

The Land Ethic (notes)

The Ethical Sequence

The first ethics dealt with the relation between individuals;

There is as yet no ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it.

The land relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but no obligations.

The Community Concept

All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts.

The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.

a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it.

The Ecological Conscience

Land-use ethics are still governed wholly by economic self-interest, just as social ethics were century ago.

No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis loyalties, affections, and convictions.

Substitutes for a Land Ethic

One basic weakness in a conservation system based wholly on economic motives is that most members of the land community have no economic value.

The Land Pyramid

We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in.

Land Health and the A-B Cleavage

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

The Outlook

The 'key-log' which must be moved to release the evolutionary process for an ethic is simply this: quit thinking about decent land-use as solely an economic problem. Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.