

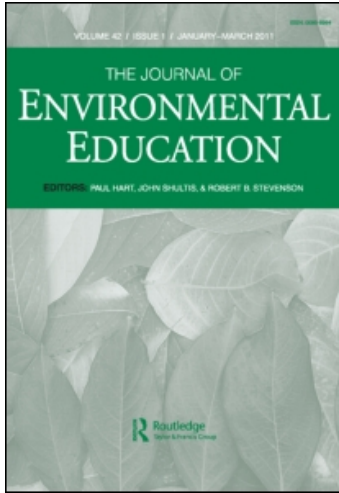
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Framing a Philosophy of Environmental Action: Aldo Leopold, John Muir, and the Importance of Community

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ESSAY/ANALYSIS

Framing a Philosophy of Environmental Action: Aldo Leopold, John Muir, and the Importance of Community

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A philosophy of action consists of a theory about how and why we do things and what motivates us to act. By juxtaposing the theory of environmental action implied by the works and life of John Muir with the philosophy of action suggested by Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic, we will illuminate the importance of a philosophy of action in determining one's approach to environmental decision making. This discussion is important for environmental education and the ethics these experiences inspire because both philosophies advocate very different visions of environmental action. In short, Muir demonstrates an ethic guided by the expected results of actions, an approach parallel to the responsible environmental behavior model (REB) of environmental education, whereas Leopold, demonstrates the role of intention and emotion in ethical decision making through the lens of community.

Keywords *community, environmental action, ethic, Leopold, Muir, philosophy, responsible environmental behavior*

At the end of a recent course in Isle Royale National Park, after living and learning with 10 college students for a week, we sat on the dock with our group and discussed wilderness. What is wilderness? Do you care about wilderness? Why do you care about it? We were probing for values and for a sense of the limits of the students' moral communities. We wanted them to consider how values influence action.

As environmental educators and ethicists, we often recognize inconsistencies between students' professed values and the actions they prescribe on behalf of the natural world. While the literature advocates responsible environmental behavior, these actual behaviors are not always clear or are restricted to specific individual tasks. When this focus on behavior outweighs the

intentions driving the action, we can easily act in ways that work against our values. Therefore, one of our goals is to help students identify their values, so they can envision how these values might play out in action. In this way, we advocate not for any specific responsible environmental behavior, but rather for a lifestyle where actions are consciously and reflectively driven by values and a vision for the world.

The students said they valued the strength they gained and the friends they made. They valued feeling wild, they explained, which they qualified by appreciating the opportunity to share their experience with the moose and her calf we saw splashing in the river behind our camp every day. Our students valued the wilderness because it provided these things. So we asked them: Should wilderness be accessible for everyone? Some environmental thinkers, like John Muir, believe greater access to natural landscapes will encourage greater preservation of these places. Others worry that the act of providing access might destroy the very things we love about these places, or perhaps imply that preservation values might only develop in these special places, thus allowing us to neglect our homeplaces. They might even argue that by providing widespread access we locate the value of these places in their ability to satiate our recreational, aesthetic, or scientific needs. It is an 'other' that we can claim for ourselves. The student responses were mixed, but after a while, most conceded that one of the things they love about being in the wilderness is that they worked for it. If they had not taken an aluminum ferry across a frozen lake, woken up to mosquitoes and gone to bed exhausted, their experience would be different. *So even if most people will not or cannot visit places like this, is wilderness valuable in and of itself?* The class unanimously agreed. There is great value in wilderness beyond what it provides for us.

"How can you live if this matters?" we asked. "If you value wilderness for its own sake, what does this mean in your life?"

They could recycle, they said. They could volunteer for an eco-organization. They could plant a garden or show their friends their pictures or research the environmental policies of candidates. All of these are good ideas, and all are driven by a philosophy of action that aims to reflect the students' professed values. There are many more actions to take, and actions to avoid, and serious lifestyle choices the students will need to reflect upon if they truly want their behaviors to reflect their beliefs. There are also directions we, as educators, can steer their discussion, which might develop their thinking in important, even crucial, ways. But our students had embarked on the formation of a philosophy of action. They had begun to think: How can my actions reflect who I am, what I believe, and what I value? Success in the responsible environmental behavior (REB) model of environmental education would depend on the students' actions in practice, but from our conversation, the intent to act was there, and in our estimation, this intent, as well as the knowledge that right action fits into a wider philosophy of action that is greater than the sum of individual acts, is more meaningful than simple and finite behavior shifts.

In this article we will illuminate the importance of a philosophy of action in determining one's approach to environmental decision making by examining the theory of environmental action implied by the works and life of naturalist and activist John Muir juxtaposed with the philosophy of action suggested by Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic. Both philosophies have clear presence in environmental education practice and history, and both philosophies have merit as guides for action on behalf of the natural world. At the same time, a discussion of their nuances is important for environmental education application and the ethics these experiences inspire, because both philosophies advocate very different visions of environmental action. In short, Muir demonstrates a consequentialist ethic guided by the expected results of actions, rather than

the virtue of the actions themselves. Leopold, alternatively, demonstrates the role of intention and process in ethical decision making through the lens of community. Understanding how our philosophy shapes our actions through a close reading of these seminal authors in our field may help us better educate students to link action to values, as well as craft more effective arguments on behalf of the natural world.

PHILOSOPHY OF ACTION AND RESPONSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOR

A philosophy of action consists of a theory about how and why we do things and what motivates us to act. It is a response to our values that represents our attempt to do good as a reflection of what we deem good or valuable. More specifically, a theory of environmental action explains why we care about the preservation of wilderness, old-growth forests, and biodiversity, and it explains why and how we are motivated to act on behalf of the nonhuman world. Further, it ethically justifies, even necessitates, our actions on behalf of the nonhuman world. Delineating a philosophy of action can serve more consistent and effective environmental arguments.

Though similar to elements of responsible environmental behavior (REB; attitudes, personal investment, locus of control), the emphasis here is on affective shifts rather than on action. The integral piece here is *the why*, not *the what*. *Why* do I care, are my values consistent, and how might I act to honor these values in action? Of course, *the what*, the action, will hopefully follow, but this action, if guided by an ethic, is neither random nor finite, and what might be right action today may be less effective or desired when the facts about our world shift. The idea of educating for ethics is that all actions are related. By guiding students only toward environmental choices, we limit them from approaching all decision-making and action choices as if they matter environmentally, humanely, socially, and personally.

When educating for environmental ethics we cannot evaluate people's actions as empirical data. Rather, we need to understand their valuation process, the shifts in their relationships and how they care about the world. The REB model of environmental education implies these affective shifts, but research has demonstrated we are often not meeting these goals. Citing Hines, Hungerford, and Tomera (1987), Vaske and Kobrin (2001, p. 21) explain: "[A]lthough educators have sometimes assumed that increasing awareness of the issues will stimulate ERB [REB], the empirical data has repeatedly demonstrated that this assumption is not valid." This critique of the knowledge-attitude-behavior method is widespread (Hsu, 2004; Hungerford & Volk, 1990; Jenson & Schnack, 1999; Sia, Hungerford, and Tomera 1985/86). It is also supported by research that reveals the clear cognitive focus of many nature centers and academic programs that aim to educate for REB (Simmons, 1991). The ethical framework we employ instead assumes that students will neither care about nor retain the knowledge they gain unless they are first emotionally and ethically engaged by place, community, and content.

JOHN MUIR AND THE CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY OF ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION

John Muir, in his roles with the Sierra Club, the Hetch Hetchy water debates, and his frequently quoted environmental writing, is often embraced as the iconic leader of the preservation movement. Muir (1912) achieves his public image when he rages against "temple destroyers,

devotees of ravaging commercialism” (p. 261). In other ways, however, he was not the radical environmentalist we sometimes expect. Muir embraced, at least in principle, some actions environmentalists now see as the epitome of environmental degradation. For example, in comments about immigration Muir (1901) encourages the widespread use of natural resources:

Let them be welcomed still as Nature welcomes them, to the woods as well as to the prairies and plains. . . . Let them be as free to pick gold and gems from the hills, to cut and hew, dig and plant. . . . Nor will the woods be the worse for this use. (p. 363)

Muir also positively assesses mining, forestry, and road building. Even though the Alaska gold rush would undoubtedly bring thousands of people who would build “ragged towns” and create mills and locomotives, Muir (1901) believes that in the end, “comparatively little harm will be done” (p. 12). The benefit of their experiences, their appreciation of Alaska’s beauty, would offset their impact on the landscape. Moreover, Muir (1901) states, “the roads of the pioneer miners will lead many a lover of wildness into the heart of the reserve, who without them would never see it” (p. 12). Muir (1901) looks favorably upon road building because roads bring people into the wilderness, experience which will prompt in them a “growing interest in the care and preservation of forests and wild places in general” (p. 2). Thus, the heart of John Muir’s philosophy of environmental action: People will act on behalf of the natural world if they have exposure to it, therefore knowledge about it. As Muir (1901) explains: “If every citizen could take one walk through this reserve, there would be no more trouble about its care; for only in darkness does vandalism flourish” (pp. 33–34).

In this way, Muir inhabits the knowledge-attitude-behavior model of environmental learning (Dispoto, 1977; Ramsey & Rickson, 1977; Young, 1980), which has been articulated in the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and refined with the work of Hungerford and Volk (1990) for environmental education. This is a dominant model for effective environmental education in much of the field’s literature. Knowledge about (and/or experience in) the natural world will influence attitudes regarding the natural world, which will in turn impact one’s actions on behalf of the natural world.

John Muir, and the educational models developed in his shadow, believes experience with and knowledge of the natural world is a sufficient condition to prompt us to act on behalf of the natural world. Muir’s philosophy of action might be summarized as follows:

1. Experiences with the environment will increase our familiarity and knowledge of the natural world.
2. We become emotionally attached to and posit value in those things we know about.
3. We act to preserve things we are emotionally attached to and in which we posit value.
4. We will act to preserve the environment if through our experiences with it we become more knowledgeable about it.

This philosophy of environmental action drives the implicit goals of many environmental organizations and outdoor education programs. For example, The Sierra Club continues Muir’s tradition of taking people into the natural world in order to inspire them to act on behalf of the places they visit, and links these experiences to environmental action. The Sierra Club’s Web site (2008) explains: “John Muir discovered an essential truth while out hiking the high country: If you want people to go to bat for the environment, he realized, you’ve got to get them out into

the wilderness. ‘If people in general could be got into the woods, even for once, to hear the trees speak for themselves, all difficulties in the way of forest preservation would vanish,’ he said.’

Such assumptions about the connection between familiarity and action have historical precedence. In the 1950s, the Sierra Club produced picture books and short films about places threatened by development. These actions helped spark the rise of a popular environmental movement because they allowed environmental groups to share their philosophy with people who could not get to wilderness areas. The underlying assumption was that people would be more likely to act on behalf of a place if they had some sort of experience with the place, even if only indirect experience. The paradigmatic example of this method came when, in an effort to save Dinosaur National Monument, lobbyist Howard Zahniser pushed a video cart with the film *Two Yosemite*¹ around Congress to try to persuade members to vote on behalf of Dinosaur. Many of Muir’s own writings, famous for their detailed descriptions, can similarly be viewed as his attempt to familiarize readers with faraway landscapes, in the hope that literary contact with their beauty would move his readers to action.

Examples of this knowledge-attitude-action expectation permeate environmental education literature as well. A Peace Corps environmental education manual (Braus & Wood, 1993) explains, “the road to environmentally responsible behavior is a continuum that begins with awareness and knowledge and ends with students becoming actively dedicated to improving and maintaining environmental quality” (p. 26). This same philosophy appears in proposed national educational policy. The *No Child Left Inside Act*² (H.R. 2025), currently in Congress, would amend the No Child Left Behind legislation to include environmental education in core curriculum for all students and would incentivize teacher training and environmental education funding to elevate the role of environmental learning for all students. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation Web-site for the No Child Left Inside Coalition also uses Muir-inspired, or knowledge-attitude-action, language:

The No Child Left Inside Act would address [nature deficit disorder] by igniting students’ interest in the outdoors and spurring them to take part in outside activities. And learning to explore the natural world and their personal connection to it inevitably triggers an interest in spending more time in it.

Nature Deficit Disorder is a term coined by the author Richard Louv (2005) in his book *Last Child in the Woods*, which in many ways has spurred the national dialogue about the impacts of limited outdoor play for children. The central idea of the book is that kids and communities were healthier when fort building and river romping were the predominant childhood activities, rather than video games and structured sports experiences. Therefore, we need to create more opportunities for children to be outside, so they will be healthier, learn to care about the natural world, and in turn, develop academic and environmental citizenship skills. The Children and Nature Network (2010), the nonprofit organization started by Louv and others, explains that all children should spend time in nature because “Children are smarter, cooperative, happier, and healthier when they have frequent varied opportunities for free and unstructured play in the outdoors.” Though they do not explicitly refer to REB, the organization’s language about the direct impacts of contact with the natural world mirrors the knowledge-attitude-behavior philosophy, as does NCLI’s (No Child Left Inside) reference to the “inevitability” of the connection between environmental learning and a desire to seek out further similar experiences. If one becomes familiar with the natural world, Muir and Louv suggest, one will care about the natural world.

A SHORTCOMING OF MUIR'S PHILOSOPHY OF ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION

It does seem true that, generally speaking, people act on behalf of those things to which they feel an emotional attachment. Therefore, if people become emotionally attached—perhaps through a physical attachment—to the environment, then they will also act on its behalf. However, this theory operates under the assumption that the positive emotional reactions that enable people to act will be prompted merely by exposure to and knowledge of the environment. Russell (1999, p. 124) writes: [S]tudents, fellow educators, and academic writers . . . seem to treat nature experience as some sort of panacea. Part of the problem . . . is that nature experience is often seen to automatically contribute to environmental awareness, commitment, and action.” Her argument hinges on Scott’s ideas about the complexity of experience: “Experience is at once always already an interpretation and in need of interpretation. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward” (Scott in Russell, 1999, p. 123).

The implication is that the shifts from knowledge about nature to attitudes in favor of nature, and then from favorable attitudes to action on behalf of nature, are not given. Hwang, Kim, and Jeng (2000, p. 21) cite both Borden and Schettino (1979) and Cottrell (1993) to demonstrate this persistent concern that the effect of knowledge on behavior is less significant than often assumed, and that this effect, as well as the effect of awareness variables, is likely indirect. This idea has inspired meaningful research on the locus of control and environmental attitudes (Hwang et al., 2000; Smith-Sebasto & Fortner, 1994; Smith-Sebasto, 1995).

While we will not argue that such exposure is not a necessary condition for environmental action, we question whether it is true that such exposure is a *sufficient* condition for environmental action. We question the assumption that all people, in spending time and learning about a place, will develop similar feelings of respect for that place. We can readily imagine a canoe trip around Isle Royale National Park, which after a week’s exposure to the area, including the seasonal black flies and mosquitoes, half of a six-person party joins groups like the Nature Conservancy, while the other half feels that resort development would improve the island, or that pesticide spraying is necessary for all wilderness areas. All six people had the same exposure to and were equally knowledgeable about the area, but their sentiments were not equally sparked by this knowledge. One might argue that donating to an environmental organization demonstrates responsible environmental behavior, while the resort and pesticide ideas do not demonstrate REB. Or one might argue that all three actions are environmental actions, for a resort or bug-free terrain would encourage wilderness access for more people. But it is clear that the shift between knowledge and action that occurred for the different members of the party was very differently realized.

Current research, in fact, demonstrates a surprising relationship between knowledge, responsibility, and care. Political scientists at Texas A&M recently published a study about the social dimensions of global warming, which shows that greater knowledge about climate change leads respondents to care less about the issue. The authors explain: “More informed respondents both feel less personally responsible for global warming, and also show less concern for global warming” (Kellstedt, Zahran, & Vedlitz, 2008, p. 113). This revelation counters the knowledge-attitude-behavior argument and has direct relevance for how we educate about the environment.

If it is not simply the direct or indirect experience of beautiful places that sparks in us the emotional attachment required for environmental action, then what enables the formation of this

moral relationship? Following in the ethical tradition of Charles Darwin, David Hume, and Adam Smith, Aldo Leopold suggests we ought to focus more on the relationships that inspire care and empathy, focus more on the “we” of the biotic community and less on the intent of single actors to participate in responsible environmental behaviors. Leopold advocates a holistic model of community, in which we are a greater whole when operating as communities of interdependent beings—humans and nonhuman nature—than we are as independent beings acting in proximity. This is how a philosophy of action driven by a Muirian model differs consequentially, not aesthetically, from one driven by a Leopold model. This distinction matters in terms of how we explore and explain the facts of the natural world with our environmental education students. Action in relationship looks far different than individual action; caring about a thing is very different from caring about a relative or a community member.

LEOPOLD'S THEORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION

In Muir, and much of the environmentalism premised on Muir's model of action, the human is often looking in upon nature, not an integral participant within the larger community. Leopold's philosophy of action, on the contrary, depends on the recognition of the biotic community, which includes humans as equal participants in a wider web of connection.

Leopold (1949) begins his “Land Ethic” by invoking the return of Odysseus, Homer's hero in *The Odyssey*, to Greece. Upon arrival home, Odysseus “hanged all on one rope [or ordered his son to do so] a dozen slave-girls of his household whom he suspected of misbehavior during his absence” (p. 201). Leopold points out that in this context of time and place, Odysseus's actions were viewed as simply a matter of “expediency,” not an ethical “right and wrong.” Odysseus was dealing with his property in the most efficient manner, and for him, the notion of ethical obligation did not yet include human bondservants. Hence, the underlying “ethical structure,” or the fundamental idea that ethical consideration responds to a shared community, has not changed in 3,000 years. But the boundaries of community inclusion have changed. This notion of a change in ethical inclusion over time, and the reason(s) for it, is one of the cornerstones of the Land Ethic and Leopold's philosophy of action.

Leopold, following Darwin, explains the human possession of ethical traits in the same way that he might explain the possession of any other trait (e.g., rationality) we express. And Leopold, like Darwin, is interested in the biological reasoning behind this change in ethics as a “process in ecological evolution” (Leopold, 1949, p. 202). This philosophical grounding of biological moral development first emerged with eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment philosophers David Hume and Adam Smith.

Hume and Smith conclude that all human behavior is *ultimately* motivated by our emotions, or by what they refer to as our “moral sentiments.” In Hume's (1978) words, “morality is determined by sentiment,” (p. 107)³ and these roots of our behavior are, in turn, informed by and amplified through the use of reason. Smith (1790) argues that sentiments like pity, compassion, or empathy exist in all humans as fundamental characteristics. Hence, Hume and Smith present a theory of moral philosophy that brings at once sentimentality and rationality, but gives a priority to our emotional side. Recent brain research on the nested cognitive and affective responses to ethical dilemmas echoes this approach to morality. Rationality and emotion cannot be disentangled,

therefore we ought to address them as a single entity in education and ethical decision making (D'Arcangelo, 2000; Weiss, 2000; Sylwester, 1994; McCuen & Shah, 2007).

But neither Hume, nor Smith attempted to explain the origins of these *moral sentiments*. Darwin (1981), who cites both Hume and Smith in *The Descent of Man*, tackles this task, claiming that the origin and evolution of ethics rests at least as much in the feelings or sentiments as it does on the development of the rational faculty. “[O]ur regard for the approbation and disapprobation of our fellows *depends on sympathy*,” Darwin (1981, p. 71) explains. Most rudimentary, Darwin thought, were parental-filial affections. The fundamental love or feeling of parents for offspring and vice versa allows for greater reproductive success for animals whose young require this loving attention and would, hence, be a trait that would be selected for, evolutionarily speaking.

The parent/child community is the first community we experience; if the parents (or people/animals that assume this role) of social animals do not care for their offspring, their offspring will not survive. It seems safe to speculate that such a moral sentiment is easily extended outward to include all of one’s kin. For example, the motivation for cooperation within kinship is explainable because an individual who is less cooperative within the kin group has a decreasing chance (half/quarter/eighth/etc.) of passing on this uncooperative or less inclusive tendency. Groups that cared for each other were more successful as a collection of individuals in relationship working toward common goals, most basically survival. The important piece here is that ethics evolutionarily exist in relationship.

Darwin (1981) believes it is possible to extend this social instinct and the correlative ethical sentiments beyond mere kin. He explains:

As man advances in civilization, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races. (pp. 100–101)

Moral responsibilities extend outward from closest relationships to more distant relationships, like rings emanating from a pebble thrown in a pond. Each person is his or her own pebble, and his or her moral commitments emanate outward from the self, to the family, to more distant relationships.

Therefore, according to Hume, Smith, and Darwin, normally functioning human beings possess these moral sentiments, and humans extend these moral sentiments to those they perceive to share their social community. Ethics and society are, then, correlative. Leopold adopted Darwin’s ideas about the origin and development of ethics in his *Land Ethic*, where he refers to Darwin’s extension of moral commitments as “accretions” (Leopold, 1949, p. 202), capturing how the commitments resonate from and build on each other. Hence, Leopold also adopted the ethical foundations of Hume and Smith via the work of Darwin. “All ethics,” Leopold (1949, p. 243) writes, “so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts.” Ecology informs us that soils, waters, plants, animals, and humans are all members of one single “biotic community.” In effect, ecology serves to expand the previously perceived limits of our community, just as centuries of evolution expanded our human community to include all humans beyond Odysseus’s limited definition.

Ecology enlarges the boundaries of our social community to include the whole of the biotic community and, by prompting our moral sentiments, “the land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the [moral] community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land” (Leopold, 1949, p. 204). Because “an ecological interpretation of history” shows us “that man is, in fact, only a member of a biotic team,” (p. 205) the correlative “land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it” (p. 204).

Leopold (1949, pp. 209–210) continues: “No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions. . . . [O]bligations have no meaning without conscience, and the problem we face is the extension of the social conscience from people to land.” This is a role for environmental education, to educate for a changed perception of community and therefore work toward the related ethical extension. Since evolution instills in us the willingness to act on behalf of the beings and communities who prompt our moral sentiments, those of us who come to view the world through this ecological biotic community lens might also become, to paraphrase Leopold (1949, p. 200), “a militant minority of environmentally-minded citizens available for action in a pinch.”

In short, since our sentiments prompt us to action, and since we feel sentimental attachment for those that share our social community, we are prompted to act on behalf of those who share our social community. Since the evolutionary/ecological view of the world shows us that we are a part of a biotic community, this worldview is not only a *necessary*, but also a *sufficient* condition for environmental action. Leopold’s philosophy of environmental action can be summarized as follows:

1. Our experiences with the environment as our biotic community will prompt an emotional attachment to, and sense of value for, that community.
2. We act to preserve those things we are emotionally attached to and in which we posit value.
3. Thus, we will act on behalf of the environment if our experiences with it portray it as a community to which we belong.

For historically speaking, it is *others* that we persecute. Arguably we have done this precisely because we have seen them as “others”: unlike us, inferior to us, deserving of our abuse. According to Leopold’s slave girl story, those believed to be outside of our community (or *others*) have been given very little, if any, ethical weight. Only when they were recognized as members of our community, or similar to us in some relevant respect, were they granted moral value. Our poor behavior toward members of other tribes, other races, and other species demonstrates the very reason we have needed an expanded ethics in the first place. We need only to look back on human history for examples of this behavior. Nearly all wars have begun against a group because it was perceived as different—*other*—than the aggressor. For this reason, we need to heal the separation between humans and nature; we need to understand and engage the broad community in which we participate and belong.

In terms of environmental education, this notion suggests a very different process than the philosophy of action suggested by a Muirian-based approach for the base relationship, that between humans and the natural world, has been redefined as communal rather than dichotomous. This changed definition must, then, impact our approach to this relationship through ethical

decision making and action. If we act as if we are in community, our actions might take a different shape than if we are to act as agents acting on behalf of an “other.” How we understand the world and how we act and teach about the natural world matters. These different models, through the lenses of Muir and Leopold, can help us apply these concepts more clearly. Being consistent, intentional, and empathetic in our teaching strategies is important as we model behavior for our students, help them develop arguments on behalf of the things they care about, and craft curriculum that aims to impact environmental citizenship.

CONCLUSION

Though Muir’s and Leopold’s philosophies of action share much in common, the central difference in how each locates humans in the natural world ultimately defines and transforms the impact of each ethic. Leopold’s embrace of the biotic community makes his theory not only persuasive, but also salient in our world. For if Muir were correct, if all it took was knowledge of something to prompt us to act on its behalf, not shifts in shared worldview, then biologists and others of their ilk would be the most rabid environmental activists among us. Instead those like the late David Chain or tree-sitter Julia Butterfly Hill, who feel a kinship with nature, act most fervently on nature’s behalf. Leopold’s Land Ethic, then, might not only explain and help us understand environmental activism, but it might also justify it. We must acknowledge our wider community, accept our role within it, and then act on its behalf. To act for our community is to act for ourselves, and action, rather than simple interaction, is a demonstration of love.

This does not mean we need to abandon the Muir-based practice of leading people to beautiful places in the hopes that they learn to care for, and then act on behalf of, these places. But we need to be morally conscious of what happens when we get there, and how we talk about the experiences. We need to be intentional in the stories we tell in the field about nature, community, and humans’ role in systems.

So as we sit on the dock with our students and discuss wilderness, how should we steer the conversation? Most basically, we should talk about protecting ourselves, or our home, rather than brainstorming the ways we can work to protect or maintain our special places when we get “back to the real world.” We should talk directly about the sense of kinship the students infer they feel with the moose and her calf, rather than gloss over the beauty of the experience or the luck we had for being in the path of the “other.” This leap to the personhood of other species is the kind of link that will possibly allow the empathetic leaps necessary for developing community. The urgency and depth of actions taken on behalf of ourselves, of our direct community, will be stronger and more responsible than actions taken on behalf of a distant other that provided a neat experience.

One does not need to be a philosopher to guide this process. We can start by modeling the language and actions of care and empathy, and by focusing on the development and maintenance of community. For when we begin to include elements of the natural world in our active learning community rather than just address them as elements of study, when we engage the biotic community as our community, we may begin to shift traditional moral boundaries, and thus may influence the development of effective philosophies of environmental action. Ultimately this is our goal: changed actions regarding the natural world. But we want these actions to be intentional, long-lived, and driven by care.

NOTES

1. Brower, David. "Two Yosemite." Sierra Club, 1955. See also Harvey, M. W. T., & Cronon, W. (2000). *A symbol of wilderness: Echo Park and the American conservation movement*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
2. For information or to find a link to H.R. 2025 see <http://www.thomas.gov>.
3. See also Hume (1978, bk. III, pt. I), also much of Hume (1957), and Smith (1976, especially pt. I, sec. I, chapt. I).

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