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ABBEY, EDWARD

1927–1989

Edward Abbey was born in Indiana, Pennsylvania, on January 29, 1927, and died in Tucson, Arizona. A talented author described as the Thoreau of the desert Southwest (Fadiman 1968, McMurtry 1975, Cahalan 2001), in essays and novels Abbey extolled individualism and decried the effects of the destruction of wilderness on human liberty.

In the spirit of self-invention, Abbey cultivated the image of a rough-hewn redneck (Abbey 1991), a persona that belied a sophisticate who listened to Sibelius and Shostakovich and playfully referenced Socrates, Shakespeare, Schopenhauer, and Sartre in his writings.

Abbey was not an environmentalist in the conventional sense (Berry 1990). He rolled a tire into the Grand Canyon (Abbey 1988a), rhapsodized about the virtues of littering highways with beer cans (Abbey 1977), and claimed that he killed a rabbit with a rock (Abbey 1988a, Cahalan 2001). He was not an environmental philosopher, although he earned a bachelor's degree in English and philosophy and a master's degree in philosophy. He initially resisted the path of academe (Abbey 1990a) but eventually became a tenured professor of English at the University of Arizona (Cahalan 2001).

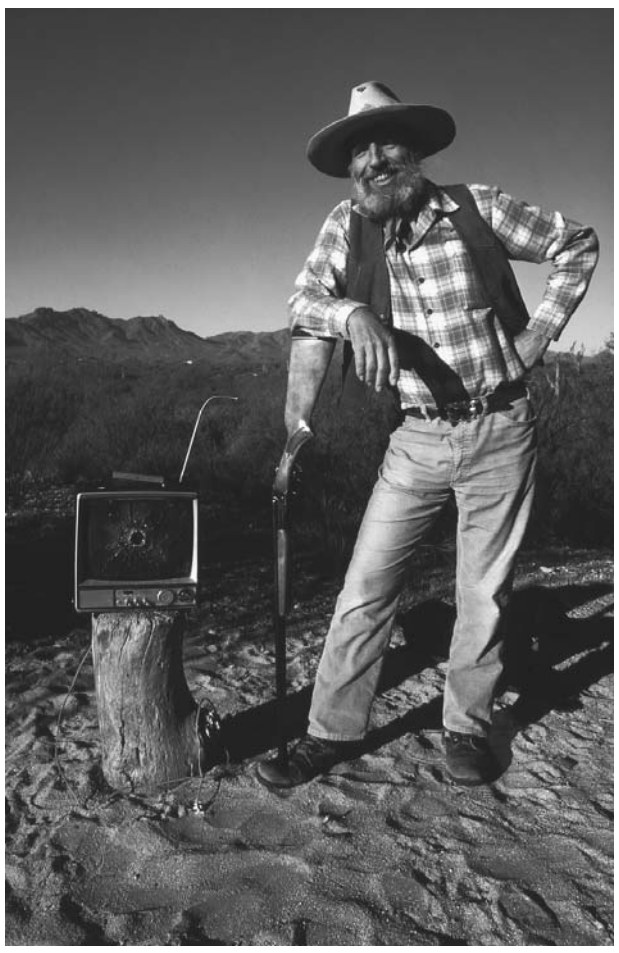
Although Abbey never produced a recondite analysis of the axiology and metaphysics of nonhuman nature, his work has important implications for environmental ethics (Rothenberg 1998). In his master's thesis in philosophy he argued that although resistance to domination is morally justified, violence against people is not (Abbey 1959). Abbey reworked this tenet decades later within the framework of environmental activism: Safeguarding wilderness from industrial defilement through sabotage of machinery is permissible as long as no injury results (Abbey 1990b).

Sabotage may be considered radical, but Abbey displayed traditional American libertarianism. According to Abbey, any form of repression—governmental bureaucracy or corporate hegemony—must be thwarted. In the western United States such authoritarianism is symbolized by rising dams, wending roads, and metastasizing suburbia (Abbey 1988b), making the means of their production legitimate targets for "ecological sabotage."

Existentialism—the idea that each individual must create life-directing meaning in the absence of objective ethical norms—is also a prominent theme throughout Abbey's work. Human potential cannot be achieved without the freedom to pursue possibilities, and in this activity people are on their own; no transcendent being helps them in the struggle (Abbey 1988a).

In Abbey's view, self-actualization is of the highest importance for ethics. Wilderness, with its gifts of wonder, surprise, solitude, and danger, is the ideal stage on which to act out the unfinished script each person has been handed. In wilderness lurks danger (Abbey 1987). Danger hovers at the limits of possibility. Exploration of these limits—death or exultation—is freedom. Freedom is the summum bonum of human existence (Abbey 1985).

The failure of industrial civilization lies in its inability to recognize the multidimensional noneconomic values of untrammeled land—aesthetic, ecological, and spiritual—that are essential to human well-being. Abbey



Edward Abbey. *Shown here near Tucson, Arizona in 1986, Abbey was not a typical environmentalist. Through his writings, Abbey espoused his libertarian beliefs about the threat of industrial tourism for the Wilderness.* **PHOTO BY TERRENCE MOORE. COURTESY OF TERRENCE MOORE PHOTOGRAPHY.**

at times seems misanthropic (Abbey 1988a), yet careful exegesis reveals a robust humanism.

Abbey's rant against "industrial tourism" (Abbey 1988a) can be analyzed in several ways. An environmentalist interpretation emphasizes the denigration of wilderness. A Marxian interpretation emphasizes the reification of wilderness travel into commodities purchased at visitor centers and shopping malls. An existentialist interpretation emphasizes the inauthenticity of sanitized experience: glossy pamphlets, scenic drives, paved nature walks, handrail-circumscribed overlooks, panoramic movies shown in air-conditioned and insect-free auditoriums.

Although all three interpretations are present in Abbey's work, the existentialist viewpoint looms largest: People are the real losers to industrial tourism (Abbey 1988a). The fundamental ontology of human being remains hidden amid the cacophony of civilization and is discernible only in the context of wildness.

By most measures Abbey lived wildly: drinking liberally, coveting numerous women, living from paycheck to paycheck, traveling incessantly. By his own admission, he diverged from Thoreau's fastidious New England sensibilities (Abbey 1982). Nonetheless, a comparison of the two authors is instructive. Both loved to meditate on the relevance of wilderness for the human condition. Both have been categorized as nature writers but are best characterized as prescient social commentators whose critiques have implications for environmental policy.

Abbey was an existentialist with environmentalist proclivities. It is not clear whether for him nonhuman nature has intrinsic value independently of human cognition. It is clear that nonhuman nature has extrinsic value for the authenticity of human experience it enables. Wilderness delimits ranges of possibilities; it is up to each individual to discover those limits. Wilderness experience allows people to glimpse their inner humanity.

SEE ALSO *Civil Disobedience; Earth First!; Ecosabotage; Ecotage and Ecoterrorism; Environmental Activism; Environmental Philosophy: V. Contemporary Philosophy; Thoreau, Henry David; Wilderness.*

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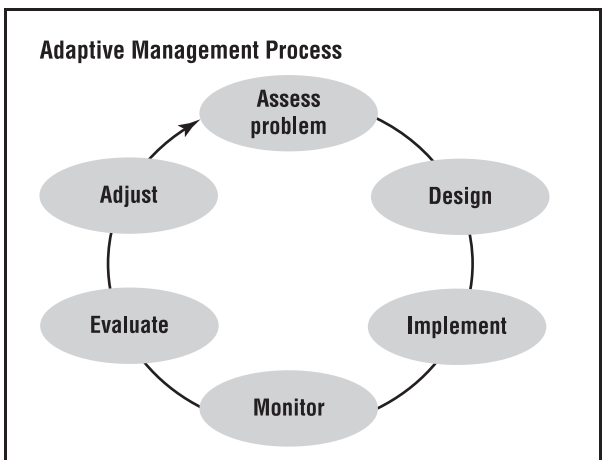
ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Adaptive management, also called collaborative adaptive management (CAM), has deep roots in the environmental professions reaching back at least to Aldo Leopold's emphasis on community, ecology, and prudence. CAM reflects a shift in worldview from arrogance, control, and technocracy to humility, learning, and collaboration. It accepts that ecological and social systems are so complex and dynamic that our knowledge of them will always be partial. It expects to be surprised by an unpredictable future. It views every management action as an opportunity to learn. And it helps to refine visions of a desired future as humans collaboratively adapt and reformulate management goals in response to experience.

In principle, CAM is as simple as it is powerful. Experts work collaboratively with stakeholders to define desired future conditions and identify the management actions most likely to produce those conditions. Each of these management actions provides an opportunity to learn how ecological systems function and respond to human intervention. The management actions are carefully monitored as they are implemented and progress toward agreed-upon goals, yielding feedback that leads to adjustments in both goals and management. Failures lead to a reevaluation of both the means and the ends. Scientific understanding advances through comparisons of changes in socioenvironmental conditions with predictions that were made using the best available science. CAM, therefore, provides a platform for scientific and social learning that gradually but deliberately builds the capacity to manage resilient, thriving, and sustainable biocultural systems.



SOURCE: From *Adaptive Management: The U.S. Department of the Interior Technical Guide*. Adaptive Management Working Group, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington D.C.

What Is Adaptive Management? *Adaptive management focuses on learning and adapting, through partnerships of managers, scientists, and other stakeholders who learn together how to create and maintain sustainable ecosystems.* **CENGAGE LEARNING, GALE.**

CONTEXT AND HISTORY

Contemporary ecology integrates the thinking of chaos and systems theories that gained prominence in the later half of the twentieth century. Ecologists now accept the idea that natural disturbance and change are normal in most ecological systems and that many disturbance-driven changes are unpredictable (e.g., by fire, hurricane, flood, and disease). Ecological systems are organized so that changes in smaller units occur within constraints determined by the larger units in which the smaller units are nested. Changes in smaller units can sometimes induce changes in the larger, and some of these changes can be nonlinear, abrupt, and dramatic because whole systems "flip" to a new state, perhaps irreversibly, when enough change in the smaller levels accumulate to affect functions at larger levels. A celebrated example is the change from grass savannas to brushy fields in the southwest United States. This shift alarmed Aldo Leopold, who contended that this abrupt ecological revolution was caused by suppression of the region's fire regime and the introduction of domestic livestock. Contemporary ecology acknowledges that humans likely will never possess sufficient understanding and technical capacity to control the biocultural system that is constantly evolving in response to both natural and cultural disturbances and evolving human desires.

CAM has also evolved in response to the failures of rational comprehensive environmental planning, a style of decision making that dominated the twentieth-century, positivist, Progressive-Era policies of the United States. Public agencies assumed public interests were best served if decisions were made by scientists and technicians using objective methods that avoided the biases of parochial interests and political power. Rational comprehensive planning further assumed that solutions that would serve the public interest could be found if sufficient resources were available for expert analysis of problems.