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

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Abstract

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

Keywords

Aldo Leopold, ecofeminism, receptivity, Nel Noddings, ethics of care.

Ecofeminism has enjoyed a bounty of publication and productivity in the thirty-five years since it became a subject of academic interest.¹

1. Two separate occurrences happened about thirty-five years ago. First, French feminist Françoise D'Eaubonne coined the term 'ecofeminism' in 1974; see D'Eaubonne 1974. (Though Karen Warren only attributed to D'Eaubonne the coining of the term 'ecological feminism' [Warren 2000: 21], we can safely credit D'Eaubonne with

However, only a handful of ecofeminist philosophers have turned concerted attention to Aldo Leopold's work, an attention that I suggest is well warranted.² Those ecofeminists who have analyzed his views differ on the extent to which Leopold's ethic is a departure from problematically masculine biases and traditions; however, they all agree that his Land Ethic is not, and does not provide a basis for, an ecofeminist ethic. I share ecofeminist commitments with these critics, but I find compelling similarities between Leopold's views and feminist philosopher Nel Noddings's prioritization of receptivity and the moral motivations provided by affection and relationship. I suggest that on balance, Leopold's views about ethics are distinctively ecofeminist-friendly in fundamental and basic senses. I also suggest that practices of caring are enhanced by engagement with Leopold's twin emphases on perceptivity and receptivity, emphases which are inadequately recognized in environmental ethics. Appreciation of Leopold's work can contribute to ecofeminist ethics, so much so that it is worth sorting out his recommendations for ethical conduct and the preconditions for their exercise.

Perceptivity and Receptivity in A Sand County Almanac

In 1938, Leopold wrote, 'Recreational development is a job not of building roads into lovely country, but of building receptivity into the still unlovely human mind' (Leopold 1966: 295). Leopold was fifty years old and a recognized authority on the importance of wilderness preservation

coining both terms; her chapter is titled 'Le Temps de l'eco-féminisme', and in the body of the work she referred to 'ecological feminism'.) Shortly thereafter, in 1975, Rosemary Radford Ruether wrote, 'women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination', influencing a generation of ecofeminist theorists, including Karen Warren (Ruether 1975: 204, in Warren 2000: xiii). Of course, insights about women and nature were expressed prior to Ruether's work, but hers was the motivation for many Anglophone philosophers to turn professional and academic attention to ecofeminism as a subject of disciplinary and interdisciplinary inquiry. (For evidence of the bountiful ecofeminist scholarship I mention, see the online bibliography of works by over one hundred different scholars just since 1990, available at www.lancs.ac.uk/staff/twine/ecofem/ecofembiblio.html.)

2. The handful includes the following four scholars: Karen Warren (see especially *Ecofeminist Philosophy* [2000]); Chaone Mallory (see her oft-cited 'Acts of Objectification and the Repudiation of Dominance' [2001]); Marti Kheel (see especially *Nature Ethics: An Ecofeminist Perspective* [2008]); and Karen Davis ('Thinking Like a Chicken' [1995]). Friendly theorists who have, at least in passing, attended to the connections between Leopold's views and ecofeminist views include Sandra Jane Fairbanks 2010; Christian Diehm 2007; and Peter Wenz 2003.

when he made this statement, but it was consistent with arguments he had been making for years against the 'modern', consumerist model of treating nature as merely here for our use. This call to build receptivity was therefore not a sharp break with previous works, but marked the beginning of a ten-year streak of Leopold's most refined and sophisticated statements about ethics, and it distilled into a single sentence a subject that clearly preoccupied him during that time.

That he did not expect to succeed to any great degree in changing others' indifference to ethical constraints in their consumption of nature may be reflected in a letter he wrote to a colleague: 'That the situation is hopeless should not prevent us from doing our best'.³ Yet he seemed to take what measures he could to encourage more holistic views of land management, including replacing his course at the University of Wisconsin, Game Management 118, with a course called Wildlife Ecology 118 (Meine 1988: 391). In doing so he continued a shift away from that of the trained devotee in natural resource management, and toward the appreciation of complexities that exceed what it may be possible for us to apprehend. As he said of the complexity of the land organism, 'Only those who know the most about it can appreciate how little is known about it... If the land mechanism on the whole is good, then every part is good whether we understand it or not' (Leopold 1966: 190).

The theme that ecologists and scientists were not yet possessed with sufficient knowledge was one he returned to often, and he recommended pursuing greater knowledge of the particular facts about one's object of study, even as he recognized the limits of factual information. Indeed, he emphasized that, at times, knowledge of facts could even detract from understanding, as revealed in his statement, 'Education, I fear, is learning to see one thing by going blind to another' (Leopold 1966: 168). Leopold's conception of understanding relied on an experiential and praxis-centered account of what it means to appreciatively perceive. Such perception was not based upon preconceived answers or action-guides. Leopold consistently described understanding as an openness to engrossing oneself in the physical presence of the object of understanding in order to begin asking the right questions. This is evinced in the first section of *A Sand County Almanac*, from the opening essay 'January Thaw', in which he followed a skunk track and never deduced the purpose of the skunk's behavior, to the closing essay 'Manitoba', in which he buried himself 'prone, in the muck of a muskrat house' for so long that he 'was starting to doze in the sun' before he saw the grebe about whose habits he hazarded only guesses (Leopold 1966: 170, 171).

3. The letter dates from January 1946, near the end of his life; see Meine 1988: 478.

The end of 'Manitoba' included an explicit recommendation as to what such active forms of engagement (and conservation education generally) must build: 'a universal curiosity to understand the land mechanism' (Leopold 1966: 202). Building curiosity and related dispositions took precedence, for Leopold, over acquisition of facts and formal education. His students attested that his pedagogical method was one of raising questions rather than imparting all the answers (Meine 1988: 397). Ever more frequently in his later works, Leopold noted that whatever ethic emerged, it would have to be internally motivated and not 'injected', for 'The thing we need must grow from within' (Leopold 1966: 210). Another way of putting this is that Leopold appealed to internal sensibilities as preconditions of ethical practice; as he said, 'obligations have no meaning without conscience... No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions' (1966: 209-10).

The important changes Leopold was recommending for conservation practice were not easy, and he believed that they would only be enduring if they were voluntary. This was reflected in his worried response about monetary rewards for private landowners' conservation: 'he today assents only with outstretched palm' (Leopold 1966: 250). Drawing a striking contrast to farmers who plant tamarack trees—'No extension bureau had offered these farmers any prize for this utterly quixotic undertaking'—he happily called their endeavor 'a Revolt' against the 'merely economic attitude toward land', and a demonstration of regard for 'the pleasure to be had in wild things' (1966: 203). In this particular essay ('Natural History'), Leopold stressed that by wild things he meant living things, and he lamented the extent to which formal education took place in laboratories filled with 'bones' (1966: 205). 'Instead of being taught to see his native countryside with appreciation and intelligence', Leopold asserted, the college student 'is taught to carve cats'; classroom lessons in anatomy were no substitute for what the student and the average citizen really needed: 'some understanding of the living world' (1966: 207-208). Key to Leopold's view was his statement that the amateur may do natural history research better than the professionally trained land manager, 'and have a lot of fun doing it' (1966: 209).

Decrying the tendency of his fellow citizens to leave conservation in the hands of bureaus or distant experts, Leopold argued that humans are best situated to correctly perceive their relationship to land when they engage it, and perhaps as importantly, when they enjoy it. The importance of fun, of play and recreation, arose repeatedly in Leopold's writing. As a young boy, Leopold learned to 'see his native countryside' from his father during pleasure trips, hunts, and hikes, and he recounted

his happy experiences in nature with family members throughout his lifetime. He expressed his position about the joy of exploration most clearly and succinctly in one of the last missives he ever penned, a two-page description of his course objectives for his wildlife ecology class in which he said he taught 'amateur exploration, research for fun, in the field of land':

The human relation to land...is, or should be, esthetic as well [as economic]... If the individual has a warm personal understanding of land, he will perceive of his own accord that it is something more than a bread-basket. He will see land as a community of which he is only a member, albeit now the dominant one. He will see the beauty, as well as the utility, of the whole, and know the two cannot be separated. We love (and make intelligent use of) what we have learned to understand... Once you learn to read the land, I have no fear of what you will do to it, or with it. And I know many pleasant things it will do to you (Leopold 1991 [1947]: 337).

This passage underscores that while Leopold appreciated the necessity of scientific knowledge, he believed such knowledge should be accompanied by affectionate sensibilities, or as he often put it, 'love'. Love recurs in Leopold's essays as both a source and a result of perceptive appreciation and greater receptivity to nature's wonders. He found it 'inconceivable...that an ethical relationship to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value' (Leopold 1966: 223). As early as 1933, he suggested two promising avenues of American enlightenment: 'One is to apply science to land use. The other is to cultivate a love of country a little less spangled with stars, and a little more imbued with that respect for mother-earth—the lack of which is, to me, the outstanding attribute of the machine age' (Leopold 1991 [1933]: 180). This is remarkably consistent with a claim he made in the year before he died: 'The ecological conscience, then, is an affair of the mind as well as the heart' (27 June 1947, in Meine 1988: 499). Cultivating an ecological conscience, then, was not merely a bookish exercise, divorced from relational and emotional attachments. The mind and the heart are both necessary for perceptivity and receptivity, and were foundational aspects of Leopold's ethic. I suggest that perceptivity and receptivity are also basic to practices of caring, which in turn are or should be of interest to feminists who endorse care ethics.⁴

4. I do not mean to give the impression that all feminist philosophers indeed endorse care ethics; feminists and care ethicists are not coextensive sets. However, those of us who identify ourselves as *ecofeminist* philosophers regularly include the insights of care ethics in our work. I suggest that *ecofeminists* who appeal to care ethics are intellectually obligated to consider the importance of basic caring concepts in Leopold's work.

Caring: Noddings's and Leopold's 'Receptivity'

Leopold's arguments for affection as a basis of ethics have affinities with feminist criticisms of moral theories that place rational duties above supposedly capricious desires. Leopold's work bears an especially profound correspondence with that of feminist care ethics, which in just three decades has reinvigorated attention to relationships, motivating passions, and direct experiences as sources and priorities of morality.⁵

Proponents of the ethics of care consider relationships central to moral life. The disposition to care for particular others and the practice of caring for others are therefore considered sources and priorities of morality. Relations give rise to obligations, according to these philosophers, and a caring ethical behavior is one that maintains connection and fosters the well-being of someone to whom a moral agent stands in relationship. Though some authors who write about care ethics have focused exclusively on human relationships, others have expanded their theories of relationality to include dependent animals (Curtin 1996) and the natural world (Warren 2000), 'in which all such relationships are ultimately nested' (Mann 2006: 136).

Leopold's writings may share the most fruitful commonalities with the work of Nel Noddings, whose early articulations of care ethics were often centrally concerned with receptivity, engrossment in relationships with encountered and particular others, and joy. Although she expressed some resistance to extending her moral circle beyond human beings, Noddings wrote compellingly and instructively about the critical importance in moral theory of inclination to particular relationships.⁶

5. Nel Noddings is widely credited with being the first to articulate care ethics in *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984). Both she and Annette Baier (1985) cite psychologist Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982) as an influence. Gilligan challenged the assumption of a traditional 'justice perspective' in moral development, which emphasized universal moral principles and impartiality as a virtue, and provided evidence that girls and women frequently employed an alternative 'care perspective' that focused on particular relationships, emotional dispositions, and sensitivity to context in moral deliberation. As Virginia Held succinctly observed, 'Feminist philosophers reading Gilligan's work found that it resonated with many of their own dissatisfactions with dominant moral theories' (2006: 28). The terminology for care varies with the author; Held's use of the term 'the ethics of care' has come into wider use than Noddings's initial formulations, 'ethic of caring' and 'care ethics'; I use the terms interchangeably.

6. See 'Caring for Animals, Plants, Things and Ideas' (Noddings 1984: 148-70). Noddings did not oppose the inclusion of animals and other beings in caring practices and relationships, but her commitment to a conception of caring as being 'received' by a 'consciousness' (1984: 170) unnecessarily limits the possibilities for caring relationships.

According to Noddings, 'Because we are inclined toward the cared-for, *we want to act*' for the sake of the cared-for (Noddings 1984: 24, emphasis added). That is, the one-caring is inclined to the particular other. Noddings further explained 'that morality as an "active virtue" requires two feelings and not just one. The first is the sentiment of natural caring. There can be no ethical sentiment without the initial, enabling sentiment' (1984: 79). Like Leopold, she granted that we can act in accord with grim duty when it is mandated by an outside entity, but she endorsed an ethic in which 'we act on behalf of the other because we want to do so', thus 'acting in accord with natural caring' (1984: 79). This 'natural caring' for the well-being of others, for both Noddings and Leopold, was based on experience and encounter.

Leopold and Noddings both argued, however, that sensory connection is not sufficient; rather, Noddings stressed both 'thinking *and* feeling', and proposed that varieties of attitudes and approaches were required for problem solving—'lateral moves' between engrossment in a relationship and abstract thinking about how to solve issues that become clearer as a result of one's attentiveness. Thus, one's relationships, or one's membership in a community, *order* one's thinking. Just as Leopold suggested that affectively motivated field experience endows the more distant and abstract ecological education of the classroom with purpose and meaning, Noddings suggested that 'we keep our objective thinking tied to a relational stake at the heart of caring' (1984: 36). Without this attentiveness to the relations that lend ratiocination its purpose, Noddings added, we can lose ourselves and that for which we were supposed to care in abstractions. When that happens, as Leopold said, 'Ideas, like men, can become dictators' (Leopold 1991 [1939]: 259).

Another point of contact between the work of Leopold and Noddings is that a person must cultivate an attentive disposition. Noddings suggested that receptivity, as a state and as a 'mode' of moral practice, 'seems to be an essential component of intellectual work... Indeed, we must settle ourselves, clear our minds, reduce the racket around us in order to enter it' (1984: 34). Receptivity so understood is not merely an instinctive well-spring, but includes practices of listening and attending that require cultivation. Her gentle urging that ethical persons 'listen, look, and feel' is reminiscent of Leopold's poetical essay, 'Song of the Gavian', in which we are granted a glimpse into a better means of growing 'the thing we need' from within:

To hear even a few notes of [the Song], you must first live here for a long time, and then you must know the speech of hills and rivers. Then on a still night, when the campfire is low and Pleiades have climbed over rimrocks,

sit quietly and listen for a wolf to howl, and think hard of everything you have seen and tried to understand (1966: 158).

This passage could be read simply as a lyrical metaphor, a pleasant but not literal recommendation. One should note, however, how much of his life Leopold spent sitting quietly in and with nature. His writings consistently demonstrated the receptivity that Noddings described as both a continual 'commitment' and a 'cessation of manipulative striving' (1984: 175, 164).

While Leopold often expressed joy about such experiences, he also appreciated that his excellences of perception were not necessarily conducive to happiness. Indeed, as he memorably put it, 'One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds' (Leopold 1966: 197). That more acute forms of perception may lead not only to joy but to anguish is particularly evident in his memory of a trip to the Sierra Madre in 1937: 'It was here that I first clearly realized that land is an organism and that all my life I had seen only sick land, whereas here was a biota still in perfect aboriginal health' (Leopold 1987 [1947]: 285-86). These experiences led Leopold to observe that the very land which conservationists had worked so hard to preserve in the United States was 'so badly damaged that only tourists and others ecologically color-blind, can look upon them without a feeling of sadness and regret' (1937: 239; in Flader 1974: 27).

Receptivity to the realization of one's own failures as a conservationist is praiseworthy, but coupled with perceptivity, may yield full awareness that neither oneself nor one's land is flourishing. We should not conclude, therefore, that receptivity is worth cultivating because it leads to happiness. Instead, the pleasures to be had in nature, in recreational fun and aesthetic appreciation are good partly because they incline one to be receptive, to cultivate attentiveness and practices of caring. Leopold's eloquent depictions of canoeing on a singing river and seeing the Pleiades climb over rimrocks are instructive reminders that such cultivation is possible.

Feminist philosophers of care advance arguments for the value of receptivity to a moral life. Leopold's works provide us with practical means to cultivate such receptivity in relation to the natural world, and offer possibilities for enhanced forms of connection to the lands upon which we depend. The ecofeminist philosophers I discuss in this article express endorsement of key aspects of care ethics.⁷ Given the

7. Marti Kheel presents a 'holist philosophy that incorporates care and respect' in the service of an 'ecology of care' (2008: 207-208). Karen Warren offers a 'version of ecofeminist ethics as "care-sensitive ethics"' (2000: 97). Mallory does not appeal to the

commonalities in the approaches and aims of Leopold's holistic Land Ethic and a feminist care ethic, one might expect that ecofeminists would embrace Aldo Leopold as a sort of philosophical ally. This has not been the case in ecofeminist scholarship to date, and the reasons why are worth exploring.

The Small Intersection of Ecofeminism and Leopold Scholarship

The three ecofeminist scholars who have devoted the most concerted attention to Leopold's work, Marti Kheel, Chaone Mallory, and Karen Warren, have acknowledged his 'invaluable contributions' to wider appreciation of human 'co-membership' in ecological systems, and to 'ecological principles and nature's fragility'.⁸ Yet they also have agreed that his Land Ethic is not, and does not provide a basis for, a feminist ethic, although their critical appraisals differ.

Kheel has claimed Leopold's views are *masculinist*, that is, biased at their foundation in favor of the priorities of a cultural ideal of masculinity.⁹ At the other end of this critical spectrum, Warren has asserted that there are 'grounds of commonality between a Leopoldian Land Ethic and an ecologically informed feminist philosophy' (2000: 170). Occupying a middle ground, Mallory has suggested Leopold's writings 'may unwittingly promote an attitude of domination toward the nonhuman world, due to his frequent and unregenerate hunting' (2001: 59), but Mallory does not conclude as Kheel does that Leopold's hunting was 'merely a different manifestation of the masculinist orientation' (Kheel 2008: 110).¹⁰

language of care but her philosophical work proceeds from related priorities, including the centrality of direct, embodied, and concrete experiences; see especially Mallory 2009.

8. Mallory celebrates Leopold's 'invaluable contributions' (2001: 59); Warren (2000) attends especially closely to humans as co-members in her fourth chapter; Kheel (2008: 12) is the source of the last passage.

9. My paraphrasing of Kheel's use of 'masculinist' is designed to cover the ways in which many ecofeminists use the term, in order to show connections between views; I cannot in this article do justice to her more careful elaboration and history of masculinity and its related concepts. Kheel defined her use of the term precisely: 'I use the term "masculinism" in this study to refer to an *ideology* that endorses the explicit or implicit belief in the superiority of a constellation of traits attributed to men...a culturally exalted *hegemonic ideal*, which has exerted a powerful influence on Western culture' (2008: 3, emphasis hers).

10. In personal communication, Mallory has affirmed that she sees herself as critically sympathetic to Leopold, and not quite occupying the same position as Kheel (personal communication, 5 June 2010).

I disagree that Leopold's perspective was so fundamentally masculinist that his work perpetuated or legitimated an unjustified domination of the natural world. My own views build upon Warren's interpretation, which suggested that ecofeminism has contributions to offer a Leopoldian Land Ethic, and vice versa. Warren's insights, when coupled with my emphasis on the concordance between Leopold's and Noddings's prioritization of receptive and perceptive practices, provide sufficient reason to see Leopold's work as a basis for an ecofeminist ethic. Before explaining my more sympathetic account, however, I take up the views of the two ecofeminist philosophers at the more skeptical end of the spectrum.

Leopold and the Masculinist View

In her book *Nature's Ethics*, Marti Kheel contended that Leopold exhibited masculine biases that were not entirely reflective or well-justified, and these biases were 'foundational' to his philosophy and worldview (Kheel 2008: 110). Moreover, she argued of the conservation movement more broadly that, 'in expanding their moral allegiance to the larger "whole"', that is, in more perceptively appreciating ecological goods and holistic systems, the writings of conservationists still 'reflect a masculinist orientation that fails to incorporate care and empathy for individual other-than-human animals' (Kheel 2008: 2). In 'Thinking like a Mountain or Thinking Like a "Man"?' Kheel argued that Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic, in particular, was not 'a substantive break with the earlier ideas of the conservation movement', but instead 'merely a different manifestation of the masculinist orientation' (Kheel 2008: 110). She observed, for example, that Leopold's 'emphasis on the central importance of sport hunting' both reflected and 'perpetuated a masculinist orientation that subordinates affective ties to individual beings to larger, more enduring constructs' (2008: 129). Kheel noted particularly 'that Leopold's lifelong love of hunting, with its masculine allure, was not incidental to his philosophy, but rather foundational to it' in a way that results in failures of attention to gender, to care, and to individuals, failures antithetical to ecofeminist principles (Kheel 2008: 110).

Kheel's objections are focused on the apparent conflict between Leopold's statements of regard for living nature, and his enthusiastic reports regarding his wounding and killing of individual animals. Kheel thinks it is problematic that Leopold seemed to perceive no disparity at all between his ethical recommendations—that his University of Wisconsin students learn from living creatures, that one must appreciate with humility the value of every part of a land system, and that perception

requires much 'living in and with'—and his hunting practices which were, arguably, recreational (Leopold 1966: 180).¹¹

Indeed, Leopold would seem to be at his least reflective when explicitly endorsing the importance of hunting to boys and the goodness of playing Daniel Boone, experiences that were so formative in his own early life. Similarly, ecofeminists would question Leopold's statement that he had 'three sons' for whom a future wild place to hunt will be important (Leopold 1966: 233); the likelihood that he wrote this in mindfulness of his largely male audience suggests that he embraced and perpetuated a manly identity as a hunter—an ideology that he apparently felt was entirely compatible with having women in the family (his wife and two daughters) who hunted as well.

Leopold exhibited little or no interest in deeply reflecting upon gender as a fundamental organizing category of human experience, though it is indisputable that he invoked gendered images in the course of his writings. Perhaps it is telling that he invoked gendered images more often in the course of writing about hunting than in the course of his other descriptive works. Although he wrote that 'hunting fever is endemic in the race', his focus in most places is much more narrowly framed: for instance, it is 'a son of a Robinson Crusoe [who] would be pretty sure to hunt or fish' (Leopold 1966: 233, 232), a 'boy' who 'goes Daniel-Booneing' and a 'farmer boy' who tends traps in re-enactment of the fur trade (Leopold 1966: 211, 212). One is hard-pressed to find an illustrative example featuring a girl in any of Leopold's work.¹²

Although his essays about killing deer, ducks, and grouse abound, charitable readers of Leopold may point for counterevidence to the more famous essay, 'Thinking Like a Mountain', in which one could argue Leopold self-consciously addressed the intersection of wolf-hunting and the Land Ethic. In this essay, Leopold described his youthful experience with shooting a wolf, on the assumption that fewer wolves meant more deer, and 'a hunter's paradise'; as he watched her die, he sensed that

11. Like Kheel, I consider Aldo Leopold to be a recreational hunter, at least during the time he spent in Wisconsin. I find no evidence in his biographies that as a salaried employee of the university, he relied on hunting for food or survival. He *was* devoted to efforts to control deer populations, which one could certainly argue were and are necessary in the absence of natural predators, but these efforts do not appear to constitute the bulk of his personal hunting. Leopold routinely emphasized the personal and cultural values of hunting as a sport, as a primitive drive, and as a hobby.

12. Kheel has catalogued Leopold's gendered images in detail. As part of her larger argument about Leopold's masculinist commitments, she contends that 'sport hunting served to symbolically link a community of boys and men across the generations' (Kheel 2008: 125).

killing the wolf was bad for the mountain on which he shot her (Leopold 1966: 138). Yet Kheel pointedly rejected the possibility that shooting the wolf constituted a turning-point in Leopold's appreciation of the lives of individual animals. Rather, she argued, Leopold used the wolf as a narrative device, showing little attention to her particular suffering. For Kheel, then, the wolf in the story was reduced to a psychological prop, a means for conveying a perceptual shift, rather than an end in herself (Kheel 2008: 114). This interpretation is consistent with her overall analysis, in which she concluded that in Leopold's writings all individual animals were reduced to props or members of 'crops' with no moral relevance (2008: 119).

I suggest that Kheel over-interpreted occasions in Leopold's essays in which individual beings may, indeed, be mere narrative devices, and took these as representative of Leopold's attitudes toward all individual animals. Why this is so is clear: Kheel tends to highlight only the occasions on which Leopold wrote about the good of the whole of nature in a way that 'sacrifices' the good of individual members (Kheel 2008: 129). She selectively quotes from Leopold's pro-hunting sentiments in his early works (2008: 116), yet she does not engage with other examples from Leopold's descriptive nature-writing. In the first essay of *A Sand County Almanac* ('January Thaw'), for example, Leopold imagined the point of view of a skunk whose particular track he followed curiously, a meadow mouse, and a rough-legged hawk; he wrote of the skunk, 'I wonder what he has on his mind; what got him out of bed?' (Leopold 1966: 5). In another essay ('Good Oak'), Leopold mourned the death of an old tree, describing its rings as the 'chronology of a lifetime' (1966: 10). Many other examples could be added, which makes it difficult to place him in Kheel's individual-disregarding frame. 'An oak is no respecter of persons', perhaps, but this person was a respecter of an individual oak (Leopold 1966: 10).

Leopold as Anthropocentric Hunter?

I agree with Kheel that hunting was central to Leopold's notions of masculine identity, but whether his hunting or his conception of manhood was foundational to his philosophy is less certain. Ecofeminist philosopher Chaone Mallory provides an alternate interpretation, for she does not conclude that Leopold's Land Ethic is intrinsically masculinist: 'There is nothing in his explicit and direct formulation of the more philosophical sections of the Land Ethic which would suggest an attitude of domination and exploitation... It is not my intention to suggest that Leopold's work is of no value because of notions it might contain' (Mallory 2001: 82, 83). Mallory concurs with Kheel in her criticism that

for Leopold to participate so enthusiastically in hunting, he must first have 'accepted and endorsed anthropocentrism to a degree that is incompatible with the sort of large-scale reform of attitudes toward nature which environmental ethicists', including Leopold, 'hope to bring about' (2001: 63). But Mallory maintains that a conflict remains between Leopold's ethic, which she characterized succinctly as 'repudiation of an attitude of anthropocentric superiority and the cultivation of respect for the moral standing of natural entities', and his advocacy and pursuit of recreational hunting (2001: 61-62). She says, 'To persist in deliberately stalking an animal who poses little or no threat to one's person and whom one does not need to kill in order to be assured of being fed', that is, to endorse sport hunting (instead of hunting solely out of necessity) as Leopold did, 'is to sublimate the interests of the animal to one's own for a purpose which is justifiable on strictly anthropocentric and self-serving grounds' (2001: 65).

It is out of the scope of this paper to review Leopold's corpus and establish that he valued sport hunting more than other varieties of hunting in which he and humanity generally engage, including subsistence hunting and ecologically motivated hunting. I content myself with the observations that Leopold was not dependent on hunting for food most of his own life, and he was not keenly interested in hunting for the purposes of ecological harmony for the first third of his life. Despite my agreements with some of Kheel's and Mallory's arguments, especially regarding Leopold's inattentiveness to his gender biases, and his apparent assumption that killing individual nonhumans for sport was *prima facie* permissible, I suggest that Kheel and Mallory err in at least two ways.

First, Mallory joined Kheel in narrowly focusing on Leopold's holistic ecology. Both of them largely neglected his appreciation of individual nonhuman entities. Karen Warren captures this well: 'It is a disservice to Leopold to suggest that his often passionate descriptions of nature are not about discrete objects, in all their glory as discrete objects' (2000: 163), and therefore, 'While Leopold indeed made "wholes" morally considerable, he did not thereby make individuals morally inconsiderable' (2000: 164).¹³

13. Warren even calls such a (mis)reading of Leopold 'disingenous': 'One drawback of ecological holism is its tendency to view animals *solely* as members of an ecological "net of biospherical relationships". They forget that animals are also individuals, with sentience, interests, desires, and needs. Leopold knew this. It would be a seriously disingenuous reading of, for example, the famous wolf passage, to assume otherwise' (2000: 170). Like Kheel and Mallory, however, Warren rejects Leopold's

Second, although I am persuaded by Kheel and Mallory that Leopold's hunting practices and related writings serve as evidence that he had some sexist or anthropocentric biases, they overemphasize the role his love of hunting played in his philosophical and ecological work, to a degree that elides the more fundamentally important aspects of his ethic that I have emphasized—perceptivity and receptivity. I suggest his love of hunting is not a critical component of his ecological philosophy; even if it was fundamental to his own development as a thinker, it is not ultimately the most basic or important aspect of his body of work.

Yet in arguing for the separability of Leopold's views regarding hunting from his values of perceptivity and receptivity, which rely on moral psychology and cultivation of mental and physical habits, I do not mean to dismiss the relevance of his lifelong and formative hunting experiences to his development of those values. Mary Zeiss Stange's arguments that hunting is crucial to habits of perceptivity, for both Leopold and for herself, are instructive. Stange, an ecofeminist theorist, religious studies scholar, and active hunter, contends that hunting is foundational to Leopold's ethic and indeed any adequate appreciation of nature. Stange approvingly quoted Leopold's 'four categories of outdoorsmen: deer hunters, duck hunters, bird hunters, and non-hunters', which exhibit 'four diverse habits of the human eye. The deer hunter habitually watches the next bend; the duck hunter watches the skyline; the bird hunter watches the dog; the non-hunter does not watch' (Leopold 1966: 223-24). In reference to these four types of perception, Stange asserted that Leopold was not 'talking merely about alternate methods of nature appreciation. Habits of eye are also habits of mind. The way one engages one's natural surroundings are also the way one engages ideas' (Stange 1997: 3). Indeed, Stange detailed the perceptual goods that accrue to the hunter's habits of mind, the 'mode of awareness' that is fostered during the long stretches of a hunter's time when he or she is not firing of a weapon. She also often held up her own hunting experiences as examples, explaining how her own basic perceptions of nature were altered, deepened, and complicated, and that even her scholarship and argumentative style were affected by her experiences as a hunter; her inquiry 'is deliberate, stealthy, and seldom moves in a straight line' (1997: 11).

As a feminist, Stange advocates for the value of women's hunting as a direct challenge to longstanding stereotypes of women as nonviolent, passive, innocent, and decorative (Stange 1997: 2). She sees these

largely uncritical advocacy of recreational killing (2000: 170). She does not reject hunting for ecological or survival purposes.

stereotypes as a product of the oppression of women, yet reinforced by some ecofeminists who exhibit 'deep ambivalence about destructive power in female hands' (1997: 76). She argues that 'as long as aggressive power is defined as male, and passivity as female, the two halves of the human species are going to be conceptually at odds not only with each other, but also (though in different ways) with the dynamic realm of non-human nature' (1997: 76). Stange urges ecofeminist attention to the image of 'woman the hunter' as a 'necessarily disruptive figure', troubling facile descriptions of the desire to kill as a masculine bias and an unreflective embrace of cultural traditions (1997: 2). She continues the ecofeminist tradition that calls for humans to break 'down the artificial boundary between human and nonhuman nature, through recovering a sense of ourselves as beings in and of this world' (1997: 120). Hunting, in Stange's view, is then intimately linked with being receptive to nature, while at the same time being cognizant of one's inseparability from nature. If one finds these arguments convincing, then hunting is perhaps the best, even the only, source of honest appreciation of nature, and its rhythms of life and death. Although in Stange's account not everyone ought to hunt, society is best off when it 'perceives, and celebrates, the literal and symbolic value of the hunt', and outdoor practices imagined to be less violent or consumptive fail to function as equally effective 'agents of awareness' of our dependence on the earth (1997: 7-8).

Cultivating Ethics of Perception

I grant that Leopold's hunting experiences are not extricable from *his* habits of perception, but I suggest that hunting experiences are not the only or the best sources for the cultivation of perceptive habits.¹⁴ The more pressing priority is Leopold's focus (whether through hunting or other means) on cultivating practices of appreciation by being in and with nature. I am keen to locate reasons for fellow citizens and future cohabitants of my modern world to care about nature, regardless of whether they hunt. As Stange remarked, even in our modern and

14. Here hunters and non-hunters may have to agree to disagree. Stange tends to say, more first-personally, that in *her* experience, hunting is the best and, for some perceptions, the only source of natural insights; she approvingly quotes environmental philosopher Paul Shepard's statements that meat can be 'the best of foods' in its embodiment of life and death, and that 'the hunter is our agent of awareness' of the necessity of human dependence upon nature (Stange 1997: 7, 8). I remain unpersuaded that hunting is a necessary element of 'much living in and with nature' (Leopold 1966: 180) for profound perceptivity, even as I appreciate that Stange's and Leopold's highly attuned perceptions are in great part the result of their hunting lives.

suburbanized culture we can 'stray back into the woods', and I agree that 'our very lives and souls may depend on it. They key question, then, is how we go about doing it' (1997: 7).

Warren recommended that we do so by approaching natural experiences with 'an attitude of loving perception', rejecting interests in domination and control in order to appreciate differences between the relations in ecological relationships (Warren 2000: 104). This applies to any activity: 'When one climbs a rock as a conqueror, one climbs with an arrogant eye. When one climbs with a loving eye, one constantly "must look and listen and check and question"' (2000: 104). Warren's view, like Noddings's, includes elements of caring ethics and an emphasis on receptivity, and she recognized the common ground between ecofeminism and Leopoldian Land Ethics, advocating that these schools of thought should engage in ongoing dialogue and coalition. She also frequently suggested that the most central premises of Leopold's outlook should be part of any genuine environmental ethic. However, a main aim of Warren's work has been to establish, as necessary to 'a conceptually adequate environmental ethic', the eradication of oppressive categories 'and the creation of a world in which difference does not breed domination and oppression' (2000: 92, 93). She explains:

According to ecofeminist philosophical analysis, the domination of women, other human Others, and the domination of nature are 'justified' by an oppressive and, at least in Western societies, patriarchal conceptual framework characterized by a logic of domination. Failure to notice the nature of this connection leaves at best an incomplete, inaccurate and partial account of what is required of a conceptually adequate environmental ethic (Warren 2000: 92).

Attending to such connections is critical to an ecofeminist ethic. To the extent that all three of the authors I have surveyed agree that Leopold is not philosophically occupied with attention to interrelated oppressions and connections between forms of unjustified domination, and even exhibited some failures of critical attention to traditional masculine conceptions, his ethic cannot be the basis of a comprehensive feminist ethic.

Ethics requires some preconditions of its own, however. The foundation of Leopold's emergent philosophy, especially evident in the writing he accomplished in his last ten years of life, was the urgency with which he begged attention to perceptivity and a quality of understanding that was not reducible to either economic value or scientifically educable facts. Instead, perception and understanding would be, importantly, conducive to and mutually reinforcing with receptivity. The prior condition of an attentiveness that entails 'intellectual humility' was, for Leopold, the complex product of both personal, direct experiences in

nature and education in the scientific facts of ecological interdependence.¹⁵

Taking the recommendation to build receptivity (in oneself and in others, depending on his audience) to be the core of his philosophy yields a different interpretation of many of Leopold's essays; an interpretation he may not have always intended but a fruitful one that instructs us to live in and with nature. Read through this lens, I find new value in essays like 'Red Legs Kicking', which celebrated the thrills Leopold experienced as a boy the first time he shot a duck. He described his 'unspeakable delight when my first duck hit the snowy ice with a thud and lay there, belly up, red legs kicking' an image which non-hunters like me may find off-putting at first (Leopold 1966: 129).¹⁶ Seen as a straightforward endorsement of hunting as enjoyable, the essay may fail to move those who find offensive such a description of an animal's suffering. Seen as another anecdote from a lifetime of building receptivity, Leopold's essay drew connections between the experience and an enduring love of the natural things associated with the direct experience: 'I could draw a map today of each clump of bunchberry and each blue aster that adorned the mossy spot where he lay, my first partridge on the wing. I suspect my present affection for bunchberries and asters dates from that moment' (1966: 129). If we ourselves are receptive to the ways hunting fostered Leopold's own love of the land, then whether we hunt or not, we can all read essays like 'Red Legs Kicking' with appreciation for the importance of the encounter, the author's evident joy as a motivation for caring, and the reinforcement of enduring affection through personal experience. I find this line of inquiry to be the most promising for developing an ecofeminist-friendly interpretation of Leopold's work.

15. Although the idea of intellectual humility was discussed in different ways throughout Leopold's work, I pull this use of the phrase from his essay 'Defenders of Wilderness' (1966: 279). The inseparability, for Leopold, between direct natural experience and scientific education is especially evident in the last section of Part IV of the *Sand County Almanac*, 'Wilderness', which includes his argument for the necessity of recreation, especially 'canoeing and packing', and his arguments for scientific utility, especially the preservation of wilderness as a control or baseline of previously healthy land (1966: 270, 274).

16. 'Although duck hunters understand this delight, many nonhunters do not', according to ethnographer Carmen McLeod, and my conversations with nonhunters about this essay coheres with that pithy observation (McLeod 2007: 152). The thrill of achievement is understandable, but remembering fondly the death-throes of a suffering animal, as Leopold did in this passage, is not always imaginatively entered into with ease.

Ecofeminist philosophers correctly emphasize the importance of practice over theory in learning and doing ethics; early articulations of care ethics emphasized the roles of direct encounters, particular relationships, feelings of attachment, and motivations of pleasure and joy. We should recognize the extent to which Leopold identified these same priorities well before most ecofeminists did, and we should acknowledge, and if possible emulate, his effectiveness at embedding ethical arguments in richly illustrative narratives. The high values of receptivity and perceptivity were already integrated into Leopold's nature writing; identifying the consonance of his insights with those of ecofeminists renews my hope that caring and sensitive practices are cultivatable in natural settings, for ecological purposes. Leopold's urgent, sometimes mournful but often cheerful recommendations to slap a canoe on the water, to stand still and watch a grebe dance, to look and listen, to live in and with nature, are necessary aids in understanding how to build receptivity to nature in oneself and in future generations. Ecofeminists have largely neglected Leopold's work, but his is a compelling combination of philosophical theory and writing from life, evoking the emotions that theorists describe as morally motivating, but rarely inspire. The essays in *A Sand County Almanac* are valuable accounts of particular, deeply felt encounters, offering regular recommendations for trying out similar adventures, and extending real possibilities for excellent praxis. It is difficult to build receptivity in the still unlovely human mind, to bring distracted and inattentive fellow citizens to care about their natural world. The situation may be hopeless. Yet when I read Leopold, I am encouraged, and believe it is worth the effort to try.

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