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Most of the tools around us are merely conveniences, so in the end, we have control over them. Take, for example, our cell phones. As hard as they may try to keep our eyes fixed upon them, and no matter how powerful a social media algorithm is at showing the most stimulating content possible, we ultimately have the choice to simply put the phone down. Thus, willpower can mitigate whether we are bested by the tools which provide only convenience.

By contrast, it is often the tools which we have little control over that have the most impact on our lives; in this sense, they are better than us. In spite of this, I am appreciative that one of the tools which greatly affects my life, the water system, spurs a positive relationship with my native ecological community. As a cross country runner, I frequently traverse the arroyo nearest my house which channels flood water under the streets. Without it, my house might be flooded during a storm. In this sense, the arroyo keeps the fruits of developed land—that is, the houses already constructed—from going to waste, even if some might consider the land spoilt by the suburb’s construction. The path along the arroyo allows me to escape running alongside the hectic rush hour traffic and instead peacefully observe the native flora and fauna. Jogging up and down the same path season after season, I experience the life cycle of the tumbleweeds that grow in the arroyo: from sprouting in the spring, to shining a vibrant turquoise in the summer, to drying out and tumbling through the park in the howling New Mexico winter windstorms.

From my grandparents house in the North Valley, I run along the banks of the acequias that flow around the Los Poblanos Open Space. It calms me to be around the mini aquatic habitat they provide (especially to watch the water striders jump around the water’s surface) and see the cultivation of fruit, vegetables, and grains they support. The acequia system is the tool which, of all things, gets me closest to the local ecological community while also being mutually beneficial to both the human community who built it and the native ecosystems which grow around it. Without the acequias, sandhill cranes would not be able to feast on the freshly cut alfalfa fields; nor would so many cottonwoods be able to flourish at length from the Rio Grande; nor would I be able to make salsa out of the delicious Big Jim green chile grown across the path from the alfalfa.

A theme present throughout Aldo Leopold’s writing is that a grave danger lies in using destructive tools to the point of maximizing land’s short-term profitability. However, in the current operation of the acequias at Los Poblanos, I believe their usage is akin to that which Leopold described as the “the Arcadian age” for the habitat he chronicled in *Marshland Elegy*, where “man and beast, plant and soil

lived on and with each other in mutual toleration, to the mutual benefit of all.” I personally do not have much direct control over the acequias, though I enjoy them for what they provide. Indeed, my local agricultural community, which I proudly support, does decide the extent of their use, and I am grateful that we have accepted modest profits in exchange for a system that supports the ecological community.

Certainly all the tools in my life do not support a relationship with the ecological community, but I am grateful for the great many that do. One could consider running a tool; simply engaging in that action takes me outside and away from a screen for a longer period of time than any other tool in my life. Social media is also a tool, but one that works to almost the complete adverse effect as the former. Ultimately, the tools which bring me *closer* to my local ecological community are those that bring me *away* from the distractions of modern daily life.