Van Renssalaer Potter. *Global Bioethics: Building on the Leopold Legacy*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1988. xvi, 203 pages. $12.00, paper.

In *Bioethics: Bridge to the Future,* published in 1971, Van Rensselaer Potter proposed "the formation of a new discipline . . . of bioethics" that would bring together the sciences and humanities in a common effort "to generate wisdom, the knowledge of how to use knowledge for social good." Potter's motive was plain: "Man's survival," he wrote, "may depend on ethics based on biological knowledge." Yet, Potter's presentation plainly went beyond consideration for the fate of humanity alone. A strong sense of environmental concern suffused Potter's wide-ranging discussion. "We must," he wrote in the preface, "face up to . . . the fact that human ethics cannot be separated from a realistic understanding of ecology in the broadest sense. *Ethical values* cannot be separated from *biological facts*" (emphasis in original).

Writing amidst the headiest days of the awakened environmental movement, Potter was one of many who found the science of ecology a promising source of new insights, questions, and purpose. His contribution, however, was remarkable for a number of reasons. First, Potter's professional background was not in environmental science, policy, or philosophy *per se*. He was drawing on a distinguished thirty-year career in cancer research as Professor of Oncology and Assistant Director (later Director) of the McArdle Cancer Research Laboratory at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (he currently serves as Hilldale Emeritus Professor of Oncology and Environmental Studies).

Second, Potter—as a consequence of his background—brought to his discussion a biological perspective different in its emphases from many environmental thinkers. "The subject matter [of bioethics]," he wrote, "should include both the reductionist view and the holistic view of biology and should be broader than both together. . . . We must combine biological reductionism and holism and then proceed to an ecological and ethical holism if man is to survive and prosper." At a time when many in the environmental community were reacting strongly against the devotion of the biological sciences—including ecology—to pure reductionism, Potter thus staked out a territory in the conceptual middleground.

Finally, in his coinage of the term *bioethics,* Potter captured the attention of many of his medical colleagues who simultaneously were looking to expand the older concept of medical ethics to take into account new dilemmas posed by the tremendous steps taken in such endeavors as genetic engineering, *in vitro* fertilization, neonatal intensive care, and organ transplantation. Bioethics has gone on to secure an intellectual niche of its own, denser in content and narrower in scope than in Potter's independent proposal, and certainly no less dynamic for the fact. It was, and remains, a term rich with meaningful suggestions.

Ethic." The years immediately following World War II were ones of profound concern over the survival of the human species in *any* form. The war, its crisis-spawned technologies, and especially its fearful concluding act forced—at least upon the ecological intelligentsia—a heightened global perspective in which the fate of the Earth and the fate of humanity came to be seen as aspects of a single dilemma. In that awful crucible, conservation's chronic philosophical dissensions melded into a common concern for the future; the same might be said of the persistent tensions in Leopold's own personal philosophy. Devotees of Leopold's ecological "depth" need not fear Potter's premise; to grant greater visibility to Leopold's concern for the future of humanity does not necessitate any lesser visibility for Leopold's concern for the future of the full biotic community. If anything, such an emphasis only adds realism, sophistication, and humanity—drama, really—to what Leopold was trying to accomplish in the summer of 1947 as he assembled "The Land Ethic." In this sense, Potter's treatment of Leopold is more solidly based than that of René Dubos, a figure to whom Potter bears some comparison. Potter himself sees the speculations of deep ecology as "an excellent complement" to his own effort.

Some readers may justifiably take issue with Potter's extrapolations of Leopold's land ethic. Yet it is the fate, if not the very definition, of seminal thinkers that they open up new channels of speculation; Potter is not the first, nor will he be the last, to find Leopold's thought a crucial point of origin. Intellectual influence, like a free-running river, will carve its bends, raise its bars, and alter its direction in the course of its self-expression.

For Potter, the main value of Leopold's land ethic is the unprecedented way in which it combines "biological knowledge and human values," the chief components in his construct of bioethics. Potter, however, acknowledges a number of influences from a variety of fields: geneticist C. H. Waddington, anthropologist Margaret Mead, zoologist Theodosius Dobzhansky, biologist Norman Berrill, and bioethicist George H. Kieffer. Many of these, particularly the brethren from the biomedical ethics community, are certainly worthy of increased attention from the readers of this journal.

At the core of Potter's presentation is a question to which neither environmental nor biomedical ethicists have devoted enough thought: what is, or should be, the relationship between the two? Is there any relationship? Potter's stance is unequivocal. He devotes a full chapter to a discussion of the "two kinds of bioethics" and critically assesses the "overlap" of their bailiwicks. He concludes that

> We must recognize that over-specialization in either branch can be counterproductive to the goal of acceptable survival on a global scale. The two branches need to be harmonized and unified to a conceptual point of view that may well be termed global bioethics, stressing the two meanings of the word global. A system of ethics

cern and his intent. His is the humane voice of a thoughtful man with broad medical experience trying to come to grips with some of the most difficult questions we face. His answers are sensitive, hopeful, and tolerant.

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