect on level with my disregard for the Yonkeypin. Despite having considered “egalitarian” accounts offered by Paul Taylor and others,⁵ I cannot conceive of them as being a possibility. The consideration that I grant to persons in general (*a fortiori* to family members and other intimates) is, and should be, different in kind from that which I might grant to the Yonkeypin; just as the consideration that I presently grant to self-aware human beings is different in kind from that which I grant to other, less cognitively sophisticated animals. The continuum on which those things deemed fit for moral consideration lies, need not confer equal (comparable?) consideration to each of its members; personhood, however this notion is to be cashed out (and, I'll save that discussion for another day), should play some role in providing an instrument of measure with respect to degree of consideration, here.

That said, while I find myself quite sympathetic to some aspects of “deep ecology,” and find many of the challenges which the movement presents to the anthropocentric ethic compelling, I neither implicitly nor explicitly mean to endorse any shape of

⁵ Paul W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 59–98.

egalitarian environmental ethic.⁶ I merely mean to ask, with the deep ecologist, and provide answer to, the following: is this—my apathy with respect to the wellbeing of, and “interests” had by, the Yonkeypin—too, an indication of a profound moral failing that needs to be overcome? Is this disregard, like that had for my father, another instantiation of selfishness?—an appendage leftover from an egoism (*writ large* as the anthropocentrism which permeates the West) that I (we) need excise? It seems so; as, today, recalling this event—somewhat like replaying the countless episodes in which I looked selfishly past my father’s interests—is something I’d, frankly, rather never do again; as this betrays an additional solipsistic facet of my own moral personality.

But, what does it mean when I say that I failed to take the Yonkeypin into consideration? What does it mean to take anything into consideration?

To suggest that I failed to consider the Yonkeypin is, perhaps, misleading. To be sure, I considered ways in which the Yonkeypin might benefit me. But, I never considered the Yonkeypin, *an sich*. It is as if the Yonkeypin came into existence the moment that it is was presented to me as a potential exchange value; and, just as quickly, the Yonkeypin ceased to exist as its disutility in the latter respect became apparent. Only now—at the age of thirty-one, sadly, am I coming to inquire as to whether I was right to disregard the Yonkeypin, in this way. If I was wrong to do so, as I’ve already suggested, this raises another question: if not that of “user”-to-“use value,” in what relation should I have stood to the Yonkeypin? Again, in what relation might consideration, as the notion is used here, be found?

Should I have “revered” the Yonkeypin, simply in virtue of the fact that it is a living organism?⁷ Should I have endeavored to become its “intimate”?⁸ Should I have expressed my “respect” for the Yonkeypin?⁹ Should I have “befriended” it?¹⁰ Should I, somehow, have come to “love” the Yonkeypin?¹¹

As “ought” implies “can,” this begs that I ask a more basic question, still: could I have come to revere the Yonkeypin?—become intimate with it, in some significant respect—befriended it? Could I have respected the Yonkeypin?—Could I have come to *love* the Yonkeypin? Can I, now, love the Yonkeypin? Or is talk of this kind tantamount to incoherent sentimentalism?

According to Leopold, I can come to love the Yonkeypin, and must do so—and in doing so, offer the appropriate consideration; we can, and we must come to love nature. He writes: “The extension of ethics to [the land, wherein this includes all

⁶ For further discussion of this distinction, see Kenneth Goodpaster, “On Being Morally Considerable,” *Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1978): 308–25.

⁷ Albert Schweitzer, *Philosophy of Civilization* (London: A. and C. Black, 1923), pp. 251–93.

⁸ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), p.13; Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2006), p. 33.

⁹ Taylor, *Respect for Nature*, pp. 59–98.

¹⁰ DeVall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, p. 197.

¹¹ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, p. 233.

of: soils, waters, plants, animals, and the collectivity which these things comprise] is . . . an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity."¹² Callicot reads Leopold, here, and I endorse his interpretation, as suggesting that “. . . today, the natural environment, the land, is represented as a community, the biotic community; and that, therefore, an environmental or land ethic is both possible—the biopsychosocial and cognitive conditions are in place—and necessary, since human beings collectively have acquired the power to destroy the integrity, diversity, and stability of the environing and supporting economy of nature.”¹³

As natural selection has endowed the *Homo sapiens* with the capacity to love those who are considered members of its community—hence, to show them moral consideration—and, since we are moving toward the inclusion of the land therein, °it follows that our species can come to love the land. Moreover, given the degree to which we have allowed for the degradation of the land under the watch of a wholly anthropocentric ethic (a trend which in no respect seems to be dissipating), our species must, if for no other reason than that of prudence, come to love the land, to—much like we’ve come to view the nonhuman animal—consider the land, itself, as an entity the likes of whose interests *prima facie* we are bound to respect; and, in embracing a thoroughgoing ecology, to view our own species as intrinsically connected to the land.

This view seems correct, to me, and, among other things, entails the forfeiture of any lingering claims that we, in the West, may make with respect to our purported transcendence of nature, under either religious or secular descriptions. We can come to love the land; in order to survive as a species long-term, in fact, we must. Given the presence elsewhere of what I take to be sufficient argument for this position,¹⁴ I would like to turn attention, now, to a peripheral, but nonetheless important, concept in the remainder of this paper; a notion which lies at the heart of the land ethic, itself: the “ecological conscience”—a faculty which I take to be the hallmark of moral maturation with respect to one’s approach to environmental issues.

Leopold writes, “Obligations have no meaning without conscience, and the problem we face is the extension of the social conscience from people to land,”¹⁵ and elsewhere, “No important change in human conduct is ever accomplished without the internal change in our intellectual emphasis, our loyalties, our affections, and our convictions.”¹⁶ Treating the land with the respect it demands involves, for

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 203.

¹³ Callicot, *Companion to A Sand County Almanac*, p. 195.

¹⁴ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, pp. 201–26; Callicot, *Companion to A Sand County Almanac*, pp. 186–17; J. Baird Callicot, *In Defense of the Land Ethic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 251–93; Kenneth Goodpaster and K. M. Sayre, *Ethics and the Problems of the Twenty-First Century* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1979), pp. 36–59.

¹⁵ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, p. 209.

¹⁶ Aldo Leopold, *The River of the Mother of God and Other Essays* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p. 338.

Leopold, again, coming to love the land; and coming to love the land involves coming to view the land as a member of the community; doing so necessitates a change of heart and mind. Echoing Leopold, Arne Naess suggests that a change in perspective is necessary to the realization of a land ethic; this shift “consists of a transition to a more egalitarian attitude to life and the unfolding of life on Earth.”¹⁷ DeVall and Sessions, too, speak of the necessity of cultivating “the proper attitude” towards nature, via “a shift in consciousness.”¹⁸ Thus far, I’ve only gestured as to what this “proper attitude” might be: an empathizing with, and love of, the land. Below, I offer an account of what it would mean to stand in a relation of love to the land; and, in so doing, I discuss what the successful cultivation *en mass* of such a relation might involve.

III

Above, I’ve provided a sketch of the procession of my own moral maturation, as an account wherein moral consideration was extended outward, from myself and to some Other—with each inclusion of an additional Other further removed from myself than the previous—and where this extension was the result of my having come to empathize with the Other. The scope of my consideration, again, extended, first, beyond myself to my family; then on to my friends; then to my community; and finally to . . . all sentient entities. It is in this sense that I want to suggest that I have come to “love” the Other; so, to confer moral consideration to the Other. But, it is fair to ask: is “love” really what is at issue, here? If so, what morally charged components are being imported with the term’s use?

It seems clear why the ethicist might be hesitant to ground any ethic in love, *per se*. Taylor, for instance, balks at using “love” to denote any kind of moral consideration; he writes: “. . . respect for nature,” which, for Taylor, is that wherein our moral consideration of the natural world finds its foundation, “is quite different from the love of nature. Being a moral attitude, respect is not a matter of simple personal affection or caring in the way the love of nature is.”¹⁹ While I take Taylor’s point to be a valid one, I—following Leopold and Callicot—continue, here, to use “love” to denote the proper attitude toward nature; following Hume, I’ve assumed that, irrespective of the role that reason may come to play in moral deliberation, the pull toward moral consideration is provided affectively, initially. In addition, it should be said—as will become apparent below—that I take the proponents of the land ethic to include some strong sense of respect not at all unlike that championed by Taylor in their notion, love. That said, aside its affective connotation, I intend love to involve evaluative and normative components as well.

¹⁷ Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*, trans. David Rothenberg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 91.

¹⁸ DeVall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, pp.188, 196.

¹⁹ Taylor, *Respect for Nature*, p. 90.

Returning, now, to the account with which I opened—the recollection of summers spent working in the rice fields with my father—there seems to be a very intuitive explanation for my having come to treat my father with love (and so, to confer moral consideration to him); namely, I learned to, as it were, look my father in the eye, and to recognize him for the subject that he is—a subject whose interests, simply in virtue of the fact that they, to borrow from Tom Regan, inform a cohesive life, demand consideration.²⁰ Of course, I'd already come to recognize this subjectivity in my earliest years of development; however, as described above, there were residual elements of what I've called moral solipsism that I had to purge (—that I continue to work through, today), as I matured. This, I aver, involves something like in kind to arriving at a further appreciation for, and weighting of, in this case, my father's interests, and a deeper understanding that, in some important respect, his interests are my own; a shift in moral perspective, which is born out of my coming to empathize with him, and, my becoming able to love him—of the I becoming we.

This account of the impetus of moral deliberation and action is, while certainly debatable, a fairly orthodox appeal to grounding morality in the sentiments, and empathy, an account the likes of which goes back at least as far as David Hume and Adam Smith; of the pull of emotion as regards moral consideration, the latter writes:

How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. Of this kind is pity or compassion, the emotion which we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner. That we often derive sorrow from the sorrow of others, is a matter of fact too obvious to require any instances to prove it; for this sentiment, like all the other original passions of human nature, is by no means confined to the virtuous and humane, though they perhaps may feel it with the most exquisite sensibility. The greatest ruffian, the most hardened violators of the laws of society, is not altogether without it.²¹

So, says Smith, we are predisposed to empathize with the Other, wherein we may, to borrow from the colloquialism, put ourselves in the shoes of the Other. Given this, it seems only right (considerations of partiality, aside) that my moral consideration would advance not only beyond myself and to my father, but, to my family, to my community, and, to other sentient entities: that I would come to love them. In empathizing with these “persons,” I've come to view them and their interests as variables which must enter into my moral deliberation, at all times. But, if we are

²⁰ Tom Regan, *All That Dwell Therein: Animal Rights and Environmental Action* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

²¹ Adam Smith, *The Essential Adam Smith*, ed. Robert L. Heilbroner (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1987), p. 65.

to achieve a land ethic, we need still provide answer to: what drives this extension to that Other which is the land? Wherein might I find the roots of my consideration of the Yonkeypín, for instance?—and, how might such moral sensitivity toward the land, more generally, be cultivated? Or, more simply asked: How might one come to empathize with the land?

The difficulty, here, arises with our species' seeming inability to relate to the land itself. Again, I can look my father in the eye—subsequently, I can come to grant to him subjectivity; so too, to consider his interests; speaking loosely, to *become* him. In a similar way, I can empathize with others of my own species; and even with those sentient creatures which are of a different species—as, we share common interests which involve the avoidance of pain and suffering. But, what of my relation to the land? How can I come to empathize with the land?—hence, to confer consideration on the land? I cannot, it seems, simply look the Yonkeypín in the eye, as I can with my father; as the Yonkeypín's interests (if I can even imagine it being the kind of entity which may have interests) must be wholly foreign to me.²²

A clue to answering these questions may be found in the words of Thomas Merton: “In this wilderness I have learned how to sleep again. The trees I know, the night I know, the rain I know. I close my eyes and instantly sink into the whole rainy world of which I am a part, and the world goes on with me in it, and I am not alien to it.”²³ Here Merton seems to be describing a kind of kinship which he feels with nature—a kinship not at all unlike the communitarian relations had between sentient and non-sentient entities made mention of by Leopold and Callicot. With Merton we find one who has, in virtue of coming to view nature and its constituent components as the most cordial of neighbors, come to perceive himself as at home in nature—as part of the land. For Merton, there remains nothing “alien.” Here, to return to Hegel, the Other, which is the land, comes to disclose itself to Merton “as something united [with oneself] and no longer as something separate,” as “life [in the subject] senses life [in the object].”²⁴

In coming to understand the difference between an anthropocentric perspective with respect to the land and one like in kind to Merton's, we might do well to consider the distinction made by Mike Michael and Robyn Grove-White—i.e., that of understanding the land as a “Thou” as opposed to an “It.”²⁵ Michael and Grove-White write, “[The interrelation of ‘I’-‘Thou’] entails both [parties] as subject/agents. That is, both are viewed as cognizant, reflexive, volitional beings. The

²² For an extensive treatment of the subjectivity of Nature and its implications for environmental ethics, see Eric Katz, *Nature as Subject: Human Obligation and Natural Community* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996).

²³ Thomas Merton, *When the Trees Say Nothing* (Notre Dame: Sorin Books, 2003), p. 43.

²⁴ Hegel, *Hegel Reader*, p. 31.

²⁵ Mike Michael and Robyn Grove-White, “Talking About Talking About Nature: Nurturing Ecological Consciousness,” *Environmental Ethics* (1993): 33–47.

interaction between these persons takes the form of an ‘authentic’ exchange—that is to say, a communication between two subjects.”²⁶

The development of ecological conscience, then, involves coming to grant to the land a kind of subjectivity, very loosely construed,²⁷ which, for someone who has Hegelian intuitions, results in coming to associate oneself with the land—much as, for instance, I eventually came to view my father’s interests as my own. This, in turn, results in the extension of moral consideration to the land.

Today, my father’s interests are tied up with my own to such an extent that his suffering is my suffering; or, at least, where the former is present, so is the latter (to some degree). Of a similar kind of empathy with the land, and his own experiences with this, DeVall writes: “I was angry, and felt physical pain, a kind of suffering, every time I saw a truck loaded with an old growth log rushing down the freeway to the lumber mill.”²⁸ DeVall’s empathy with the land—here, in the form of the trees—has dissolved the cut between subject and object; the tree’s interests are his interests; hence, the tree’s “suffering” is his own.

Were it the case that DeVall’s ability to empathize with the land grew out of a particular sensitivity to the land which is peculiar to him and, relatively speaking, a handful of other “ecologically minded” persons, talk of a mass adoption of the land ethic would admittedly be futile. However, to return to Leopold, there is reason to believe that the collective adoption of such an ethic by our species is “an evolutionary possibility,”²⁹ as there is every reason to believe that the *Homo sapien* may come to include the land within its conception of the community member.³⁰ Building atop Leopold’s intuitions on this matter, E. O. Wilson has argued that our species has, in fact, a genetically predisposed affinity for the living—a phenomena which he calls “biophilia.”³¹ Wilson writes: “The capacity, even the proneness [to love nonhuman life], may well be one of the human instincts,” so too “to focus upon life and lifelike forms, and in some instances, to affiliate with them emotionally.”³²

If Wilson’s theory is correct, nature has, as it were, set the table for the adoption

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁷ Some, most prominently among them—J. E. Lovelock, have gone so far as to grant the Land a kind of person-hood; this is known as the “Gaia-hypothesis.” However, in recognizing and respecting a figurative subjectivity in the land, one needn’t make this radical of an assumption. I would argue, in fact, that talk of an “ensouled” land is counterproductive—as, this kind of quasi-religious rhetoric does not resonate with the majority of persons whom the deep ecologist is trying to reach; given this, many people are “turned off” by such talk. For discussion of the Gaia-hypothesis, see J. E. Lovelock, *Gaia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

²⁸ Bill DeVall, *Simple in Means, Rich in Ends: Practicing Deep Ecology* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1988), p. 7.

²⁹ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, p. 203.

³⁰ Holmes Rolston, III, *Philosophy Gone Wild: Essays in Environmental Ethics* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1986), pp. 252–55.

³¹ Edward O. Wilson, *Biophilia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 119–40; Edward O. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 349–51.

³² Edward O. Wilson, *The Future of Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), p.134,

of the land ethic by the *Homo sapiens*, by selecting for “biophilic” traits within our species’ genome. One needn’t conclude, however, that all that is required for the collective adoption of the land ethic is a geological moment for these selected-for tendencies to emerge; and, we mustn’t, in fact, simply “sit back and wait” for the ecological conscience to awaken. The human animal needs a nudge towards ecology which, I close by suggesting, comes in the form of relearning how to look at nature. Wilson writes of just such a nudge: “It is not so difficult to love nonhuman life, if gifted with knowledge about it.”³³

In coming to recognize the complexity and elegance which inheres within the land, our species can come to love the land—and so, to treat the land with the respect which it demands. The moral maturation which involves coming to this recognition may find as its source a look at the land from the vantage of the “already-converted.” For Wilson, this amounts to viewing the land through the lens of the biologist—as, the biologist is, if anyone is, in a position to appreciate nature, aside from the consideration of what it can do for humanity. So, contends Wilson, coming to love the land involves coming to understand the land, attaining knowledge of its inner workings.

Wilson’s assertion seems correct to me, in part. However, in coming to know the land in the ways in which Wilson intends, it would seem that an unreasonable amount of the disturbance thereof may be justified. That said, I’m not sure that the biologist’s lens is the most utile with respect to converting Westerners into “lovers” of nature. The change of heart sought by the ecologist may be best brought about by looking through the nature writer’s lens. We in the West are so used to looking upon the natural world as first—in many cases, exclusively—a resource, that even minimal exposure to the writings of, for instance, the Romantic poets, John Muir, Emerson, and, contemporarily, Gary Snyder can go a long way in awaking the ecological conscience. In the writings of these and like thinkers, the reader is presented with a vantage in which he or she—through the person of the author—is looking nature directly in the eye; in some cases, for the first time. As a result, this reader stands in the best of positions for coming to recognize the Other, which is the land, as *subject*; and, then, to grow to love it.

³³ Ibid.