



A Moral Defense

By Derek Van Damme

Editor's Note: Derek Van Damme is a senior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and will graduate with a degree in Turf and Grounds Management next December. He has worked at the Nemadji Golf Club in Superior, Golden Valley Country Club in suburban Minneapolis, and Blackhawk Country Club in Madison. Derek is the past president of the Badger Turf and Grounds Club, and Dr. Wayne Kussow has been his undergraduate advisor at the UW-Madison. He has written other pieces for *THE GRASS ROOTS*.

As a college student, I am often asked by fellow students about my major field of study. Since I am not fond of small talk, particularly when it is about me, I usually attempt to sidestep this question. When I do answer it, I subject myself to the inevitable and annoyingly typical follow up questions like, "So you want to be like Carl in Caddyshack?", and "You have to go to college to be a greenskeeper?" and "What do you do in the winter?"

On the occasions an answer is elicited and further explanation of a golf course superintendent's duties is given, the question and topic I dread most is then raised—the environment.

It may disappoint many of you to read that I and most of my peers (turf students) do not relish the thought of discussing environment concerns. But I ask you to keep in mind the campus we are enrolled on is overflowing with supercharged, hyper-liberal students. Rational discourse with such people (rational/liberal—how's that for an oxymoron?!) is nearly impossible. But, as I am learning, such conversations are part of a golf course superintendent's job and responsibility.

The two most common types of responses given by those of us in the turf field to those in ecology are, in my view, inadequate. The first is an apologetic response, an attempt to shift the "blame" of pesticide use to our employers' expectations regarding playing conditions being incompatible with

plant growth requirements. Although accurate in identifying a correlation between cutting heights/plant stress levels/traffic and pesticide requirements, this response fails to recognize the philosophical grounds the "ecologist" is coming from.

A second common response is one filled with facts and figures from the plethora of scientific data we have been inundated with of late. The Penn State and the Cape Cod studies come to mind most often. This attempt to wow the environmentalist with scientific fact alone is futile. For one to be truly "green", he or she must reject the scientific method itself and all that derives from it. Again, this second response fails to address the philosophical angle of the issue.

For this argument to be won, our industry must begin to recognize from where it is we are being attacked. As Michael Gemmell, editor and publisher of *The Free-Market Environmentalist*, explains, "It is crucial to recognize that ecology was, from the very beginning, primarily a philosophical rather than a scientific area of study. By analogy, if philosophy is the soil of the forest, science consists of the trees within it. Scientific study proceeds from a philosophic framework." Without a philosophical soil, the trees of our arguments are blown to the ground by the hot air of environmentalists. I therefore offer this philosophical and moral defense of pesticide use.

The use of pesticides in our industry is man's attempt to create surroundings conducive to both aesthetics and utility. Those two qualities combined on a golf course give rise to objective value in our society, represented in the form of green fees or club membership dues.

It is this pursuit of objective goals and the profits made from the attaining of those goals that environmentalists oppose, NOT the supposed destruction of the planet. Aldo Leopold, author of *A Sand County Almanac*,

freely admitted distorting scientific fact to preserve the environment: "Of the 22,000 higher plants and animals native to Wisconsin, it is doubtful whether more than 5 percent can be sold, fed, eaten or otherwise put to economic use. Yet these creatures are members of the biotic community, and they are entitled to continuance. When one of these non-economic categories is threatened, and if we happen to love it, we invent subterfuges to give it economic importance." Stephen Schneider, climatologist and global warming theorist, says, "To capture the public imagination, we have to offer up some scary scenarios, make simplified dramatic statements and little mention of any doubts one might have."

Those two quotes expose the moral shortcomings of environmentalists—an adherence to the premise that nature holds some intrinsic value. That is value in and of itself, separate from any relationship to man. This is the basis for their arguments against almost anything.

As George G. Reisman, PhD., argues in his essay *The Toxicity Of Environmentalism*, "The doctrine of intrinsic value is itself only a rationalization for a preexisting hatred of man. It is invoked not because one attaches any actual value to what is alleged to have intrinsic value, but simply to serve as the pretext for denying values to man. For example, caribou feed upon vegetation, wolves eat caribou, and microbes attack wolves. Each of these is alleged to possess intrinsic value. Yet absolutely no course of action is indicated for man. Should he act to protect the intrinsic value of the vegetation, caribou, or wolves? Even though each of these alleged intrinsic values is at stake, man is not called upon to do anything. When does the doctrine of intrinsic value serve as a guide to what man should do? Only when man comes to attach value to something. Then it is invoked to deny

him the value he seeks. In other words, *the doctrine of intrinsic value is nothing but a doctrine of the negation of human values*. It is pure nihilism.

It is this nihilism and the rejection of reason and the scientific method (the two are inseparable) that proves the moral bankruptcy of environmentalists.

It is clearly established that environmentalists oppose the pursuit of objective value, achieved in our industry primarily through aesthetics. It should also be clear that their opposition to pesticide use comes not out of concern for mankind or nature, nor from solid scientific fact. Their opposition comes from a denial of reason as man's means of survival and a rejection of the scientific method and objectivity.

To justify pesticide use on a golf course, it is necessary to justify the pursuit of aesthetics and the form of utility—sport—on a golf course. In other words, does the end justify the means?

For golf course superintendents, pursuit of aesthetics represents a sim-

ple yet adequate job description. It is a mode of productivity. Productiveness is necessary for man's survival. All other species survive by consuming existing materials. Man survives by imagining, then producing, materials. In order to produce anything it is necessary to alter the existing surroundings. Since the opposite of productivity is parasitism, the value of productivity should be self evident.

Philosopher/novelist Ayn Rand writes, "Productive work is the process by which man's consciousness controls his existence, a constant process of acquiring knowledge and shaping matter to fit one's purpose, of translating an idea into physical form, of remaking the earth in the image of one's values..."

A golf course's form of utility is sport. It is a place for people to exercise, compete, relax and enjoy. Should such places exist? Is sport a moral activity? George F. Will knows it is. He writes in *Men At Work*, "Greek philosophers considered sport a religious and civic—in a word, moral—

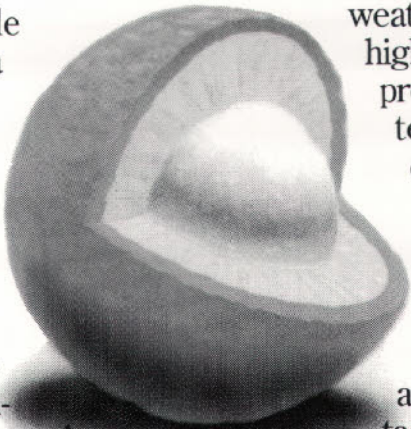
undertaking. Sport, they say, is morally serious because mankind's noblest air is loving contemplation of worthy things, such as beauty and courage. By witnessing physical grace, the soul comes to understand and love beauty. Seeing people compete courageously and fairly helps emancipate the individual by educating his passions."

There can be only one standard of judging ethical behavior in environmental matters—does the activity improve **human** life or not? It should be obvious to all that human life is enhanced by aesthetics and sport.

To the doomsday environmentalists out there I leave this quote from Lord Thomas B. Macaulay, uttered in 1830: "We cannot prove that those are in error who tell us that society has reached a turning point, that we have seen our best days. But so said all before us, and with just as much apparent reason. On what principle is it that, when we see nothing but improvement behind us, we are to expect nothing but deteriorations before us?" ♣

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