

Address to National Park Service

Napa California

The Bioevolutionary Ethic©

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The other night I had one of those rare experiences. It was at once very subtle yet infinitely powerful and deeply personal. It is when you are suddenly aware of the great wonder of existence itself. It is such an overpowering feeling that you tremble. It, I think, is caused by the mind's attempt to comprehend the incomprehensible. Or, perhaps it is as Wordsworth said:

**Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And Cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:**

In today's world we are on the verge of technological discoveries that promise to unveil the mysteries of the universe, while at the same time threatening not physical destruction, rather destruction of the mind's continuous attempt to comprehend existence.

My thesis tonight is simple. The future is about the mind's ability to comprehend existence and the survival of the human spirit. Not at the expense of other species, but in total harmony with all life. It is our evolutionary destiny.

This is central to the future management of our National Parks because we must understand what it is that we are managing. And I submit that we are managing this thing of the mind. No we are not cosmic psychiatrists, but we are managers of the resources that connect our minds to our cosmic beginnings. There must be an ethic that guides us in our management.

It is a privilege to address fellow park professionals this evening. I know many of you have had long and distinguished careers and some of you may just be starting. I personally think that we as park professionals are on the cutting edge of humanity's evolution. Our profession serves as the outward evidence that humanity has a new found respect for the land and our cultural resources. We are helping to dispose of the myth that human kind must have a predatory relationship with the environment. The land ethic introduced by Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson has helped to dispel this myth. Biodiversity, ecosystems management and the natural communities conservation program have all contributed to the destruction of this myth. But the myth is not dead yet.

Through our programs, our protection of the resources, our education of our visitors, and our love for the environment we are establishing a new ethic. This new ethic will determine the direction of our evolutionary survival and the ultimate demise of the predatory myth. It is more than a land ethic, more than an environmental ethic; it is a Bioevolutionary Ethic. This ethic, simply stated, is that human beings have a responsibility to understand how their actions either facilitate or hamper biological evolution on this planet. It further finds us -- in a biological sense -- with brains capable of influencing this evolution in such a way as to promote the survival of the human spirit.

What we don't know is how this process works. We don't know how our brains are hardwired, as E. O. Wilson puts it, to have a proclivity toward the natural world. And we must not destroy that world before we come to this understanding. That would be tantamount to short circuiting the evolutionary process.

In recent times, much of our ethics has become situational. In an effort to accommodate everyone within the context of individual liberty, we have adopted situational ethics as a way of not offending anyone. But ethics at their best should serve as a set of principles that help to guide the development of the individual and community in a non-destructive manner. If we have an ethic that is founded on the principle of Bioevolution, then perhaps we could resolve some of the conflicts we face. Conflicts

between expansion and stewardship.

Though we hear much talk of humanity's destructiveness of the natural world, we hear little talk of its contributions to the positive leaps forward that can only come from the human spirit. Clearly, we are not separate from the biological processes that shape the world. In many ways park professionals are the catalysts for these processes. We facilitate the connection of our park visitors to their natural environment. If we are doing our jobs right we do them in a way that does not interfere with the natural process of linking the human spirit to the world around it. We are like enzymes in a chemical reaction. While we do not interfere with the reaction, the process could not take place without us. This is an awesome responsibility.

It certainly means that what we do is not trivial. It is essential. The future of parks, our survival as a profession does not depend only on our ability to be entrepreneurial, self sufficient, ecotourist oriented, more business like, or a myriad of other things some say we must become to survive. Rather our survival also depends on our ability to effectively serve humanity to insure the continuance of the biological evolution of the species. This can only be done in harmony with other species. It means we must effectively communicate to our stakeholders, legislators, park visitors, and the world at large that our profession is essential and integral to biological processes that lead to evolutionary progress. When we understand this, when this becomes a new ethic, we have a basis for resolving the most difficult conflicts.

If not us, then who? It is easy perhaps for us to only think of ourselves as humble civil servants. The humility is good. But to not realize the full measure of our importance in the grand scheme of things is self-limiting. We are a collection of professions bringing to bear our individual expertise upon the question of survival of the human spirit. We are landscape architects, biologists, botanists, interpreters, maintenance workers, rangers, administrators, engineers, ecologists and more. But we all have a common calling that binds us into one profession. A call to preserve and protect our natural and cultural

resources while providing for quality recreational experiences. Hidden in this calling is a subtler calling with far greater implications. As we go about the business of preserving and protecting, and providing for recreation, we are also creating.

We are creating an ever-increasing self-aware consciousness. If the greatest evolutionary achievement thus far has been the human spirit with its ability to reflect back upon the process which created it, then an even greater evolutionary achievement will be a full and complete understanding of that process. For this to take place there must be a merger of the arts and sciences. There can no longer be a separation between scientific discovery and artistic creation. The poet and the scientist must become one. In a flash of poetic genius which, I believe is also a profound scientific observation, Ansel Adams said: "As the fisherman depends upon the rivers, lakes and seas, and the farmer upon the land for his existence, so does mankind in general depend upon the beauty of the world about him for his spiritual and emotional existence." I submit that it is interpreters within our own profession who have long realized this.

I was asked when I first became director to address a group of guides and interpreters who were graduating from a training class. My schedule did not permit me to attend but here is what I wrote to the class: I am convinced that we as interpreters bring a little bit of heaven onto this earth. It doesn't matter if you're staffing a visitor center, or if you're conducting a moonlight walk through the mountains, or doing a "gutter walk" in the middle of the city, interpreters are the vehicle for transforming society by transcending the common vicissitudes of life.

Indeed, finding in the common the sublime we become translators. We take the language of the stars, the leaf, the ancient civilization and communicate the meaning that is too often hidden by that part of our nature that is blinded by selfishness, poverty, technology unchecked by wisdom, and the ordinary routine of life.

Therefore, within the context of the world today interpretation plays a vital role in maintaining the psychological and spiritual health of our society. When a young child is provoked to wonder at how a caterpillar slinks effortlessly up a twig; or a young girl sits silently beside a stream and hears music that inspires her to sing songs of love; or when a group of blind children for the first time are guided along an accessible trail, when these seemingly small events take place life is enriching itself. Interpreters facilitate this process.

Interpretation is an art form that demands a spiritual commitment like no other profession. Ultimately it is what you as interpreters are able to do to inspire, provoke, and enlighten your fellow human being that will determine the fate of our relationship with the rest of the world. I challenge you to capture the light that radiates from all things cultural and natural. Use that light to lead park visitors to a greater understanding of themselves and the environment.

Interpreters open our ears to the voice of God in nature.

Almost without knowing it we have gone about the business of furthering the progress of humanity. And just as interpreters have been quietly pursuing the merger of science and art, landscape architects have been finding creative ways to connect people to the natural world while maintaining the integrity of natural landscapes. As the impact of the automobile on the land becomes greater, and more people visit our parks, landscape architects, along with civic leaders and environmental groups, will be faced with the challenge of managing this threat without destroying the all important connection between humanity and the natural environment.

Why do I keep emphasizing this connection? Because through connections information is passed, and it is information that I believe our brains are hardwired to seek out. Einstein said, "Never stop questioning." It is our ability to question that leads to evolutionary progress of the human spirit. Human beings have an insatiable thirst for

information. Almost everything we do is about gathering and transferring information. We are genetically programmed that way. Somewhere along the evolutionary path – very early I believe – those life's processes were favored which could gather and process information about the world around them. At first these were simple feedback loops, both positive and negative.

It is clear, that we as park professionals facilitate the park experience. We are continuing this process began eons ago. The Bioevolutionary Ethic of which I spoke earlier compels us to act in such a way as to reverence this process. It must be incorporated in our culture, it must be the 21st century's great idea. Just as the conservation ethic as introduced by E. O. Wilson and others changed the way we viewed our relationship to the environment in the latter half of the twentieth century, so the Bioevolutionary Ethic must bring us an understanding of our relationship to biological evolution. We must strain to hear, see and feel the artistic in the scientific and the scientific in the artistic. We must stretch the limits of our brain's ability to question so that information can be discovered, shared, transferred and transformed. The information revolution is not being fought in the boards rooms of Sun Microsystems and Microsoft, it is being waged in the brains of biological life forms throughout the universe.

Information is to the brain as food is to the body. The problem is most of what we crave is irrelevant. Wisdom, I believe, is the ability to discern what information is relevant so that we gain understanding-that upon which all things are founded-the Foundation. In other words information leads to the continuous and infinite unfolding of life.

When people visit our parks they are yearning for information. But we all have difficulty determining what information is relevant. The connection we make is like putting a jigsaw puzzle together. One thing leads to another and you begin to "see". It is the classic "Ah, Ha!" experience, or the *deja vu*, or a deep sense of "knowing". We have all experienced it. And I dare say most of these experiences have been during periods of interaction with the natural world.

But even when we make connections successfully we see only partially. The trouble with the world today is we are acting upon an incomplete picture. We make some steps toward "understanding" but because we have an incomplete picture. We stagger way off course; we cannot keep a straight evolutionary path. This is normal. Evolution is so much trial and error. The difference now in our evolutionary course, is that instead of simple positive and negative feedback loops, humanity has a profound ability to consciously choose the path outright, or at least affect its direction. This is where the ethic enters. The conscious decision on the part of a human being that affects an outcome always has an ethical component.

This gathering of like-minded professionals is about you connecting and sharing information. For us here this evening the word synergy has great meaning. There is no greater power of progress or destruction than the coming together of multiple minds. The potential is awesome. It is my hope that during this conference you will not only share ideas about entrepreneurialism, public/private partnerships, and common problems of operations and management, but that you will also talk about the survival of the human spirit, and the role we as park professionals have to play in that survival.

The future is about the survival of the human spirit. Not because as a species we are better than any other species in a cosmic sense, but because we as a species stand at the apex of biological evolution. We are the culmination of life seeking to understand itself. It is the human spirit that represents that great achievement and that has the conscious ability to affect the outcome of all of life's processes. Our minds are the instrument upon which the future will be played out. In the words of Wilson:

Over thousands of generations the mind evolved within a ripening culture, creating itself out of symbols and tools, and genetic advantage accrued from planned modifications of the environment. The unique operations of the brain are the result of natural selection operating through the filter of

culture. They have suspended us between the two antipodal ideals of nature and machine, forest and city, the natural and artificial, relentlessly seeking, in the words of geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, an equilibrium not of this world.

I like the characterization "not of this world". It captures the wonder of where we are headed physically and spiritually in an evolutionary sense, and it avoids the common vernacular of "New World" with all of its connotations. It is out of this world and in to another that our minds are taking us. Consider for a moment how a sixth century human being would feel in today's world. Surely they would believe they had left the earth if it were not for familiar landmarks. It is in this context that we must ponder the future of parks.

The event this week is a meeting of the minds which I hope will lead to something not of this world. That we will see the future of our parks as inextricably bound to the future evolution of this world into a world where we understand humanity as one with its environment and hence as its chief steward. In serving our world through proper stewardship we are fulfilling the ultimate in the Bioevolutionary Ethic. Because we will have evolved to live in such a way as to have resolved the greatest of paradoxes created by evolution itself. And that paradox is this: I quote E. O. Wilson who put it best:

The drive toward perpetual expansion—or personal freedom—is basic to the human spirit. But to sustain it we need the most delicate, knowing stewardship of the living world that can be devised. Expansion and stewardship may appear at first to be conflicting goals, but they are not. The depth of the conservation ethic will be measured by the extent to which each of the two approaches to nature is used to reshape and reinforce the other. The paradox can be resolved by changing its premises into forms more suited to ultimate survival, by which I mean protection of the human spirit.

Where Wilson uses the term, conservation ethic, I substitute bioevolutionary ethic. Since the fundamental principle of biological evolution is cumulative and natural selection, the ultimate selection will be for a species that understands how to resolve this paradox. And this can only come as a result of a self aware community of human beings assuming an ethic that will allow it to resolve conflicts that protect the greatest achievement of life: by that I mean the human spirit.

Now that I have provided a conceptual framework let me say this. I realize that most of you struggle on a day to day basis with things like overflights of the Grand Canyon, gateway communities threatening to destroy the spirit of place, and just plain too many people visiting our parks.

These tensions exist because we as a species have not come to a common understanding of our relationship to the world around us. I believe the Bioevolutionary Ethic can bring us to such an understanding. This means that the formidable challenge of the future will be educating our citizens about this ethic. If the collective mind of society's members can comprehend how it evolved and continues to evolve, then as a society we will approach the management of our resources in such a way as to facilitate their continuing evolution.

Excellence in management must be insightful and have foresight. We can not blindly adopt management techniques without having a basis for that adoption. Successful managers of the future will be those who understand and comprehend fundamental principles. The real success of the environmental movement in general and the park movement specifically has been rooted in the conservation ethic. I predict that the conservation ethic will be replaced by an ethic which is based in our understanding of how we have evolved and insight into where we are evolving to: The Bioevolutionary Ethic.

Whether you believe it or not, comprehend it or not, understand it or not; know this: you as park professionals are humanity's best hope for the advancement of this ethic

and thus the best hope for the protection and survival of the human spirit.

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