

## Valuing Priorities In An Environmental Field

**Y**es, according to the author, there were some priorities. Yes, they were indeed the author's priorities, and no, there didn't need to be complete agreement.

"It was just a theory after all," the corporal had remarked, "something you roll down the hill to see if anyone will salute it."

Since this was an insider's perspective, and we were enveloped in that process with the ability of gathering information through experience, the author believed the primary valuing dimension to be

aesthetic.

"Information gathering through all the senses," the general had explained, "including the organ of the mind. We don't merely perceive and filter reality, we constitute it, said the Corporal, partially aware of his feelings on the subject."

"Pure Kant with the Shopenhauer extension," said the scholar.

"A deep appreciation for the place we find ourselves. The wonder of its creative ability and its potential," the designer had said with deep conviction and then had emphasized:

"The dimensions of aesthetic interest that include imagination, sympathy and empathy that make a deeper awareness possible."

"A valuing that was social in conception was second," the general said pointing to his list. "But the emphasis is on an ethics that includes a broader community than the merely human."

That would be tough to swallow, we said, for those who believed that human interests were always primary if not exclusive. But the general had responded that, "Ethics begins in an awareness of relationship which is broader than the interaction between persons. This needn't diminish a human ethics, just put it in perspective."

To be just required "love, respect and admiration" for the whole biotic community. It required an acknowledgment that we were mere citizens as Aldo Leopold had believed. We were obligated to coordinate and evaluate our interests in terms of the "integrity, stability and beauty of the whole."

"The aesthetic appreciation of the morally good is the finest flower of humanity," he quoted.

Santayana, announced the scholar, and commented that it sounded as though the author was attempting to extend the thought to the larger matrix.

The valuing animal, according to the author, led a storied existence. And in the library of our oldest stories, there was much to commend and much to be concerned about. All the valuing dimensions were content for that story. Each had its unique insight and each its special traps. S/he remembered, for example, the friend who suffered from aesthete's foot.

*"May God us keep  
From Single Vision  
And Newton's sleep."*

William Blake

Humor and empathy were some of the best guardians against "Single Vision"

and the fanaticism of all kinds of too passionate belief.

S/he thought that humans were as creative and transforming as their mother, mothy matrix and that it was their inheritance to sing and weave and build and dance - but not mindlessly and at the expense of all other life.

“It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value. By value I of course mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense.”

from *The Outlook, The Land Ethic*  
by Aldo Leopold.

Her/his preference was for the ‘players and the painted stage,’ and the ‘place where all ladders start.’

”Yeats,” said the scholar, “The Circus Animals Desertion,” determined to add footnotes.

S/he said s/he yearned for greater economic justice, less suffering, and what s/he called “a poietic making that is also responsible enough to be a song that lingers in a field that lasts.”

Ideally s/he believed the song of places was a democratic song, a chorus of many voices and interests, not merely an aria of the rich, powerful, human and aggressive.

Designers sometimes forgot that not everyone was equally enfranchised. Not everyone was used to being involved and having a role in the choosing. There was an obligation in their agency to be as inclusive as possible.

The designer said s/he had tuned her/his third ear to hear all those critical things that went unspoken and to voices like the ones that Horton heard.

Designers didn’t discover environmental truth. They created it, s/he insisted. Environmental health, sustainability and justice were profound achievements of the human imagination. If you spent the majority of your time looking for them, you were wasting energy needed to multiply the stock.

Was there a purpose to the human presence in an environmental field, we wondered, not for the first time and too well-traveled to expect a definitive response?

Was it the discovery of knowledge in order to be able to understand and control the field?

The designer said the author believed the discovery of knowledge to be of great importance but merely instrumental.

No, it wasn’t the accumulation of wealth which to any one with any sense was also instrumental.

Instrumental to what then, we had inquired, since most of us had spent our lives in a materialist culture and in its research universities under the influence of such priorities.

Was it human survival, we asked? Instrumental we were told. Adventures in space? Go where no one has gone before? Cyber-mansions? Good sex? The most toys?

The corporal pointed to a sign that said simply,

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*TO DWELL  
GRACEFULLY IN  
THE FIELD*

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“There is another story about the author, probably apocryphal,” the corporal said, “about where he got these ideas.”

“They say he went out rooting for fresh metaphors one day and saw value in the hole.”

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