Animal Communication (Ling 430). First ethics assignment
(This assignment is to be credited to Keith Warner, Assistant Director for Education, Center for Science, Technology, and Society at Santa Clara University, and David DeCosse, Director of Campus Ethics Programs at the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics.)

Read through the webpage (below), and then write a 5-6 page autobiography of your relationship with the Earth, making sure to address these questions from the page:

- “Has your relationship with the earth been a relationship with a friend or stranger?”
- “How do you "see" the earth? Is it beautiful or ugly or somewhere in between?”
- “Do you feel joy or sorrow, pain or pleasure about animals or sunsets or white-capped waves?”
- “Do you ‘understand’ the natural world and how its components are related? Or are its ways foreign?”
- “Do you ‘love’ the earth - or do you feel alien from it? Do you care for its well-being, feel for its suffering, want to heal its wounds?”
- “Do you have ‘faith’ in the earth?”
- “What is your most significant experience of nature?”
- “Did your family teach you to care for the Earth and its creatures?”
- “Why, more than anything else, have you come to value the earth as you do?”

After finishing your autobiography, consider the following questions, which we will discuss in class:

1. “What have you learned about how you have come to place a value on the natural world? Did anything surprise you in your story?”

2. “What, more than anything else, is the basis for the value you put on the natural world? And what is the basis for how you view environmental issues?”

3. “Are you satisfied with the story of your relationship with the natural world? Are there aspects of your thinking that you would like to work on?”

4. (“Please read aloud to a friend or classmates a key passage from your autobiography.)

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By Keith Douglass Warner OFM, with David DeCosse

To start a journey into environmental ethics, begin with what you know. One of the best ways to become aware of what you already know about environmental ethics is to write an autobiography of your relationship with the earth. Ethics is a matter of connecting head and heart. But too often ethical reasoning becomes detached from our experience, emotions, feelings, and deepest if unacknowledged commitments. By telling the story of the history of your relationship with the earth, you can better reflect on why we value the natural world as we do. And by reflecting on these deeper commitments of the heart, you can better refine our ethical reasoning about the environment.

Step One:

The great American environmentalist Aldo Leopold said in Sand County Almanac that "we can be ethical only in relation to something that we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in." In light of Leopold's comment, we invite you in the course of writing this autobiography to think of the earth in imaginative, personified terms. Has your relationship with the earth been a relationship with a friend or stranger? Or sometime friend and sometime stranger? Using Leopold's terminology, ask yourself the following questions. How do you "see" the earth? Is it beautiful or ugly or somewhere in between? What do you "feel" about the natural world? Do you feel joy or sorrow, pain or pleasure about animals or sunsets or white-capped waves? Do you "understand" the natural world and how its components are related? Or are its ways foreign? Do you "love" the earth - or do you feel alien from it? Do you care for its well-being, feel for its suffering, want to heal its wounds? Or does thinking about the earth in such terms seem inaccurate and far-fetched? And, to use the last of Leopold's terms, do you have "faith" in the earth? Perhaps this is a religious faith? Or perhaps this is faith in the sense that you count on the earth to provide well for your life? Or perhaps the earth is faithless, a fickle friend at best? The first step in writing the autobiography of your relationship with the earth is to jot down responses to these questions.
Step Two:
The next step is an exercise in gathering additional information out of which to shape your autobiography. In this step, you should jot down responses to the following questions:

What is your most significant experience of nature? An experience undertaken in the course of work or recreation or other? Are there one or two experiences of an encounter with the natural world that stand out in memory? Close your eyes and remember the sights, smells, and feelings of being in a place where you felt intimate with nature, and then write up notes that explain why that place on that day allowed you to relate to the Earth in a special way.

How has your relationship with the Earth been affected by your family history? By the experience of your parents, grandparents, and forebears? By how they came to own and to use property? Did your family go on camping trips? Or did your family hunt? Did your family teach you to care for the Earth and its creatures? Was your family vegetarian and, if so, why? Has an environmental crisis ever affected you or your family?

Has there been a book, movie, song, or course you have taken that has affected deeply how you think about the earth? Has religion played a role - positive or negative - in how you experience your relationship with the earth?

What have been some of the most significant economic, social, cultural, or political developments that have affected how you experience the earth?

Step Three:
With Steps One and Two complete, you now have the raw materials from which create the autobiography of your relationship with the earth. Think over the notes that you have jotted down. Reflect on what is most significant, on patterns, on what most moves you. Take special note of the question of motive: Why, more than anything else, have you come to value the earth as you do? There is no right answer to this question. You may value the earth a lot or not much at all. And how you value the earth may well change in the future. But the goal now is simply to tell your own story, whatever that is, of why you have come to value the earth as you do. With the question of motive especially in mind, then, please write a 5-page autobiography of your relationship with the earth.
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| **Step Four:**  
After finishing your autobiography, consider the following questions: |
| 1. What have you learned about how you have come to place a value on the natural world? Did anything surprise you in your story?  
2. What, more than anything else, is the basis for the value you put on the natural world? And what is the basis for how you view environmental issues?  
3. Are you satisfied with the story of your relationship with the natural world? Are there aspects of your thinking that you would like to work on?  
4. Please read aloud to a friend or classmates a key passage from your autobiography. |
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