

Environmental ethics

[Philosophy](#)



Following the beginning of the industrial revolution, various environmentalists and philosophers began to speak out about our relationship with nature, and how we should treat it. Each person views differ but there is no doubt that all impacted the environmentalists of the future. This essay will look at three main players in environmental ethics: Immanuel Kant, Aldo Leopold and John Muir. All three of these men had different arguments for preserving the earth, and they all had different worldviews.

All three of them have all had significant impacts on environmental ethics, with views that are still relevant, if not more relevant, today. Immanuel Kant was born in 1724 in Prussia. He was the fourth of nine children. Before he started his major philosophical works, he was a popular teacher and a successful author. Kant pointed out that we all shape our experience of things through the filter of our mind. The mind shapes that experience, and among other things, Kant believed the concepts of space and time were programmed into the human brain, as was the notion of cause and effect.

We never have direct experience of things, the noumenal world, and what we do experience is the phenomenal world as conveyed by our senses. These observations summarize Kant's views upon the subject-object problem. Kant calls practical "everything that is possible through freedom", and the pure practical laws that are never given through sensuous conditions but are held analogously with the universal law of causality are moral laws. Reason can give us only the "pragmatic laws of free action through the senses", but pure practical laws given by reason a priori dictate "what ought to be done".

His ideas influence environmental ethics, where their emphasis is in terms of progress and it can be applied in today's ever changing world because he settled and moved philosophy beyond the debate between the rationalists and empiricists. He uses the natural resources wisely for the greatest good for most people. Deontological or "duty ethics" is represented by, among others, Immanuel Kant who wanted to structure ethics as consisting of a set of rules that one never ought to break.

For example. Another version of duty ethics was presented by John Rawls with one single procedure: imagine, you don't know who and where and in which position you are after having decided on an ethical rule - when you can accept the rule, no matter which one of the group of afflicted people you are, it is a good rule. Aldo Leopold was a conservationist, forester, philosopher, educator, writer, and outdoor enthusiast. He once noted, "Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land." His belief in the sustainability of natural systems was clear, as he wanted farming to be productive but not interfere with natural systems. He was a life long student of the environment.

Although he was not formally trained in philosophy, he created the concept of "Land Ethic." Essentially, Leopold believes that humans need a thought shift towards the land, and need to embrace it. Without this transformation, it is impossible to have compassion for the environment. This states that we must consider humans as "ecological beings" rather than self-interested. Humans have ethics to something they know or have an understanding of, he writes, "we can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel,

understand, love or otherwise have faith in. In addition, he believes that everyone needs an ecological conscience.

In conclusion, Leopold says people need an emotional change. We must create a connection with the ecosystems. The only way for there to be a change in the ecosystem, would be emotionally. His ideas were well beyond his time, however have become extremely applicable to every human today. He was a brilliant man and will forever change peoples outlooks on environmental ethics. John Muir is a Scottish-American Naturalist born on April 21, 1838. He was a philosopher and early advocate of Wilderness preservation in the United States.

His collection of essays, letters and books telling of his adventures in nature, especially in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California, majorly influenced his work and his environmental philosophies. His activism helped preserve the Yosemite Valley and Sequia National Park. He founded the Sierra Club, which is one of the most important conservation organizations of the United States, and his petitioning is responsible for the National Park bill that was passed in 1890. He has often been referred to the Father of National Parks. Steven J.

Holmes even stated that Muir has become "one of the patron saints of twentieth-century American environmental activity," both political and recreationally. Muir's experiences in nature, and his life long dedication to wilderness protection have greatly influenced his environmental philosophies. Muir believed that "wild is superior". Muir's philosophies were greatly affected by scripture, and his writings became a synthesis of natural

theology. He believed that nature was imperative for the whole and true development of the human spirit.

He believed that humans are strongly drawn to nature, and instead of fight that urge, we need to embrace it. Muir devoted much of his life to writing about the intersection and harmony of humans and nature, but he also noted that we have raped nature for short run gains and the tragedy of the commons is a constant theme of the book. He was not opposed to cost/benefit calculations and eh saw nature as necessary source of materials for human prosperity. Still he openly decried an ethic of wanton destruction as he witnessed numerous times in the Alaskan gold rush.

Muir insists that nature and animals deserve respect. Muir's philosophies and opinions on environmental ethics have been extremely influential in wildlife conservation across America. It is evident that all three of these men have proposed interesting theories and proposals about why we should preserve the environment, and what our role, as humans, with the environment should be. It is definitely important for people to discuss environmental ethics, in order for people to have a deeper understanding of why environmental conservation should be important to us all.