§ 1. It is increasingly said that civilization, Western civilization at least, stands in need of a new ethic (and derivatively of a new economics) setting out people's relations to the natural environment, in Leopold's words 'an ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it' ([1], p. 238). It is not of course that old and prevailing ethics do not deal with man's relation to nature: they do, and on the prevailing view man is free to deal with nature as he pleases, i.e. his relations with nature, insofar at least as they do not affect others, are not subject to moral censure. Thus assertions such as 'Crusoe ought not to be mutilating those trees' are significant and morally determinate but, inasmuch at least as Crusoe's actions do not interfere with others, they are false or do not hold -- and trees are not, in a good sense, moral objects. It is to this, to the values and evaluations of the prevailing ethics, that Leopold and others in fact take exception. Leopold regards as subject to moral criticism, as wrong, behaviour that on prevailing views is morally permissible. But it is not, as Leopold seems to think, that such behaviour is beyond the scope of the prevailing ethics and that an extension of traditional morality is required to cover such cases, to fill a moral void. If Leopold is right in his criticism of prevailing conduct what is required is a change in the ethics, in attitudes, values and evaluations. For as matters stand, as he himself explains, men do not feel morally ashamed if they interfere with a wilderness, if they maltreat the land, extract from it whatever it will yield, and then move on; and such conduct is not taken to interfere with and does not rouse the moral indignation of others. 'A farmer who clears the woods off a 75% slope, turns his cows into the clearing, and dumps its rainfall, rocks, and soil into the community creek, is still (if otherwise decent) a respected member of society.' ([1], p. 245) Under what we shall call an environmental ethic such traditionally permissible conduct would be accounted morally wrong, and the farmer subject to proper moral criticism.

Let us grant such evaluations for the purpose of the argument. What is not so clear is that a new ethic is required even for such radical judgements. For one thing it is none too clear what is going to count as a new ethic, much as it is often unclear whether a new development in physics counts as a new physics or just as a modification or extension of the old. For, notoriously, ethics are not clearly articulated or at all well worked out, so that the application of identity criteria for ethics may remain obscure. Furthermore we tend to cluster a family of ethical systems which do not differ on core or fundamental principles together as the one ethic; e.g. the Christain ethic, which is an umbrella notion covering a cluster of differing and even competing systems. In fact then there are two other possibilities, apart from a new environmental ethic, which might cater for the evaluations, namely that of an extension of modification of the prevailing ethics or that of the development of principles that are already encompassed or latent within the prevailing ethic. The second possibility, that environmental evaluations can be incorporated within (and ecological problems solved within) the framework of prevailing Western ethics, is open because there isn't a

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1 A view occasionally tempered by the idea that trees house spirits
2 To the consternation no doubt of Quineans. But the fact is that we can talk perfectly well about inchoate and fragmentary systems the identity of which may be indeterminate
single ethical system uniquely assumed in Western civilization: on many issues, and especially on
controversial issues such as infanticide, women's rights and drugs, there are competing sets of prin-
ciples. Talk of a neutral or immanent ethic presupposes an anthropocentric view of the human
world which is no longer taken for granted in many cultures. Nor are there the only traditions; primitivism
is another, and both romanticism and mysticism have influenced Western views.

The dominant Western view is simply inconsistent with an environmental ethic; for according
to it nature is the domain of man and he is free to deal with it as he pleases (since – at least on the
Augustine view – it exists only for his sake), whereas on an environmental
view nature exists only for the sake of the next generation, or others, or for one’s offspring. In
many cases it is relatively easy to see that an environmental ethic is not so free to do as he pleases. But
it is not quite so obvious that an environmental ethic cannot be coupled with one of the lesser traditions. Part of the problem is that the lesser
traditions are by no means adequately characterised anywhere, especially when the religious
backdrop is removed, e.g. who is man steward for and responsible to? However both traditions are
inconsistent with an environmental ethic because they imply policies of complete interference,
whereas on an environmental ethic some worthwhile parts of the earth’s surface should be
preserved from substantial human interference, whether of the “improving” sort or not. Both traditions
would in fact prefer to see the earth’s land surfaces reshaped along the lines of the tame and com-
fortable north-European small farm and village landscape. According to the co-operative position
man’s proper role is to develop, cultivate and perfect nature – all nature eventually – by bringing
out its potentialities, the test of perfection being primarily usefulness for human purposes; while on the
stewardship view man’s role, like that of a farmer manager, is to make nature productive by his
efforts though not by means that will deliberately degrade its resources. Although these positions
depart from the dominant position in a way which enables the incorporation of some evaluation of
natural or environmental ethic, e.g. some of those concerning the destruction of a farm that they
do not go far enough: for in the present situation of expanding populations confined to
natural areas, they will lead to, and enjoin, the perfecting, farming and utilizing of all natural areas.
Indeed these lesser traditions lead to what a thoroughgoing environmental ethic would reject, a
principle which implies that every natural area should be cultivated or otherwise used3
for human ends, “humanized”.

As the important Western traditions exclude an environmental ethic, it would appear that
such an ethic, not primitive, mystical or romantic, would be new alright. The matter is not so
straightforward; for the dominant ethic has been substantially qualified by the rider that one is not
always entitled to do as one pleases where this physically interferes with others. Maybe some such
proviso was implicit all along (despite evidence to the contrary), and it was simply assumed that
doing what one pleased with natural items would not affect others (the non-interference assump-
tion). Be this as it may, the modified dominant position appears, at least for many thinkers, to have
supplanted the dominant position; and the modified position can undoubtedly go much further (towards an environmental ethic. For example, the farmer’s problem of a community stream may
be ruled immoral on the grounds that it physically interferes with others who use or would use the
stream. Likewise business enterprises which destroy the natural environment for no satisfactory
returns or which cause pollution deleterious to the health of future humans, can be criticised on the
sort of welfare basis (e.g. that of (3)) that blends with the modified position; and so on. The posi-
tion is that a new ethic serves not to restrict the sort of family size one is entitled to have, but to
remove interference with other people and resources.

§ 2. As we noticed (an) ethic is ambiguous, as between a specific ethical system and a
meta-ethical, and a more generic notion, a super ethic, under which specific ethics subsidy.4 An
ethical system S

is, near enough, a propositional system (i.e. a structured set of propositions) or theory which in-
cludes (like the individuals of a theory) a set of values and (like postulates of a theory) a set of general
evaluative judgements concerning conduct, typically of what is obligatory, permissible and wrong, of
what are rights, what is valued, and so forth. A general or lawlike proposition of a system is a
principle; and certainly if systems $S_1$ and $S_2$ contain different principles, then they are different
systems. It follows that any environmental ethic differs from the important traditional ethics outlined.
Moreover if environmental ethics differ from Western ethical systems on some core principle
embodied in Western systems, then these systems differ from the Western super ethic (assuming,
what seems to be so, that it can be uniquely characterised) – in which case if an environmental
ethic is needed then a new ethic is. It suffices then to locate a core principle and to provide
environmental ethic heuristics to exemplify it.

It is commonly assumed that there are, what amount to, core principles of Western ethical
systems, principles that will accordingly belong to the super ethic. The fairness principle inscribed
in the Golden Rule provides one example. Directly relevant here, as a good stab at a core principle, is
the commonly formulated liberal principle of the modified dominance position. A recent for-
mulation6 ([31, p. 58]):

‘The liberal philosophy of the Western world holds that one should be able to do what he wishes,
providing (1) that he does not harm others and (2) that he is not likely to harm himself irreparably.’

Let us call this principle basic (human) chauvinism – because under it humans, or people,
come first and everything else a bad last – though sometimes the principle is hailed as a freedom
principle because it gives permission to perform a wide range of actions (including actions which
mess up the environment and natural things) providing they do not harm others. In fact it tends to
summing up the common of proof to others. It is worth remarking that harming others in the restric-
tion is narrower than the restriction of the (usual) interests of others; it is not enough that it is in my
interests, but you are free to breathe what you like, even if it messes me up the environment and
natural things. Moreover the width of the principle is so far obscure because ‘other’ may
be filled up in significantly different ways: it makes a difference to the extent, and privilege, of
the chauvinism whether ‘other’ expands to ‘other human’ – which is too restrictive – or to ‘other
person’ or to ‘other sentient being’ and it makes a difference to the adequacy of the principle, and in-
versely to its economic applicability, to which class of others it is intended to apply, whether to
future as well as to present others, whether to remote future others or only to non-discountable
future others, and whether to possible others. The latter would make the principle completely
unworkable, and it is generally assumed that it applies at most to present and future others.

It is taken for granted in designing systems of ethics that chauvinist principles, that a
semantical analysis of permissionability and obligation statements stretch over ideal situations
(which may be incomplete or even inconsistent), so that what is permissible holds in some ideal
situation, what is obligatory in every ideal situation, and what is wrong is excluded in every ideal
situation. But the main point to grab for the counter examples that follow, is that ethical principles
if correct are universal and are assessed over the class of ideal situations.

(i) The last man example. The last man (or person) surviving the collapse of the world
system lies to home, eliminating, as far as he can, every living thing, animal or plant (but painlessly if
you like, as at the best abattoir). What he does is quite permissible according to basic chauvinism, but
on the ethical standpoint assumed that he does is wrong what ever on he does not have to be commit-
ted to esoteric values to regard Mr. Last Man as behaving badly (the reason being perhaps that ra-
tical thinking and values have shifted in an environmental direction in advance of corresponding
shifts in the formulation of fundamental evaluative principles).

(ii) The last planet example. The last man example can be broadened to the last people example. We
can assume that they know they are the last people, e.g. because they are aware that radionuclides
effects have blocked any chance of reproduction. One considers the last people in order to rule out the
possibility that what these people do harms or somehow physically interferes with later people.

One would otherwise as well consider science fiction cases where people arrive at a new planet and

3 If ‘use’ is extended, somewhat idlyly, to include use for preservation, this total use principle is rendered innocuous at least
as regards its actual effects. Note that the total use principle is tied to the resource view of nature

4 A meta-ethical is, as usual, a theory about ethics, super ethics, their features and fundamental notions

5 A related principle is that (modified) free enterprise can operate within similar limits
destroy its ecosystems, whether with good intentions such as perfecting the planet for their ends and making it more fruitful or, forgetting the lesser traditions, just for the hell of it.

Let us assume that the last people are very numerous. They humbly exterminate every wild animal and they eliminate the fish of the seas, they put all arable land under intensive cultivation, and all remaining forests disappear in favour of quarries or plantations, and so on. They may give various familiar reasons for this, e.g. they believe it is the way to salvation or to perfection, or they are simply satisfying reasonable needs, or even that it is needed to keep the last people employed or occupied so that they do not worry too much about their impending extinctions. On an environmental ethic the last people have behaved badly; they have simplified and largely destroyed all the natural ecosystems, and with their demise the world will soon be an ugly and largely wrecked place. But this conduct may conform with the basic chauvinist principle, and as well with the principles enjoined by the lesser traditions. Indeed the main point of elaborating this example is because, as the last man example reveals, basic chauvinism may conflict with stewardship or cooperation principles. The conflict may be removed it seems by conjuring a further proviso to the basic principle, to the effect (3) that he does not willfully destroy natural resources. But as the last people do not destroy resources wilfully, but perhaps "for the best of reasons", the variant is still environmentally inadequate.

(ii) The great entrepreneur example. The last man example can be adjusted so as to not fall foul of clause (3). The last man is an industrialist; he runs a giant complex of automated factories and farms which he proceeds to extend. He produces automobiles among other things, from renewable and recyclable resources of course, only he dumps and recycles these shortly after manufacture and sale to a dummy buyer instead of putting them on the road for a short time as we do. Of course he has the best of reasons for his activity, e.g. he is increasing gross world product, or he is improving output to fulfil some plan, and he will be increasing his own and general welfare since he must prefer increases in output and productivity. The entrepreneur's behaviour is on the Western ethic quite permissible; indeed his conduct is commonly thought to be quite fine and may even meet Pareto optimality requirements given prevailing notions of being "better off".

Just as we can extend the last man example to a class of last people, so we can extend this example to the industrial society example: the society looks rather like ours. Consider the blue whale, a mixed good; on the economic picture, the blue whale is on the verge of extinction because of its qualities as a private good, as a source of valuable oil and meat. The catching and marketing of blue whales does not harm the species bias of certain ethical and economic positions which aim to make principles of natural rights according to which, among other things, "any adult human... capable of coexisting with others..." can have rights (though such a view is occasionally held, e.g. by pantheists. But pantheism is false since animals cannot have rights. Persons can relate morally, through obligations, to animals and the natural environment are, like those with respect to slaves not all that long ago, undergoing major re-evaluation.

An environmental ethic does not commit one to the view that natural objects such as trees have rights (though such a view is occasionally held, e.g. by pantheists. But pantheism is false since animals cannot have rights. Persons can relate morally, through obligations, to animals and the natural environment are, like those with respect to slaves not all that long ago, undergoing major re-evaluation.

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testability), the positions are open to familiar criticism, namely that the whole of the base class may be prejudiced in a way which leads to unjust principles. For example if every member of the base class detests dingoes, on the basis of mistaken data as to dingoes' behaviour, then by the Pareto ranking test the collective ranking will rank states where dingoes are exterminated very highly, from which it will generally be concluded that dingoes ought to be exterminated (the evaluation of most Australian farmers anyway). Likewise it would just be a happy accident, it seems, if collective demand (horizontally summed from individual demand) for a state of the economy with blue whales as a mixed good, were to succeed in outweighing private whaling demands; for if no one in the base class happened to know that blue whales exist or cared a jot that they do then “rational” economic decision-making would do nothing to prevent their extinction. Whether the blue whale survives should not have to depend on what humans know or what they see on television. Human interests and preferences are far too parochial to provide a satisfactory basis for deciding on what is environmentally desirable.

These ethical and economic theories are not alone in their species chauvinism; much the same applies to most going meta-ethical theories which, unlike intuitionistic theories, try to offer some rationale for their basic principles. For instance, on social contract positions obligations are a matter of mutual agreements between individuals of the base class; on a social justice picture rights and obligations spring from the application of symmetrical fairness principles to members of the base class, usually a rather special class of persons, while on a Kantian position which has some vague obligations somehow arise from respect for members of the base class, persons. In each case if members of the base class happen to be ill-disposed to items outside the base class then that is too bad for them: that is (rough) justice.

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