

Aldo Leopold and his land ethic

People



Born on January 11, 1887, Aldo Leopold grew up in Iowa, Burlington. He became interested in the environment and natural history when he was still a small boy. Most of the time, he was involved in observing and drawing the features of his surroundings. He attended Lawrenceville Prep school in New Jersey, Burlington and Sheffield Scientific School in Yale (Meine 6). He enrolled at Yale Forestry School and graduated with masters in 1909. Yale Forestry School was the first School in the United States to offer forestry. After graduation, he got actively involved in Arizona with the U.

S. Forest Service. The whole of Arizona was under his docket and he became a great conservationist of the environment. Aldo viewed land as an organism which has life. In New Mexico, he worked with Carson National Forest where he became the Supervisor at the age of 24 in 1924 (Meine 6). He helped in the conservation of Gila National Forest in 1922. He was among the people who proposed the conservation of this forest. During his tenure with the Forest Service, he persuaded the department to conserve areas not meant for roads as wilderness. This was known as the wilderness concept.

He was against the subdivisions of these areas for the purpose of recreation such as camping sites, private use and for building homes. He argued that such actions were based on self interest. He, therefore, disagreed with the idea of utilitarianism of people like Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot who were also conservationists. Pinchot and Roosevelt believed that people can use the environment while at the same time renew it for the future generations. In his opinion, land was meant to be used by the public not set aside as reserves.

Aldo's idea came into reality when the recommendations were accepted and the Gila region became a wilderness area. This happened long before the wilderness act was established and enacted (Meine 29). Aldo Leopold traveled widely and continued with his work of conservation and ecological studies. He was involved in wildlife management and he later published a book in this field in 1924. He was transferred to Madison where he worked as an associate director with the U. S. Forest Products Laboratory in Wisconsin. The laboratory was involved in research on behalf of the U.

S. Forest Service. He held onto this position till the time of his death. In 1928, Aldo Leopold taught at University of Wisconsin. He was to make the students to understand the land and enjoy what he taught. Some of the assignments that he gave mainly involved land puzzle which required the students to understand the interaction between the different components of land such as land use, plants, animals, soil and the changes that take place. Aldo Leopold wrote several articles and books which mainly focused on human's relationship to the natural environment.

He described how man views the environment (Meine 7) During his work in Mexico, Aldo Leopold was assigned the duty of hunting down wild animals such as lions and bears. The natives in Mexico killed the predators because they attacked their livestock and caused major losses. Leopold believed that the predators were important in that they helped in ensuring a balance of nature. His concept helped in preservation and repopulation of bears and lions in the wilderness areas of Mexico (Flader 26). He was actively involved in the management and conservation of wildlife and in the wilderness system.

He believed that the wildlife in America had a future but this entirely depended on decisions of farmers and the owners of the land. He fought for the preservation of the habitats by everyone rather than leaving the task to laws that only protected particular species only. He was involved in the formation of the Wilderness Society that was mainly involved in the expansion and protection of these areas. In his book, *Game Management* which he wrote in 1933, he explains the important methods of wildlife management. He further writes on the techniques to help in restoring these populations.

His work contributed to his success since he was appointed the chairman of Department of Game management at the University of Wisconsin. This department encompassed several fields such as; ecology, zoology, forestry, education and agriculture. He was known as the father of wildlife conservation and a hero in Wisconsin. Aldo Leopold was a scientist, a teacher and a renowned writer (Newton 43). His family greatly supported him in his efforts to conserve the environment. In 1935, they bought and restored a degraded farm in Wisconsin near Baraboo (a place known as the sand counties).

Their work involved planting pine trees and monitoring the changes that took place afterwards. This further inspired Aldo to do his work even more. He believed that tools for destruction can also be used as tools for rebuilding the landscape. Through his entire life, he was mainly involved in conservation movement. He frankly criticized the injustices that the natural environment was subjected to (Newton 66). Aldo Leopold died of heart attack on 21st April 1948 when he was trying to put off a fire which was about to burn his farm.

His essays were later compiled and published in a collection which was titled, A Sand County Almanac. It mainly involved the conservation of the environment and has greatly been respected. It gives guidelines on how the environment should be handled. His legacy has for a long time been informative and an inspiration to many generations. It has been an eye opener on how people should view the natural environment and the way to preserve it. The natural world is a community where every person belongs to (Meine 51). Philosophy of Land Ethic This concept was developed by Aldo Leopold.

It dates back in Iowa on the shores of River Mississippi where he was interested in the natural environment. Aldo appreciated what he saw in the environment as he was adventuring the forests and rivers in Iowa. His strong attachment to the environment drove him into studying forestry at Yale school. He suggests that it is a moral duty to take care of the land rather than the fact that you expect to benefit from it (Meine 56). The land ethic transforms man to be a citizen and just a member to the land community rather than a conqueror. It commands respect for such a community together with its members.

The land ethic basically defined the community in a broader aspect to involve waters, soils, animals and plants. The land, therefore, was a community. He describes the degradation that the environment has been subjected to such as; soil erosion, the extermination of plant and animal species that were considered beautiful. He notes that it would be difficult to control or alter these changes. A land ethic may not alter the use or

management of the available resources. However, it affirms that they should continue existing as they were in their natural environment (Leopold 204).

In his concept of land ethic, he described conservation as a harmonious state between human and the land just as is the case of harmony between friends. The land is an organism which is treated as one unit and encompasses everything inside or above the earth. Every component of the land is important and should not be abolished. Leopold believed that conservation should be done in all areas but changes can be made but with caution. It is not possible to be involved in water conservation while at the same time the ranges are being wasted.

He further argues that a person cannot love game hunting whereas he hates the predators (Leopold 145). According to Leopold (153), the land acts as a source of livelihood for people. It is therefore the duty of everyone to ensure that the beauty of biotic community is maintained in a stable manner. However, most of them do not take part in its conservation. In forestry, for example, there has been continuous devastation due to felling of trees for the purposes of selling. Leopold argues that land is seen as a commodity that is owned by people rather than a community where they belong.

This is the reason why it is being abused, (Leopold 153). Conclusion Leopold was a significant figure whose work became useful in many generations that followed. His concepts and philosophies have been applied in efforts to conserve the environment and wildlife. It acted as a motivation and an eye opener to people so that they can understand the environment where they live and take it as a personal responsibility to take care of it. His work paved

way to other environmental philosophers and conservationists who have applied his ideas to help in the environmental conservation. Works cited

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