

THE LEOPOLD WRITING PROGRAM

2020 ALDO LEOPOLD WRITING CONTEST AWARD WINNER

MAGGI VAN DRUNEN
HONORABLE MENTION, GRADES 8-9

"Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them. Now we face the question whether a still higher 'standard of living' is worth its cost in things natural, wild and free."

Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*.

Aldo Leopold, naturalist writer and visionary, examined humanity's relationship to the natural world. Through the many manuscripts that came to life with Leopold's words, we are reminded that nature is not just an expendable resource, but something that is essential to communities and heritage; and to the health of society. Yet the value of the forests, lakes, and mountains is lost when the trump card is played – money. Money, as simple as it may seem, has the unique power to abolish any connection between the economy of a society and the ecology of the land. When economy divides from the land and ecosystems, we see aquifers drained to fill chlorine-saturated pools, and forests paved over to make room for fashion malls that will go out of style in ten years; all for the monetary value that never fills the ceaseless void of materialism, masked by the seemingly harmless face of profit.

Furthermore, economy and ecology are not as separate as we often believe. The ancient Greek word, *Οἶκος*, refers to three distinct but related concepts; the house, the family's property, and the family itself. As Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, detailed in his political philosophies, the term was often used to refer to everybody living in a given house. In other words, it represented the dwelling space, the belongings, and people in a community. The English prefix is eco, and stemming from that, comes the roots of ecology and economy - both vitally connected to the health of the οἰκογένεια (family). Over time, humanity finds it increasingly easier to forget that despite prominent differences, connecting these two subjects ensures the prosperity of the earth for future generations.

In order to maintain and safeguard the health of the economy, a major contributing factor that is often overlooked is the ecology behind the items that change hands everyday. We require a trans-disciplinary knowledge connecting our ideas of our environment and economy, with reference to the history, heritage, resources and past mistakes of a economy and resources. In addition to the analysis of past occurrences, we must apply real-life realities and expectations of the 21st century, in order to create a thriving economy adjacent to a healthy ecosystem.

These two completely different structures, while different, must embrace the idea of co-dependence in order to create a system that is not only functional and effective, but able. Leopold states in an article in his book *Game Management*, *"The hope of the future lies not in curbing the influence of human occupancy – it is already too late for that – but in creating a better understanding of the extent of that influence and a new ethic for its governance."*

But that is far easier said than done. Conventional economics demonstrates a dismally small amount of foresight, and avoids the hard-to-swallow pill that reminds us that we live on a planet with limited resources that can't support an indefinitely growing economy, and that some bionomic limits are simply unavoidable.

Unfortunately, this fact is lost as attention is turned to the daily quota of money flowing into the bank. However, we can create certain limits and constraints, designed to ensure a safe operating space. For, once again quoting Aldo Leopold, *"There can be no doubt that a society rooted in the soil is more stable than one rooted in pavements."*



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