

Ch 5: Environmental Ethics



Ethics: The branch of philosophy dealing with "morality", or questions of right and wrong human action.

Relevant concept here:

Environmental Justice:

A body of thought stressing the need for equitable distribution of environmental goods (parks, clean air, healthful working conditions) and environmental bads (pollution, hazards, waste) between people, no matter of their background

Environmental "bads"



Environmental "Goods"

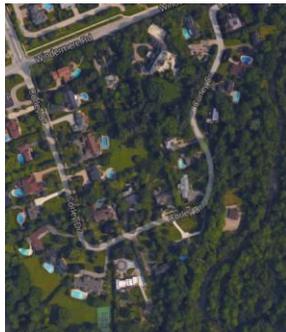


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8mWpwgbNAI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6RbvXulpAk>



Old and new buildings at Regent Park, Toronto's oldest and largest social housing estate



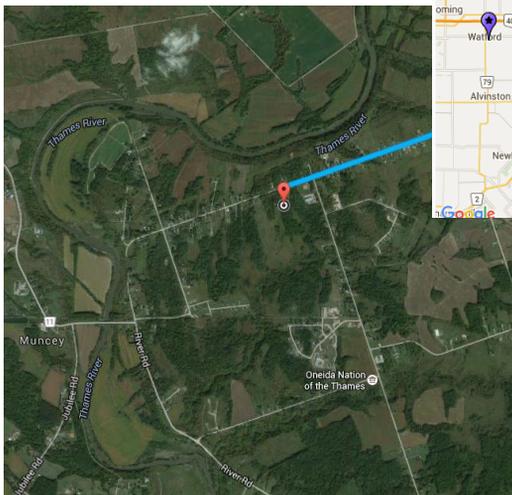
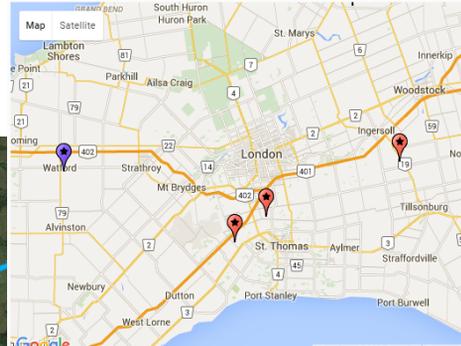
Two neighborhoods in London Ontario

0% Low Income



Social Housing Complex
95% Low Income

Map of large landfills in Ontario



Green Lane landfill is a landfill near London Ontario.

It is owned by the City of Toronto.

Oneida Nation turns to courts over Ontario landfill

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The Oneida Nation of the Thames has started a court action over the proposed sale and expansion of a London, Ont.-area landfill site to the City of Toronto.

Oneida Chief Randall Phillips says the band is worried that the landfill, two kilometres from the community, will pollute local water and air.

"We're asking the courts to intervene... and we're basing that request on the responsibility of the city and the province to fulfill its obligation and its duty to consult with First Nations," Phillips said at a news conference on Monday in Toronto.

The Oneida Nation filed an application for judicial review in Ontario Superior Court on Friday concerning the Green Lane landfill site in Elgin County southwest of London.

The community argues that the Environment Ministry acted incorrectly when it failed to consult with the Oneida Nation on the project, including changing the hours of operation and capacity of the landfill, as well as not setting up a First Nations liaison committee.

Local wells shut down

It contends the City of Toronto and the ministry breached First Nations treaty rights to hunt, fish and live in a healthy environment when they failed to consult them about the plan to ship Toronto's waste to Green Lane.

Phillips told the Toronto Sun on Monday that since the dump opened in 1978, increasing pollution has steadily compromised several local residents' way of life, with several wells being shut down.

Toronto signed an agreement last fall to buy Green Lane from a local family for \$220 million. The sale is scheduled to close in late March.

The city expects the purchase of the 130-hectare landfill site to become

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City Wastewater Treatment



The City of London operates six wastewater treatment plants and 36 pumping stations. The wastewater treatment plants are located along the Thames River.



The largest (by far) is situated next to one of London's poorer neighborhoods (Kipps Lane; Also East London, south of Hamilton Road)

- [Sewage Treatment Description](#)
- [Historical Markers in Sewage Treatment](#)
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Some of our busier streets (Adelaide, Highbury, Wharncliffe, Hamilton) are high density residential, with low income housing



Environmental "goods"



Environmental "bads"



Relevant concept here:
 Environmental Justice:
 Where do we situate the environmental "bads" (waste, air pollution, hazards, waste, snow removal, traffic)?
 What about the environmental "goods"?? (parks, clean air, quiet neighborhoods, healthful living conditions)

Majora Carter, environmental activist, NYC

https://www.ted.com/talks/majora_carter_s_tale_of_urban_renewal?language=en



- The ethics of “factory farms”..
 - **Factory farms** raise animals for industrial meat production, but often use morally questionable methods
 - In terms of “*environmental justice*”, think of:
 - the working conditions of employees/farmers??
 - The impact on local rural communities (air/water pollution)??
 - The impact on smaller competitors (can they compete)??
 - But what of the treatment of the animals themselves, as living “sentient” beings (moving beyond our “anthropocentric world view”)?
 - Here, we speak of “**moral extensionism**” – extending our sphere of moral concern beyond the human realm; what of other species, particularly those that are “sentient” or relatively intelligent??

A breeder sow's "farrowing crate"



Most pigs in the United States & Canada are being produced on "industrial farms". A similar situation exists with to hens (for eggs), broiler hens (for meat) turkey, and dairy cows. Cattle (for meat) usually spend the last couple of months of their lives in feedlots (unnatural diet, cramped quarters, ...)

Why?

Industrial efficiency: less land; space, less input & cost; cheaper meat;

Utilitarianism: the value of nature is determined solely by its usefulness to society;

Maximize "utility", i.e. maximum good for the maximum number.

Ethics: The branch of philosophy dealing with "morality", or questions of right and wrong human action.

Western ethics tends to be **anthropocentric**, or human-centered.

-> ethical orientation whereby "humans are the central focus in issues relating to right and wrong in our actions toward the environment and nature.."

This can be held in contrast with an **ecocentric** (ecology-centered) ethical framework.

-> ethical orientation whereby "ecological concerns are central to decisions about right and wrong action (over and above human priorities)"

The former (anthropocentric) is clearly the dominant ethical orientation,..

Western ethics tends to be **anthropocentric**, or human-centered

Consider the biblical tradition (old testament)

Genesis 1:28
 "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."



Humans are separate and superior to nature

Old testament:

Dominion thesis – humans should control nature and use it how they wish

Note that this has evolved over time:

E.g. More progressive religious movements have evolved to the idea that: humans have **stewardship over nature**, and must care for the environment.. i.e. a moral responsibility to care for & protect the natural world

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Pope Francis says destroying the environment is a sin

Pontiff says humans are turning planet into 'wasteland full of debris, desolation and filth' in call for urgent action on climate change



📷 Pope Francis welcomes the Paris accord but suggests voters might need to take additional action to ensure their governments do not backtrack on the deal. Photograph: Galazka/Sipa/Rex Shutterstock

Pope Francis has called for urgent action to stop climate change and proposed that caring for the environment be added to traditional Christian works of mercy such as feeding the hungry and visiting the sick.

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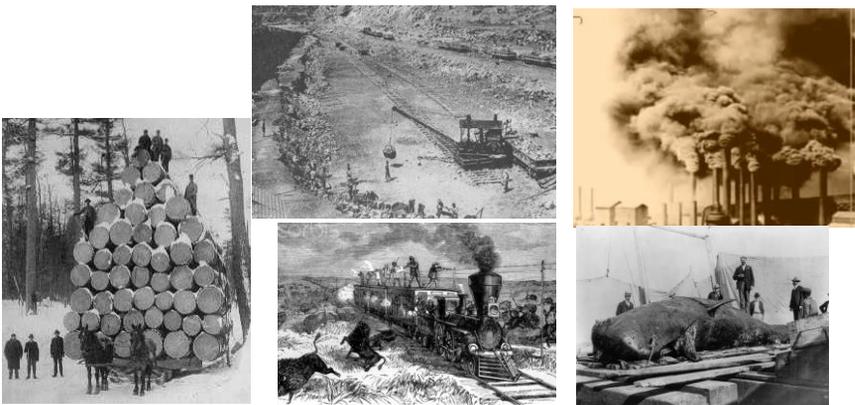
Roots of modern environmentalism: 19th century

Late 19th century/ early 20th century

Context: very little regulation/concern over the impact of human activities on the environment.. much of Western Canada/U.S. was a frontier for settlement

2 major traditions in North American Environmentalism emerged

1. conservationism (Gifford Pinchot, 1865 – 1946)
2. preservationism (John Muir, 1838 – 1914)



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- **Conservationism:**
 - Gifford Pinchot, American forester and politician.
Chief of the United States Forest Service (1905)
 - Context: Free for all, no environmental regulation at all..
 - Pinchot was given jurisdiction over lands controlled by the federal government
 - **Conservation:** The management of a resource to sustain its productivity over time
 - Scientific management of resources: forestry/fisheries with proper management & regulation
 - **Utilitarian** - Best thing is to do the greatest good for the greatest number of people
 - Remains: anthropocentric yet concerned with long term sustainability
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 - Scientific management of resources: forestry/fisheries with proper management & regulation
 - -> emphasis on "long term economic sustainability"..
-



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- **Preservationism:**
 - John Muir: Scottish-American naturalist (founder of the environmental organization: The Sierra Club)
 - Preservation: The management of a resource for its own protection, and preservation
 - Nature should be left alone as much as possible
 - **Wilderness** areas that have had little human impact should be protected (protecting nature, for its own sake)
 - Successful in establishing & expanding several "National Parks"
-





Conservation had its roots in “Utilitarianism”

In early 19th century, [Jeremy Bentham](#) and [John Stuart Mill](#) promoted the idea that actions are right as they maximize human happiness, and happiness alone (fundamental here: increased wealth & development increases happiness”)

For Gifford Pinchot, this should dictate how we treat nature..



Conservation had its roots in “Utilitarianism”

In early 19th century, [Jeremy Bentham](#) and [John Stuart Mill](#) promoted the idea that actions are right as they maximize human happiness, and happiness alone (fundamental here: increasing wealth increases happiness”)

For Gifford Pinchot, this should dictate how we treat nature..



Preservationism had its roots in “Transcendentalism”

[Ralph Waldo Emerson](#) and [Henry David Thoreau](#) wrote of this tradition in America
-> rejection of utilitarian thinking..

-> “anti-materialist”.. (we can’t achieve happiness through “wealth & property”..)

The main belief was in an ideal spiritual state that 'transcends' the physical and is only realized through the individual's intuition/meditation..

Thoreau -> “voluntary simplicity in nature can lead to enlightenment”..

On Walden Pond, Henry David Thoreau



Are the two traditions contradictory?

Conservationism versus Preservationism?

Think of the "Pinery Provincial Park"..



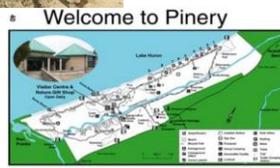
Are we "preserving" a "unique and sensitive ecosystem"?? "preservationism"??

Or

Conservationism: using nature to "promote local tourism industry" (maximizing utility)



Or...



The conservationists and preservationists can come into direct conflict

The Hetch Hetchy Valley



Northwestern part of Yosemite National Park (est. 1864)

San Francisco needed fresh water! The city applied to the United States Department of the Interior to gain water rights and to dam the river and establish a reservoir..

Hetch Hetchy was home to a diverse array of plants and animals. Gray pine, incense-cedar, and California black oak grow in abundance. Spring and early summer bring wildflowers including wallflower, monkey flower, and buttercup. Seventeen species of bats inhabited the Hetch Hetchy area, including the largest North American bat, the western mastiff. - various endangered species..

The debate over the fate of Hetch Hetchy Valley

- Pinchot and the conservationists:
 - The river should be dammed to provide a steady water supply for the residents of San Francisco
 - Leaving the area wild serves fewer people

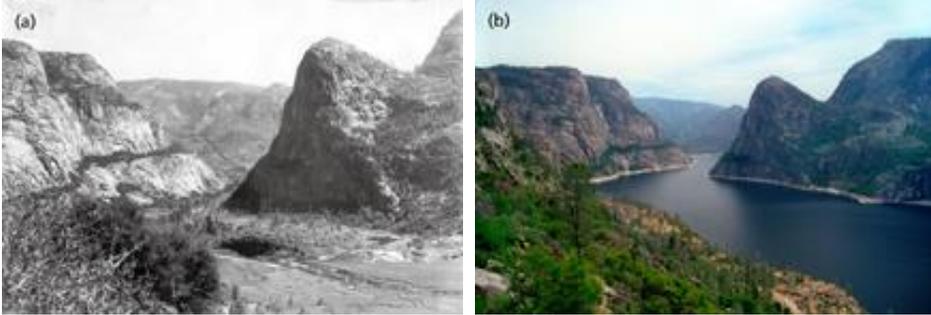
"The object of policy," he wrote, "is not to preserve the forests because they are beautiful . .

The first great fact about conservation is that it stands for development."

- Muir and the preservationists:
 - The landscape should remain unaltered so that people may enjoy it
 - The natural landscape has **intrinsic value**

Muir declared "everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in where nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike"..

The Hetch Hetchy Valley



Through to the present: CONSERVATIONISM HAS FAR MORE CURRENCY THAN PRESERVATIONISM AMONG DECISION MAKERS, NO?

Pinchot's thinking continues to be dominant..

Following up on Muir:



Aldo Leopold (1887 – 1948) was an American scientist (ecologist).
important impact on 20th century environmentalism..

- His thinking was heavily influenced by his training in the scientific field of ecology.
- Also, he rejected the “utilitarianism” and “anthropocentric” thinking that was dominant at the time
- Primary argument:
- We can extend our sphere of moral concern beyond the human realm; what of other species..
- Extending this concern to “the land” upon which we depend..
- “soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively, the land”..

Aldo Leopold and “The Land Ethic”



- Ecologist:
 - Relatively young science, that really didn’t establish itself until well into the 1900s..
 - the field of **ecology**, the study of the interactions between organisms and their environment (living and non-living).
 - It is an interdisciplinary field that includes biology, geography and geoscience.
 - Ecologists attempt to explain:
 - Life processes, their interactions and adaptations
 - The abundance and distribution of organisms and biodiversity
 - The movement of materials and energy through living communities
 - A FUNDAMENTAL INSIGHT OF ECOLOGY:

Human beings can be thought of as **one species among many**, and we too are “dependent” upon the health of our environment

Aldo Leopold and “The Land Ethic”

- Leopold’s land ethic argues that something is right if it promotes healthy ecosystem functioning, and wrong when it doesn’t
 - An **ecocentric** ethic – ecological concerns should come before human concerns

Rejects mindset whereby it is morally okay to “exploit” nature (to produce the maximum good for people) if in fact, this exploitation leads to the destruction or major degradation of our environment and ecosystems (think of industrial farming).



HENCE: Our use of the land and our “ethics” must be informed by the science of ecology, to maintain ecosystem health

One final issue: What of the animal rights movement?



- The **animal liberation** movement argues for the extension of ethical consideration to individual animals
 - The suffering of sentient beings should be minimized or eliminated
 - Use of animals for human purposes is therefore unethical

Moose cull in Gros Morne expanded to save habitat

CBC News | Posted: Nov 06, 2013 7:00 PM NT | Last Updated: Nov 06, 2013 7:00 PM NT



The hunting zone for the moose cull in Gros Morne has been expanded to 90 per cent of the park this year. (CBC)

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• Munching moose in Gros Morne affecting...

A Parks Canada scientist says Gros Morne National Park has expanded the area where people will be able to hunt moose this year in the hopes of curbing an ecological issue that's been created by the animals.

This is the third year that hunters have been allowed into the park to hunt, but this year they've expanded the number of licenses issued as well as the hunting zone.

Tom Knight, an eco-scientist with Parks Canada, said the moose have been eating so much of the vegetation that it's forcing some smaller species of animals to make their home elsewhere.

"In the forest, we are obviously getting less forest cover and then that affects the animals that live in the forest, for example birds," Knight said.

"We've seen that there has been a change in the bird populations and bird communities in these areas."



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Guest Peter Whittle, president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils.

Issues to ponder:

– To what extent does equal consideration of humans and animals make sense??

This is "NOT" what Leopold was arguing, right?

The emphasis was on "ecosystem vitality" and "sustainability"..

Newfoundland's difficulty:

Land ethicists would argue that a major cull is necessary for ecosystem health

Animal liberationists argue that it leads to animal suffering and is wrong in any context