

The Consciousness and Philosophy of *The Land Ethic* presented by Aldo Leopold with reference to P.D. Ouspensky.

Stephanie Wojtowicz¹ and William Vitek²

Environmental Science and Policy

Throughout the Environmental Science & Policy Program at Clarkson University, the name Aldo Leopold is often referred to. Being one of the first founders of the modern environmental conservation movement, he is regarded highly by students of the environment.

During the Fall semester of 1999 I was able to research the work and life of Aldo Leopold while enrolled in the Senior Seminar designed for seniors within the ES&P program. Throughout this course we focused on Leopold's writings while at the same time discovering how he lived his life through reading his biography. To complete the course individuals in the class were required to write a comprehensive paper dealing with the Leopold's work.

Leopold, like all of us, is influenced by those we meet throughout our lives. Knowing that he was greatly influence by the work of P.D. Ouspensky, a Russian mystic and philosopher, I focused my research on the correlations of Leopold's *The Land Ethic* and Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum*. Under the advisement of Professor William Vitek, I explored the ideas of an earth consciousness acknowledged by both Leopold and Ouspensky in the my final paper entitled The Consciousness and Philosophy of *The Land Ethic* presented by Aldo Leopold with reference to P.D. Ouspensky.

Aldo Leopold was not greatly known for his philosophies about the world and the community, which we live in. However, he was known for his dedication to conservation and the environment. He spent most of his life researching and fighting for game management, writing the first and only book on the subject. Yet there are many other subjects Leopold spent time researching and contemplating. One of these is our world, our place in it, and our ethics toward it. Influenced greatly by P. D. Ouspensky, he did not extensively write about his philosophy directly in specific essays dedicated to the topic. However, his theories can be seen indirectly throughout his other works. One of these being *The Sand County Almanac*, which he is most recognized for.

Leopold, throughout his life developed ideas about what nature is, and what it should be. Along with his many ideas about conservation and game management, Leopold also had theories about holism

¹ Class of 2000, Interdisciplinary Engineering & Mgt.

² Associate Professor, Liberal Arts

within nature. The holistic theory, which was first formulated by Jan C. Smuts, considers the factors of nature as wholes or in other words organisms. Leopold embraces a similar theory, which we will return to later. Furthermore we investigated the holistic views of P. D. Ouspensky, the Russian mystic philosopher.

Ouspensky, author of *Tertium Organum*, brought to seek out the realization of the relationship between the human race and nature. Along with this idea, he explored the world of consciousness and the meaning of life. Though he delves into many different concepts and theories, such as space, time and motion, the concepts that seem most related to Leopold are those that have been mentioned previously along with the theory of phenomena and the three separate types thereof.

Within the exploration of the works of both Leopold and Ouspensky we discovered how and in what way Ouspensky influenced Leopold and how Leopold brought these philosophies into his work. Leopold theorized that we must take a new look at the way we view the world. It is time with the knowledge that we have gained to not view ourselves as a conqueror of the world but as a citizen of it. It is also time to take a look at the “paradoxes; man the conqueror *versus* man the biotic citizen; science the sharpener of the his sword *versus* science the searchlight of the universe; land the slave *versus* land the collective organism”³ Together Ouspensky and Leopold believe that knowledge is the creator of life, and that science is to the creator of knowledge. For Ouspensky writes that we can not move away from science.

This is quite apparent throughout Leopold’s life and writings. Though I do not believe that he obtained this theory of science completely from Ouspensky, I believe that Ouspensky reminded Leopold of the importance of science and his continuation within that realm was to remain important. Throughout his essays, including *A Biotic View of the Land* and *Game Methods: The American Way* and his book entitled *Game Management*, Leopold brought science and philosophy together. With science he could prove the importance of his methods through practice, but with philosophy he could show the beauty and importance of his methods through life.

Throughout this exploration of Leopold it can be said that he is a complex person, with complex theories and philosophies. These philosophies of the land and his ethics that he believes in, has created a great new of thinking for all of society. Though *The Land Ethic* has not been adopted by much of society, those that believe in it and live with it have tried to carry Leopold’s thoughts to others. If society could envision the world as a collective whole and living organism, perhaps then society could live within Nature peacefully.

We have seen that Leopold was influenced greatly by P.D. Ouspensky, but we have also learned that Leopold has created his views in conjunction with the thoughts of the Russian philosopher. Together they have created an ethic that is important that the survival of our world. We must now ask the question,

³ Aldo Leopold , *A Sand County Almanac; With Essays on Conservation from Round River*. New York: Ballantine Books, Inc.), 261.

as Leopold does in his essay, *Conservation in the Southwest*, “was the earth made for man’s use, or has man merely the privilege of temporarily possessing an earth made for other and inscrutable purposes?”⁴ We, as Leopold explains, are merely citizens within a complex world, merely small parts within the whole. The cooperation and relationship between humans and Nature is the answer to this question.

Currently I am continuing to work on this paper by further exploring others whom influenced Leopold throughout his life, namely Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. I am also conducting a literary search in the hope that I might be able to publish my final work.

⁴ Susan L. Flander and J. Baird Callicott, *The River of the Mother of God and other Essay by Aldo Leopold*(Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press), 95.