



The Land Is Our Community

Discussion Questions and Activity Prompts

Below, you will find some discussion questions to help you engage with the final three chapters of Roberta L. Millstein's 2024 book [The Land Is Our Community: Aldo Leopold's Environmental Ethic for the New Millennium](https://bibliopen.org/9780226834474), as well as some activity/assignment prompts that you can use to put this philosophy to work. Note that the entire book is available open access: <https://bibliopen.org/9780226834474>

Discussion Questions

Chapter Four. Land Health

- How does Leopold's understanding of diversity in flora and fauna relate to the contemporary understanding of biodiversity, and how does his conception of stability relate to the notion of equilibrium? How do his notions of stability, integrity, and health relate to one another? How do they relate to the contemporary concepts of sustainability and resilience?
- How does Millstein propose that we understand Leopold's concept of *land health*? On this conception, are causes of deterioration of land health always due to human activity?

Chapter Five. Arguing for the Land Ethic

- According to the land ethic, the land as a whole (as well as its parts such as soil, animal populations etc.) are morally considerable. Do you agree? Are there special conditions that an entity must possess in order to be the sort of thing that could be the subject of direct moral considerability?
- Do you find the argument that Millstein identifies as Leopold's main argument for the land ethic, the "argument from consistency," to be persuasive? In what ways is interdependence between humans similar to interdependence between humans and "plants, animals, soils, and waters" and in what ways is it different? Are they "instances of the same kind," as Millstein contends?
- Do you think that land communities have intrinsic value? Do you think that ugly and economically useless parts of land communities have intrinsic value? What implications do your answers to these questions have for conservation policy?

Chapter Six. Policy Implications



- What is Leopold's view on the role of human intervention in conservation efforts? What is his view on setting aside wilderness areas in which human intervention is limited? Do you agree with him on these points?
- Millstein's first subprinciple of the Principle of Integration of Land Uses is "Include and attempt to integrate all pertinent interests and values" (139). What consequences does this have for the role of destructive interests (for example, of the fossil fuel industry) in conservation efforts guided by the land ethic?

Activity Prompts

Activity 1: Assessing Land Health

Note: this prompt could be used as the basis of a group discussion and/or a writing assignment.

Consider a place where you spend significant time—perhaps your campus, place of work, or neighborhood. Using the Leopoldian conception of land health that Millstein articulates in Chapter Four, assess the health of the land community to which that place belongs. It may be helpful to refer to Millstein's suggestion for delimiting the boundaries of land communities from Chapter Three. What factors are likely degrading the health of the land? What factors are likely promoting its health?

Activity 2: Applying the Land Ethic to Conservation Policy

Note: this activity can be expanded or contracted to fit the needs and desires of your context. Issues might be provided from which to choose. Participants might work alone or in groups. The process of crafting policy recommendations could be briefly explored over the course of one class meeting, or as an extended community-engaged project that spans multiple iterations of a course across several years. A long-term version of this activity could involve facilitating conversations between stakeholders with diverse interests and/or presenting recommendations to relevant groups/institutions.

Millstein suggests that the articulation of the Principle of Integration of Land Uses that she gives in Chapter Six (see pages 139-40, 142) should apply "to any conservation domain: wilderness practices, restorations, dealing with invasive species and climate change, how to farm, how to live in cities, and more" (143). Choose some conservation issue that matters to you—this could be an issue on your campus, in your hometown, or something farther afield—and use the eight subprinciples given in Chapter Six to make a recommendation for conservation policy on that issue. Note that your policy recommendation need not be at the level of governmental regulation, but could apply to



practices on private land (151). In order to craft your recommendation, it will probably be useful to:

- Summarize the conservation issue (this may require some research).
- List as many of the relevant interests to the issue that you can think of.
- Consider potential conflicts and tradeoffs that you envision could arise in the application of the Leopoldian conservation principles to the issue you have chosen. What are some ways that those conflicts might be settled in order to promote the health (capacity for self-renewal) of the land as a whole?