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Where the Wild Things Are: Exploring the Concept of Wilderness and its  
Moral Implications

by

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## **Abstract**

First and foremost, this work offers a critical review of recent influential environmental theorists' efforts to construct and defend normatively significant accounts of wilderness. As such, this work focuses on the definitions provided by environmental philosophers Eric Katz, Holmes Rolston III, J. Baird Callicott, Steven Vogel, and Val Plumwood. I suggest that insofar as Katz and Rolston rely on the problematically construed human-nature dichotomy, their definitions and moral arguments for the preservation of wilderness fail. While J. Baird Callicott's definition provides an accurate account of wilderness, his ethical framework limits its normative force. Since Val Plumwood does not rely on the human-nature dichotomy, nor does she attempt to assign intrinsic value to wilderness and wild entities, her approach is the most successful.

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## Introduction

Intuitively, the human-nature dichotomy is simple—even benign: “nature” possesses certain properties that “human” does not, and these properties are foundational enough to merit a difference in kind. But intuitions are often misleading, and the human-nature dichotomy is no exception. At first glance, it may seem that there are obvious properties uniquely attributable to the concept of nature—one need only compare the expansive vista of a mountainscape to the concrete jungles we call home to appreciate these distinctive properties. The relative ease with which one intuitively grasps this dichotomy helps to explain why so many environmental philosophers rely on this conceptual tool to form the basis of their accounts of wilderness ethics.

As it turns out, however, the properties that differentiate humans from nature are more difficult to locate than one might expect. Owing to our evolutionary heritage, for example, humans are indeed “natural,” while anthropogenic climate change is for all intents and purposes a wholly “unnatural” phenomenon. The problem posed by the human-nature dichotomy is not merely that it equivocates on different senses of “nature”: when left unexamined, it serves as a disingenuous basis for an environmental ethic altogether.

Nevertheless, varying forms of the human-nature dichotomy continue to inform the wilderness debate, which emerged in the 1990s. For some environmental ethicists, such as Holmes Rolston III or Eric Katz, it is integral to their projects that humans be conceptually distinguishable from nature: the binary is presupposed in their conviction that nature ought to be protected from human

interference. Thus, if nature is valuable because it is distinct from humans, then dissolving the dichotomy would *prima facie* remove the basis for moral valuation. This designation also explains, in part, why both are opposed to including ecologically restored ecosystems in the category of nature.

For environmental ethicists such as Paul Taylor, Eric Katz, and Holmes Rolston III, nature is something we should treat with respect—it is a moral subject that ought to be valued, or it is a source of intrinsic value that merits moral consideration. In these cases, anthropogenic properties are either attributed to non-human entities (as in the case of Paul Taylor), or anthropogenic properties are redefined so as to include non-human entities (as in the case of Eric Katz’s notion of agency). However, as will become evident, it is less obvious how nature is distinguishable from humans. To this end, we might replace the ambiguous concept of “nature” with a more precise one, “wilderness.” Given how the concept of nature is defined by these philosophers, it must be the case that wilderness is indeed a subcategory of nature, but it must equally be true that our responsibilities towards wilderness are of a different sort than those we have towards nature. The challenge, then, is to formulate an adequate definition of wilderness that does not equivocate with nature, that does not rely on the human-nature dichotomy, and that is precise enough that it remains useful from an ethical perspective.

For the purposes of this project, I will be focusing on a concept of wilderness most readily associated with the 1964 Wilderness Act and which pertains to North American landscapes, primarily because this is the definition

referred to (either directly or indirectly) by the philosophers featured in this paper, namely: Eric Katz, Holmes Rolston III, J. Baird Callicott, Val Plumwood, and Steven Vogel, all of whom have made profound contributions to the domain of English-language environmental philosophy.

Although discourse on the distinctions between British, Canadian, and American attitudes towards wilderness (to say nothing of non-Western perspectives) is available, I shall concentrate primarily on American landscapes and attitudes. While Canadian legislation is significantly influenced by its southern neighbour's, British perceptions of wilderness and nature differ substantially, largely because British landscapes are far more humanized than North American landscapes (Henderson 394). Furthermore, while North American conservationists tend to be preoccupied with maintaining the natural processes in certain landscapes and minimizing human interference, British legislation often emphasizes historical (i.e. cultural) significance, diversity, and the preservation of preferred species, which are labelled as such on the basis of aesthetic considerations (Henderson 394). Thus, given the approaches taken by the philosophers featured in this paper, it is clear that all are referring primarily to North American lands (and in Plumwood's case, Australian).

Norman Henderson accounts for the disparity between these countries' approaches to wilderness in three ways: 1) Britain is largely bereft of any landscapes which would qualify as "wilderness" in North America, 2) since the 1890s, American attitudes towards wilderness have become increasingly sympathetic as wilderness landscapes dwindle, and 3) until very recently,



Canadians tended to be ambivalent towards wilderness, due in large part to its comparative abundance (Henderson 394-95). This, in part, explains why the bulk of legislation concerning wilderness areas, such as the Wilderness Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the Endangered Species Act, first emerged in the United States and are either absent in British and Canadian legislation (Canada, for example, had no equivalent endangered species legislation until very recently) or does not reflect the same priorities (In Britain, environmentalists tend to favour substantial human intervention with environments in order to maintain a level of species-diversity that might otherwise be impossible.) (Henderson 397).

J. Baird Callicott and Michael Nelson have coined the phrase “received wilderness idea” to refer to the simplest definition of wilderness: wild landscapes are those which are devoid of human artifacts (Nelson 156). According to this formulation, Britain and the European continent do not contain any recognizably wild landscapes, save perhaps for the Białowieża woodland bordering Poland and Belarus, a remnant of the vast primeval forest that once blanketed most of Europe (Lafreniere 95). On the other hand, as of 2004, legally designated wilderness areas in the United States comprise 4.67 percent of its total landmass or roughly 105.7 million acres, as designated by the National Wilderness Preservation System which was enacted as part of the Wilderness Act of 1964 (Lafreniere 320). Finally, Canada has one of the lowest population densities worldwide ( $3.41/\text{km}^2$ ), with eighty percent of the population living in urban centers within 200 km of the border with the United States (“Atlas of Canada”). While most of Canada’s

legally designated wilderness areas are located within the boundaries of its National Parks, according to the above definition, wilderness areas comprise a substantial portion of Canada's landmass. Consequently, and as Henderson suggests, the presence or absence of wilderness serves (at least in part) to inform how and whether it is valued. Perhaps this helps to account for the predominance of Anglo-American (and Australian) environmental philosophers in the wilderness debate.

For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the environmental philosophers I introduced earlier, whom I take to have developed theories concerned almost exclusively with either investigating the concept of "wilderness" or developing an environmental ethic that is capable of accommodating the concept and the locations to which it refers. In the following chapters, I will outline the parameters of the wilderness debate with the primary aim of discerning whether it is possible to formulate a working definition of wilderness that can be used for prescriptive ends. Doing so involves establishing an alternative to the conceptually problematic human-nature dichotomy. Finally, much of the 1990s wilderness debate focused on the question of how to conceive of ecologically restored lands, and I intend to address this question as well, since both the moral and definitional status of these locations challenge our intuitions about the received wilderness idea.

Chapter 1 consists of four subsections and the broader aim is to historically contextualize the concept of wilderness and the human-nature dichotomy. I provide some historical background to the concept of wilderness as

it appears in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the United States. This includes outlining what I take to be three conceptions of wilderness and requisite types of valuation that continue to colour the wilderness debate and how humans are understood in relation to nature. These include wilderness as valueless wasteland, wilderness as aesthetically rich in value and biotic life, and wilderness as resource. After establishing the parameters of the debate from a historical perspective, I turn to the definition provided in the 1964 Wilderness Act to show that just as historical conceptions of wilderness colour the legislation, the resulting ambiguities in the Act's definition of wilderness serve as a wellspring of dissent amongst philosophers and environmentalists who currently defend or reject the notion of wilderness both practically and conceptually.

After locating the tensions within the Act's definition in Chapter 1, Chapters 2, 3, and 4 deal with the definition of wilderness and its moral status given by Eric Katz, Holmes Rolston III, and J. Baird Callicott, respectively. I establish my criteria for a definition of wilderness in the introduction of Chapter 2. Each thinker provides certain conceptual improvements over the last, and outlining what each takes to be central to his defence or rejection of the wilderness concept should bring us incrementally closer to a satisfactory definition that adequately deals with the criteria offered in Chapter 2. What is central to these thinkers' positions is how each deals with the human-nature dichotomy, or the notion that both humans and nature possess properties that cannot be replicated in one another. In my view, the only way for the defenders of

the wilderness idea to sidestep any definitional problems is to accurately account for humanity's role in nature.

Eric Katz defends wilderness by committing himself to the dichotomy, or as he construes it, the difference between humans and our artifacts and natural entities. His defence of wilderness and nature can be taken as synonymous since, for him, the concept of the human could be in opposition to the above concepts. Katz relies on a Kantian framework of ethics and so the distinction allows him to assert that nature and wilderness are moral subjects. Although I claim that his position inaccurately interprets the Kantian framework he depends on to do his ethical work, his emphasis on the difference between human artifacts and natural entities helps to outline which properties should be considered when looking to define what wilderness entails, and when trying to establish whether or how humans are related to nature. Accordingly, I outline three potential criteria at the beginning of Chapter 2 that, if satisfied, could provide a practically and morally workable definition of wilderness. These criteria are taken up in subsequent chapters and applied to each thinker's conception of wilderness.

Holmes Rolston III takes a similar approach to Katz, since he thinks humans do possess certain properties that are not replicated by other organisms. Unlike Katz, however, Rolston imposes a clear distinction between wilderness and nature. While he admits that humans are part of nature in the broader sense, he thinks that wilderness can be defined negatively, in terms of the absence of human interference. This seems to result in a more accurate definition of wilderness, but if wilderness is defined merely negatively as the exclusion of all

things human, then the concept lacks any distinguishing characteristics which, in turn, makes it more difficult to establish moral worth. It is possible to locate some positive characteristics that are only attributable to wilderness but, given Rolston's naturalistic account of wilderness, it appears less clear why humans ought to be excluded from the definition. Accordingly, I assess Rolston's definition using the same criteria employed in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 4, I bring these same criteria to bear on J. Baird Callicott's definition of "biosphere reserves," which is a concept he prefers over the idea of "wilderness." Callicott thinks that wilderness is problematic as a concept because it is ecologically outdated, ethnocentric, and does not sufficiently accommodate the roles of time and change. I introduce Callicott for two reasons: first, because his position acts as a helpful alternative to those offered by Katz and Rolston, and second because his criticisms point to certain exigencies that merit attention in the wilderness debate (conveniently, he also responds directly to Rolston's arguments in favour of wilderness preservation and the human-nature dichotomy). Despite his rejection of a strict distinction between humans and non-human entities, Callicott nevertheless endorses the protection of presently designated wilderness areas ("A Critique" 437).

Ultimately, Callicott favours the concept of "biosphere reserve" over "wilderness" because ecological qualities are prioritized in the former definition, while in the latter they are not ("A Critique" 440). Although I tend to agree with Callicott's dismissal of the human-nature dichotomy and the notion that humans and wilderness are mutually exclusive, it seems less clear why the concept of

wilderness ought to be rejected outright, especially given the recent trend in the United States to select wilderness areas primarily on the basis of their ecological importance. Accordingly, I propose that the idea of wilderness need not be rejected if it is possible to revise the definition so as to accommodate ecological principles. Further, given what some philosophers take to be an endemic misanthropy and potential *reductio* in the conclusions of Callicott's revised "Land Ethic," I will investigate whether these charges are applicable to his stance on wilderness, especially given that extended human development more often than not entails ecological impoverishment.

Finally, in Chapter 5 I will introduce Val Plumwood's approach, which I take to be the most persuasive defence of wilderness as well as the most compelling argument against the human-nature dichotomy. Plumwood offers a feminist critique of the received wilderness idea. Like Rolston, she differentiates between nature and wilderness, but her definition of wilderness does not rely primarily on the exclusion of humans from these locations. As a result, and despite the self-described radical nature of her critique, it tends to be more pragmatic than other competing accounts. This may be due in part to the kind of ethical framework she employs—she is less concerned with assigning intrinsic value than with exploring intentional forms of communication. Conceptually speaking, her approach de-emphasizes a strict distinction between humans and non-human entities. Rather, she proposes that wild areas are those in which non-human entities make themselves present, even in the midst of some forms of human development. Given that humans are dependent on and fundamentally

related to other life forms and ecosystems, our interactions cannot categorically divest those locations or organisms of the title “wild” without thereby imposing a false dichotomy. Thus, for her, a wilderness ethic has less to do with imposing strict boundaries between humans and non-human entities than with establishing ways in which human conduct imposes minimal damage on our surroundings.

Furthermore, her account of wilderness is consistent with the criteria proposed in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, despite what I take to be the relative promise of her definition and treatment of humanity’s relation to nature, considerable work remains to be done concerning the formulation of her proposed communicative ethics—notably in determining how her concepts might be implemented in a practical capacity. Nevertheless, I shall argue that Plumwood’s position goes a long way towards establishing the moral worth of non-human entities, and perhaps more importantly, achieves a conceptually and practically consistent picture of humanity’s relation to nature.

## Chapter 1: Enacting Wilderness

### I □ Introduction: Wilderness in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries

The American Wilderness Act of 1964 represents the culmination of a long legacy of politicians, ecologists, and environmentalists geared towards protecting areas of the American landscape that are recognized as having unique properties and distinct values that can be distinguished from those properties and values associated with human culture. According to the Act:

[Wilderness] in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man is himself a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without further improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions. (qtd. in Zahniser 121-22)

This effort to create a legal distinction between that which is primeval or wild and that which is anthropogenic or urban in order to give those former areas legal protection signifies a distinct moment within the history of environmental activism. It signals a unique conception of what wilderness means and what moral obligations the American populace perceive themselves to have towards it.

Beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, American attitudes towards these landscapes and ecosystems began to be coloured by ethical concerns, and the ways in which these areas were valued and understood have changed over time in accordance with cultural and scientific presuppositions. As William Cronon puts it in his essay “The Trouble with Wilderness”:



The more one knows of its peculiar history, the more one realizes that wilderness is not quite what it seems. Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation—indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in history. (471)

Cronon chronicles the history of these changing cultural attitudes to show that what is often assumed to be verifiably true about wilderness today is only a product of current cultural assumptions about how we understand ourselves in the world and what constitutes “human” as opposed to purely “natural” entities. Interestingly, most of the attitudes that Cronon describes can be captured by arguments presently used to embrace or reject the concepts of nature and wilderness, which indicates the perennial philosophical challenge of understanding what entities these concepts are meant to capture.

The objective of this chapter is to provide a brief historical overview of the contributing perspectives that ultimately led to the definition of wilderness as it appears in the 1964 Wilderness Act. In subsequent sections, I outline the problematic structure of the wilderness concept as presented in the Act, which engendered the wilderness debate of the 1990s, and which “rages on” presently. It is impossible, however, to clearly represent the wilderness debate of the 1990s without giving the notion of wilderness any historical orientation. This is because a historical analysis of how the idea has been used and what it has been intended for explains why wilderness was defined in the 1964 Act in terms of its opposition to humanity. It also explains why the Act’s dependence on the human-nature dichotomy continues to challenge environmental philosophers, especially those concerned with establishing the status and value of wilderness today.

Since an exhaustive account of the historical genesis of the wilderness idea both as a philosophical concept and as a legal term extends beyond the scope of this chapter, I will limit my discussion to what might be considered three widespread conceptual frameworks used to define and understand areas designated as wilderness that emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

First, as Cronon suggests, is the conception of wilderness as a relatively value-less entity, taken by 19<sup>th</sup>-century immigrants as fodder for economic exploitation and by historians as a cornerstone of American political identity. This attitude is perhaps most famously captured in Frederick Jackson Turner's book, *The Frontier in American History*. The second consists in the aesthetic and spiritual values ascribed to landscapes which appeared to European settlers as devoid of human development. On this account, these landscapes were considered deserving of legal protection because their worth could not be measured in terms of economic value. This conviction ultimately led to the formation of the preservation movement most often attributed to John Muir. Finally, the third framework can be captured by Muir's contemporary, Gifford Pinchot, who is largely responsible for the conservation movement, and whose utilitarian approach to the management of these landscapes appears in stark contrast to the preservation movement.

## **II □ The Frontier Thesis and wilderness as wasteland**

In his book, *The Frontier in American History*, Frederick Turner explains the extent to which American social structures and ideals were shaped by the expansive, un-modernized landscapes that confronted early colonizers upon their

arrival in North America. He observed how these immigrants conceived of wilderness as an oppositional force completely devoid of human enterprises and which, due to its apparent chaotic nature, was destined to be refined, tamed, and ultimately conquered through economic development by people of European origin (Cronon 479). Both Thomas Birch and William Cronon argue that this lingering perception continues to contribute to the identification of wilderness as a remote and pristine landscape untouched by human projects. Although Turner is concerned largely with how the constant urge of early settlers to push westward and claim land for themselves shaped the republican ideals of individualism and economic freedom that contributed to a unique American version of democracy, his argument is predicated upon the colonizers' idea of wilderness as described above.

The idea of "winning a wilderness" is the foundational motivation that compelled early Americans to form "the complexity of city life" and civilization from "primitive" and "savage" lands (Turner 1). Indeed for Turner, "this perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character" (2). He explains how settlers considered the frontier "the meeting point between savagery and civilization" and argued that "Western democracy has been from the time of its birth idealistic. The very fact of the wilderness appealed to men as a fair, blank page on which to write a new chapter in the story of man's struggle for a higher type of society" (2). However blank this page may have been from the point of view of European

civilization, it was nonetheless replete with the requisite natural resources for prosperous economic growth. These pages were written by the hand of nature, and they needed to be translated into the rational and productive script of modern capitalism. It was this mentality, claims Turner, that drove settlers westward and that gave them the impetus to bring the frontier under their dominion through the transformation of the landscape.

Turner does mention the ‘wasteful’ ways by which the early settlers used the rich resources available to them. He also recognizes that the presently perceived reckless consumption of these resources, paired with a burgeoning population and increasing food prices, has resulted in a new trend towards preserving those areas as yet untouched (which he aptly remarks were mainly arid landscapes and mountain ranges, unfit for extraction or agricultural use). Nevertheless, Thomas Birch thinks that vestiges of the frontier thesis persist and continue to inform the way in which we understand what wilderness is and how it ought to be valued.

What matters most here, however, is not just the way in which the frontier thesis helps to explain the unique dimensions of American democracy but, rather, how the imperialist attitude provides a set of definitional properties that imbue these designated landscapes with a kind of value which still resonates today. Birch and Cronon take this line, and so too does Val Plumwood, as I explain in Chapter 5. So, even though Turner argues that the early Americans’ “most fundamental traits, their institutions, even their ideals were shaped by this interaction between the wilderness and themselves” (226), Birch and Cronon reply that the concept of

wilderness, understood according to this attitude as something which is extraneous and oppositional to human culture, is itself *already* a specific worldview that requires further investigation (Birch 6, Cronon 472). Furthermore, according to Birch, this worldview did not just contribute to the definition of wilderness and the American political mythology but also to the way in which wilderness was and still is valued (6).

For Cronon, what is substantial about Turner's thesis is not only that the early Americans' conception of wilderness as Other or as completely untamed landscape played a crucial role in defining American identity, but that it is because Americans have maintained such a strong affiliation for these areas of Otherness that they render these areas sacred in their own right (475). They are no longer locations devoid of value and ready to be tamed as the early settlers might have supposed, but rather, they are symbols of America's origin—present reminders of its infancy.<sup>1</sup> Thus, as Turner indicates, the wilderness idea took on a more symbolic significance as the frontier began receding. There is, however, a far more precise way in which wilderness can be understood as sacred—one which stems from the aesthetic tradition of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe, and which can be best characterized by the exaltations of John Muir's environmental writings.

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<sup>1</sup> Birch takes this thesis a step further, by implying that the frontier ideology has contributed not just to the preservation of wilderness—both literally and as an idea—but also to a far more sinister feature of American democracy—American imperialism. For him, these areas represent not so much a symbol of the keystones of republic democracy—justice and equality—but instead are the products of imperialistic, dominating tendencies that constantly confront any system that relies on an oppositional Other to sustain itself.

### III □ John Muir and the sanctity of nature

John Muir, arguably one of the pre-eminent environmental thinkers in the United States prior to Aldo Leopold, is largely responsible for changing the tide of American legal attitudes towards these wild landscapes (Chadwick Brame 34-5). As described above, the frontier mentality that dominated the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was one which captured the conviction that wilderness, whatever it meant, was first and foremost a chaotic, untamed place—quite literally a wasteland—and was treated accordingly (Cronon 473). By the end of the 1800s, however, this attitude began to shift. By then, most of the United States had been settled and tracts of land the size of European countries were no longer available for settlement. The United States was now unified rather than divided between a densely populated eastern seaboard and a comparatively barren western frontier. And so, when John Muir first visited Yosemite Valley in 1868, he was not the first European to have encountered the place and his preoccupation with the landscape had nothing to do with establishing a land claim. Rather, the Scottish Protestant drew from his religious background in his efforts to value, popularize, and protect what he described as “divine, enduring, unwastable wealth” (*My First Summer* 113).

According to Cronon, John Muir’s defence of these landscapes represented a dramatic shift away from the dominant perception of wilderness espoused in Turner’s frontier thesis and towards a new frame by which to understand and value these areas. Under this conception, what makes these lands valuable is not restricted to the natural resources available for economic use, nor

the symbolic ties it has to the founding of a new continent and dominion; instead, these areas began to be perceived by some, and most explicitly by John Muir, as sacred spaces where God's work could become available to those who chose to witness it. According to the likes of Muir and other similarly minded proto-environmentalists, such landscapes required legal protection—they needed to be preserved as unblemished reminders of the sacred. This conviction led Muir to found the Sierra Club, whose activities were central to the rise of the preservation movement and to the enactment of the National Park Bill of 1899, a precursor to the 1916 Organic Act.

For Cronon, John Muir's encounter with these areas serves as an exemplar of the tradition extending to European romanticism, which values nature as an object of aesthetic experience. Beginning with Shaftesbury, extending to Addison, and culminating in Kant, valuing nature as a locus of sublime experiences served, for thinkers such as Muir, as the reason why landscapes such as Yosemite Valley ought to be given legal protection and preserved as they were originally found by European explorers.<sup>2</sup> For Cronon, conceiving these landscapes as sacred spaces is predicated upon a unique kind of aesthetic appreciation—the feeling of the sublime—and from a historical perspective, the very properties which had previously been used to devalue these landscapes were being used as central features of their value. As he put it: “Satan's home had become God's own temple” (Cronon 474). Furthermore, the landscapes that garnered this status were, more often than not, those which appealed to very specific aesthetic tastes.

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth mentioning that although these lands had originally been inhabited by indigenous peoples, the remaining populations were evicted during the time that Yosemite became a popular tourist destination and was declared a National Park (Keller and Turek 20).

Common to these areas were their dramatic formations, often geological. The giant redwoods of Sequoia National Park and the impressive mountains framing Yosemite Valley, for example, closely mirror the common features associated with the experience of the sublime.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, according to Cronon, “it is not too much to say that the modern environmental movement is itself a grandchild of romanticism and post-frontier ideology, which is why it is no accident that so much environmentalist discourse takes its bearings from the wilderness these intellectual movements helped create” (475). This appeal to aesthetic consideration is especially evident in light of John Muir’s effort to prevent the construction of the Hetch Hetchy dam. His defence included the suggestion that other “gentler” valleys within the Sierra foothills be chosen over the grandiose Hetch Hetchy valley. For Cronon, this suggests that his defence had “nothing to do with nature and everything [to do] with the cultural traditions of the sublime” (491).<sup>4</sup> Even if the value that Muir attributes to these landscapes can be understood to align more closely with aesthetics rather than with broader properties that might apply to a wider range of natural entities, what remains crucial for Muir is that the worth of these landscapes is of a different order than mere utilitarian or economic value. For him, one of the central challenges facing environmentalists is to discharge the widely held conviction “that the world was made especially for the uses of man” (*Steep Trails* 12). On

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, section B “On the Dynamically Sublime in Nature” in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (121).

<sup>4</sup> This tendency to value landscapes based on their aesthetic properties is equally evident in the development of National Parks in the United States and Canada. The first locations chosen for this designation included those which offered stunning vistas (King’s Canyon, 1890; Mount Ranier, 1899; Yosemite, 1890). It wasn’t until the 1930s that areas were chosen first and foremost for their ecological uniqueness (Everglades, 1934; Biscayne, 1980; Congaree, 2003).



this view wilderness can be understood to refer to very specific landscapes which arouse feelings of the sublime and are devoid of human intervention. Here, wilderness areas take on a normative dimension: they are aesthetic and spiritual bearers of value deserving moral and legal standing.

#### **IV □ Putting wilderness to work: Gifford Pinchot and conservationism**

Despite Cronon's claim that the received wilderness idea finds its origins in the frontier thesis and later in the European aesthetic traditions, the conservation movement, spearheaded by Gifford Pinchot in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, is perhaps of equal importance from the perspective of the legal and philosophical development of the received wilderness idea. A contemporary of Muir, Pinchot shared in the perspective that the machinations of capitalism risked destructively exploiting areas of the American landscape. In contrast to Muir's claim that wilderness areas are bearers of a type of value that transcends human economic interests, however, Pinchot claimed that "there are just two things on this material earth—people and natural resources" (*Breaking* 325). Over his career as a forester and later as a state governor, Pinchot regarded the systematic privatization of land and the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a small minority of landholders as an egregious moral affront to American democratic ideals. He adopted Bentham's principle, "the greatest good to the greatest number," with the addition "for the longest time" as the central precept of conservationism (*The Fight* 17). Thus, while Muir and Pinchot agreed that the American populace is entitled to enjoy the bounty offered by specific areas of the American landscape, they differed on what exactly this "bounty" consisted in, and on how to value it.

Unlike Muir's preservationism, which seeks to section off portions of land designated as aesthetic or spiritual sites of value, Pinchot's conservationism aims to forge a balance between the practical and economic interests of the people of the present with the needs of future generations. The primary value of these lands, then, cannot be derived from their pristine quality nor from their beauty, but stems from their capacity to provide people with the resources necessary for a prosperous economy: hydroelectricity, mineral deposits, lumber, agriculture, and the like.

This clash in values is illustrated perhaps most acutely by the infamous 1913 decision to dam the Tuolumne River to create a water reservoir in the Hetch Hetchy Valley of California. For Muir and other preservationists, Hetch Hetchy Valley was a site of immense natural beauty for whose inclusion in Yosemite National Park they had successfully lobbied. But the valley served as an equally exceptional site for a reservoir, which was urgently needed by the expanding population of San Francisco. For Muir, the damming of the Valley was equivalent to the damming of "the people's cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple [had] ever been concentrated by the hearts of man" (*The Yosemite* 114). Thus, despite his acknowledgement that "to obtain a hearing on behalf of nature from any other standpoint than that of human use is almost impossible," Muir believed that the values of these areas for spiritual observance and aesthetic appreciation trumped any other human interest (*Steep Trails* 11). Conversely, Pinchot, acting for the bulk of the debate as the Chief of the United States Forest Service, advised President Roosevelt and later President Taft that the best use that

could be made of the Hetch Hetchy Valley “would be to supply water to a great center of population” (qtd. in Meyer 272), revealing his democratic and utilitarian ideal of fair distribution.

Indeed, for Pinchot, the principles of conservationism include what might initially seem to be human interests unrelated to land management—and for this reason his conservationism might be considered a political stance with an ecological tenor, rather than the reverse (*The Fight* 51). The first principle of conservationism, he argues in *The Fight for Conservation*, is economic development—but development which is undertaken using the most efficient means possible. For Pinchot, the least wasteful use of natural resources ought to be married with the drive for economic development.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, his second principle “stands for the prevention of waste” (*The Fight* 16). Finally, a third tenet of conservationism is that natural resources “must be developed and preserved for the benefit of the many, and not merely for the profit of a few” (*The Fight* 16). From the standpoint of environmental ethics, Pinchot undeniably held an anthropocentric<sup>6</sup> position and as such was derided by supporters of Muir and other advocates of the intrinsic value of wilderness for ignoring other sources of value that cannot be captured by economic and materialist models.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century wilderness and national parks were taken to be synonymous, and this perspective did not change until the creation of the 1964 National Wilderness Preservation System (Miles 3-4). Before then, the National

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<sup>5</sup> Perhaps for this reason, we might consider conservationism as a precursor to sustainable development.

<sup>6</sup> As explained in section V of this chapter, an anthropocentric worldview is one which claims humans alone are morally considerable, or which values human interests above all others (Lee 68).

Parks Service already considered the lands under its administrative control to be wild—even if some of these lands were used primarily as recreational sites for human enjoyment. Furthermore, the National Forest Service, with its mission to use the resources wisely for the good of the general public, also claimed that the lands under its jurisdiction were for the most part wild, even though its very mission was predicated on human interference and development. Given that wilderness is defined in the Act as a uniquely nonhuman landmass, the chasms between this definition and the conceptions of wilderness that distinguish the National Park Service from the National Forest Service were as deep as they were complex. It was on the basis of this tradition of contrasting opinions regarding the appropriate use and value of certain regions of the American landscape that the Wilderness Act of 1964 was devised. This is made manifest by its commitment to the human-nature dichotomy, in addition to its apparently contradictory appeals to intrinsic and instrumental value. As I hope to show in later chapters, the ongoing dilemma of determining what the definition of wilderness ultimately consists in, and also what kind of value we ought to associate with it, remain perennial challenges for environmental philosophers and activists alike.

## **V □ The Wilderness Act of 1964, or the birth of the wilderness debate**

So far I have considered some historical influences that led to the creation of the Wilderness Act of 1964, as well as some of the assumptions undergirding those influences. In what follows I will examine the idea of wilderness as it is presented in the Act itself and describe the parameters of the debate that emerged in the 1990s as a direct result of the burgeoning field of ecological restoration

(which was presented as an alternative to conservation and preservation). It is on the shoulders of the Wilderness Act that much of the debate stands, and so it is necessary to assess the definition that the Act provides. The debate revolves around the idea of wilderness—whether such an environment actually exists as defined in the Wilderness Act and whether restored landscapes deserve the same value as “untouched” wilderness areas.

Before beginning my analysis, it is worth recalling the initial definition provided in the Wilderness Act. There are several key features of this definition—the first being that wilderness is wholly independent of culture—that return in the 1990s debate. As explained in the first few lines of the definition, wilderness is “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man,” where humans do not permanently or visibly impact the landscape (qtd. in Zahniser 121). Wilderness, according to the Act, is placed in direct opposition to humans and our artifacts. So, while a city park might be composed of organic materials, it is not considered wild on this view. Indeed, areas such as Central Park are dominated by human projects—although trees take the place of buildings, and streams and lakes take the place of sewers, their biotic processes are curbed by human interference.

Following this description, the Act designates as wild those areas that retain their primeval characteristics, or as “area[s] of undeveloped Federal land retaining [their] primeval character and influence, without further improvements or human habitation” (qtd. in Zahniser 121). Again, according to this definition, a city park would not be characterized as wild because, unlike some tracts of federal

land, it does not retain its “primeval character and influence”—playgrounds for children, kiosks, and even roadways dot the landscape while grassy areas are mowed and vegetation is pruned. All of this interference prevents the organic processes from expressing themselves in their fullest capacity. They are heavily managed and geared towards human projects—they do not flourish regardless of whether they satisfy human interests. Contrary to wild areas where “the imprint of man’s work [is] substantially unnoticeable,” city parks are—relatively speaking—dominated by human projects (qtd. in Zahniser 121).

Another notable feature of this definition is its reliance on anthropocentric valuations. As Keekok Lee explains, “an anthropocentric worldview is one that claims humans alone to be morally considerable or to have intrinsic value (because they have language, interests, preferences, or whatever) and that always prioritizes human over nonhuman interests” (68). As curious as it may sound to attribute an anthropocentric worldview to an Act that is specifically geared to protecting tracts of land from being exploited for human interests, the anthropocentric tenor of the Act is unmistakable. Although the Act does mention that these lands be preserved in part to benefit the interests of those organisms that occupy it, the tone of the legislation is overwhelmingly anthropocentric, insofar as it establishes that these locations are meant to serve specific human interests. This is made abundantly evident by the following passage: “except as otherwise provided in this Act, wilderness areas shall be devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use” (qtd. in Zahniser 126). Precisely because loggers and miners are prohibited from

extracting trees and minerals, the land can be available for other purely human projects, including “primitive and unconfined type[s] of recreation” (qtd. in Zahniser 121). The Act also specifies that wilderness areas must encompass at least 5000 acres of land and have certain geological curiosities that are of scientific interest (qtd. in Zahniser 121).

## **Conclusion**

Although the Act provides the means and justification for preserving areas that would have otherwise been deprived of their biotic richness to serve economic ends, detractors claim the Act is hopelessly problematic because of the lack of precision in its definition of wilderness.<sup>7</sup> What, for example, constitutes an area’s “primeval character and influence”? Besides, what about those areas inhabited by indigenous peoples? Might we still consider them “untrammelled by man”? If not, then does this suggest that nature has some degree of autonomy that essentially distinguishes natural entities from human artifacts? Or does it imply that all humans, despite or because of our evolutionary ancestry, are sufficiently unique to be considered distinct from nature? These kinds of questions, along with the emergence of ecological restoration, open the ground for a debate surrounding the concept of wilderness.<sup>8</sup> As it turns out, the original focal points of the debate are grounded in what I take to be a more foundational matter: what is the relation between humanity and nature, and is there a basis for the human-nature

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Mark Wood’s “Federal Wilderness Preservation in the United States: The Preservation of Wilderness?”

<sup>8</sup> As defined by the Society for Ecological Restoration: “ecological restoration is the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed” (Clewell, Aronson, and Winterhalder 3). Ecological restoration will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

dichotomy? I view this question to be central because, as I hope to show, any attempt to define wilderness either rejects or assumes this distinction, and so a clearer understanding of this relationship might build inroads to understanding what wilderness ultimately entails, or whether it can persist as a philosophically useful concept. Accordingly, in the following chapters, I will ask these questions of the positions espoused by Eric Katz, Holmes Rolston III, J. Baird Callicott, and Val Plumwood, all prominent contributors to the 1990's wilderness debate.



## Chapter 2: Eric Katz and the Natural-Artifactual Distinction

*"The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging, which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such" – Martin Heidegger*

### I – Introduction

Establishing a robust distinction between natural and artifactual entities has been a vital strategy for Eric Katz, a prominent advocate for wilderness protection and a key contributor to the 1990s debate. He argues that it is necessary to prevent pristine wilderness—landscapes left untouched by human projects—from being dominated or controlled by human technological interests. Katz's definition of wilderness, which at bottom is contingent upon the human-nature dichotomy, should meet the following criteria to avoid conceptual confusion and to be relevant from an ethical standpoint.

First, if the concept is to be used prescriptively to defend preservationist arguments, it cannot be so broad as to refer to all ecosystems, since doing so risks placing too heavy a burden on our moral obligations. On the other hand, its scope should not be so narrow as to limit its prescriptive application. Thomas Birch, for example, suggests that wildness can be attributed to particular entities whose biological processes are free to dictate their surroundings; on this account, trees lining a boulevard or weeds showing through cracks in the pavement would have enough autonomy to merit the designation 'wild' (465).<sup>9</sup> Such a broad definition

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<sup>9</sup> While the focus of this paper is to explore the concept of wilderness, it should be noted that "wilderness," "wildness" and "wild" have separate functions. I suggest that while the concept of wilderness refers to entire ecosystems, "wildness" and "wild" should be understood as properties

reduces the prescriptive thrust of the concept, since it would be impossible from a practical standpoint to respect each instance of wildness.

On the other hand, if wildness only applies relationally to organisms that inhabit specific ecosystems designated as wilderness, then the possibility for their moral consideration should remain intact, but from a more plausible practical standpoint. On this view, it is only in the context of wilderness that an entity enjoys the title ‘wild,’ while removing the entity from that context also divests it of this designation. Although assigning weaker constraints to the definition will inevitably result in some ambiguities, this strategy helps to resolve at least some of the problems associated with an overly narrow or overly broad definition. Furthermore, this approach adheres to our common intuitions about what it means to be ‘wild’: calling maple trees lining a boulevard an instance of wildness is a far more contentious claim than the same claim made of a maple growing in a forest designated as wilderness.

Similarly, if an *Ursus maritimus* was born in the wild but is currently held captive in a zoo, it should no longer be considered to be of the ‘wild’ type. Since, in my view, the concepts ‘wild’ and ‘wilderness’ have no essential properties, if the polar bear is removed from the context of wilderness, the designation would no longer apply to it (although it should not be considered domesticated in virtue of not being wild).<sup>10</sup> Once the bear is removed from its habitat in the wilderness,

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attributable to entities that inhabit and constitute wilderness locations. I suggest that these properties are context-specific, such that they apply only when an individual entity or group of entities occupies a location designated as wilderness. Accordingly, wildness is a non-essential property.

<sup>10</sup> Given that wilderness locations refer to ecosystems, the concept cannot be reducible to any one essential property such as the property of being non-human, or having  $x$  species. This is because there is too much variation in terms of biodiversity, size, and historical land-use. Further,

the properties that we use to indicate its wildness (its proximity to non-human entities, for example) are no longer attributable to it. Conversely, if a polar bear born in a zoo is returned to a wilderness area—and integrates successfully—then it would be considered wild.

Just as building a home in the middle of a sparsely populated prairie is not sufficient for the area in which the home is situated to be considered an urban centre, removing an entity from its habitat and placing it in a zoo should not be sufficient to consider either the zoo or the entity as wild or domesticated, respectively. Further, if wilderness is a normative concept, then using this designation might help us to appreciate the moral problem of depriving entities of the designation ‘wild’ by removing them from their context. Finally, this condition should allow for the possibility of engaging with and manipulating individuals within these environments without thereby affecting the designation of entire ecosystems.

The second proposed condition is that wilderness cannot be defined merely in terms of a lack of human intervention. The reason for this is twofold: first, such a definition remains too broad, since there exists a wide range of locations that we might otherwise not consider to be wild but which share the property of lacking human intervention. Such locations include areas of outer space, or ocean trenches, or the surfaces of other planets. While doing so is not inconsistent or contradictory, it does bring into question whether these places should be included within the range of entities deserving of moral consideration.

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wilderness is not a natural kind, and given that its definition is subject to historical contingencies (as demonstrated in Chapter 2), the properties attributable to it must be weak constraints.

The second reason, mentioned by J. Baird Callicott among others, is that under present conditions, it is almost impossible to determine which areas have been subjected to human intervention or artifacts either directly or indirectly.

A secondary problem is that if no reason is given as to why humans are particularly unwild, then basing a definition on a distinction between humans and wilderness, appears to be an arbitrary distinction based on a kind of human exceptionalism, that is, a robust anthropocentrism. Although some forms of human intervention should be excluded from the definition of wilderness, a successful definition should include properties that do not depend on the separation between humans and non-human entities alone. Katz attempts to formulate a distinction between humans and wilderness by contending that artifacts are created to serve human purposes. What is less clear, however, is why all human interactions necessarily result in the transformation of a nonhuman entity into an artifact.

Finally, since wilderness is not a natural kind, i.e., since its meaning is contingent upon secondary attributes rather than essential properties, it must also deal effectively with the property of time and the phenomenon of change so as to preserve its normative status. For Katz, one of the reasons why restored landscapes are unnatural is because they interrupt the historical lineage of biological systems. I will demonstrate that while temporality plays a significant role in the designation of wilderness, we should remain flexible with regards to restored landscapes, so long as they allow biological processes to flourish according to their own ends.

For Katz, pristine wilderness has a special value and it ought to be protected. Ultimately, he is concerned with wilderness preservation; accordingly to transform nature into an artifice, to eradicate the metaphysical properties that distinguish it as a moral subject—in effect, to ignore its autonomy—results in the highest order of moral reprehensibility. If land is redesigned by human technologies, it results in the transformation of its ontological properties to the extent that it is robbed of its naturalness. For Katz, ecological restoration projects amount to the technologization of nature and reveal the hubristic anthropocentric attitude of humankind (*Nature* 105). The practice of ecological restoration renders explicit the arrogant assumption that we (justly) have the authority and ability to transform not just ourselves through the creation of technological artifacts, but also that which is fundamentally other to us—nature itself. Katz views the current trend towards embracing ecological restoration as the final nail in the coffin of environmental policy: to assume that all natural environments can be used for human purposes and then be reclaimed through our own practices, and to serve our interests, is to ignore the fundamental value of nature as a free, self-determining agent. I hope to show below that Katz’s reliance on the notion of “autonomy” to account for the intrinsic value of wilderness risks committing the naturalistic fallacy.<sup>11</sup>

Although Katz uses the concept of nature, it seems that his use is comparable to that of “wilderness.” In his essay “The Liberation of Humanity and

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<sup>11</sup> The naturalistic fallacy, as introduced by G. E. Moore, entails moving from an ‘is’ statement to an ‘ought’ statement in an argument without invoking the requisite middle premise to justify such a move: “the intuitive idea is that evaluative conclusions require at least one evaluative premise—purely factual premises about the naturalistic features of things do not entail or even support evaluative conclusions” (Ridge).

Nature,” for example, he uses the concepts of nature and wilderness interchangeably to refer to those areas unimpeded by human habitation. He claims he is not concerned with knowing “nature in itself” since, from a pragmatic perspective, it seems clear enough what it means to respect the integrity of nature as an autonomous subject—it means leaving natural processes to unfold unobstructed by human interference (“The Liberation” 78). Accordingly, nature is conceived purely in terms of its separation from human activity and therefore as synonymous with what others call “wilderness.” Although Katz does deploy the concept “wild” in other essays, his insistence that humans are ontologically distinct from nature appears to suggest that for him, nature and wilderness are not conceptually distinct terms.

## II □ The autonomy of nature

Katz derives his formulation of nature as autonomous subject from Kant’s moral philosophy, together with the normative implication that if nature is an autonomous subject, we would be morally obliged to respect it. But this strategy only works insofar as Katz’s definition of nature meets the criteria for autonomous agency, since autonomous agency is the prerequisite for moral consideration according to a Kantian framework. Contra Katz, I will argue that since nature is not positively autonomous in the Kantian sense, then the restoration of nature cannot be morally wrong on the grounds that humans interfere with its agency.

It is not sufficient to claim, as Katz does, that even in a pragmatic sense the domination of autonomous nature is self-evidently unethical. This is for two

reasons: first, “autonomy” as presented by Katz either refers to Kant’s conception of the capacity for rational self-governance or to the value of entities possessing such a capacity, that is, their unconditional value as “ends-in-themselves.” For Kant, as I shall argue later, nature is by definition not autonomous. And if nature lacks the capacity without which nothing can have unconditional moral value, then for Kant, nature cannot be an end-in-itself. In either case, Katz loses the justificatory basis to deem nature a moral subject. Second, leaving the notion of “autonomy” unjustified renders his position susceptible to charges of either misrepresenting or misunderstanding the idea itself. Additionally, I shall argue that even if it is the case that restored environments are produced by humans, it does not necessarily follow that they are artifacts, nor does it follow that the practice of ecological restoration is unethical. This is because, as Katz notes, not all human interactions with nature are motivated by domineering tendencies, and it is not clear why restoration projects must always be manifestations of human domination.

As mentioned, Katz’s approach involves extending the moral boundary beyond humans by applying Kant’s categorical imperative to non-human entities, which obligates us to respect their integrity as moral subjects (*Nature* 129). His aim is to show that in virtue of their agency, natural entities and systems are beholden to a variation of Kant’s categorical imperative. As part of this strategy, Katz must establish how these entities and systems are distinct from humans, and prove that they are autonomous subjects according to his revised Kantian framework.

To this end, Katz suggests that humanity ought to engage in a “partnership” with nature, which would involve a constant struggle to maintain the autonomy and integrity of the land (“Imperialism” 284). In “The Call of the Wild,” Katz elaborates this point by describing his personal encounter with wild entities near his home on Fire Island in the state of New York. The example he invokes concerns his interaction with the white-tailed deer that live nearby—by maintaining the population, or at least by allowing it to flourish rather than culling it, this symbiosis is preserved and so is the autonomy of nature (*Nature* 117). It is during his description of this partnership with the deer that Katz introduces Kant’s moral imperative to justify our obligation towards the environment:

The second formulation of the categorical imperative states that we are to treat moral subjects as ends-in-themselves, never as a mere means. If the categorical imperative is applied to a treatment of artifacts and natural entities we find a crucial difference: artifacts must be treated as means, for their existence and value only exist in a dependant relationship with human aims and goals; but natural entities, existing apart from human projects, can be considered as ends-in-themselves. Kant teaches us that the possibility of moral consideration lies in an entity’s independence from rational control and design, its existence as an end-in-itself. (*Nature* 128)

Katz correctly suggests that Kant’s moral system depends on a distinction between means and ends. His interpretation falters, however, when he claims that, as ends-in-themselves, natural entities deserve moral consideration and independence “from rational control and design” (*Nature* 128). He explicitly calls the idea of autonomy that he employs “Kantian,” but as I explain below his description resembles autonomy in the negative sense; it is “freedom from,” rather than the ethically relevant notion of positive (or moral) autonomy. This latter



notion entails the capacity to self-govern in the moral sense and it justifies the unconditional value that Kant ascribes to ends-in-themselves. In actuality, this is what “Kant teaches us” with regards to moral consideration. According to Katz, however, the natural processes that determine the moral autonomy of a natural entity consist in a kind of biological self-determination, and it is on this basis that these entities are entitled freedom from human interference or domination.

Above, I described autonomy generally as the capacity for self-governance in addition to the unconditional value that stems from such a capacity. Here, however, we see that Kant’s notion of autonomy specifically relates not to self-governance in general, but to the capacity rational subjects possess and can exercise in virtue of other capacities: autonomy is the “self-imposition of the moral law” (Christman). Kant’s moral theory is deontological—that is, it depends on principles of duty and self-governance, both of which are constitutive of the rational subject. For Kant, one ought to “act only according to that maxim whereby [one] can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (*Metaphysics* 4:421). To act morally correctly is to act rationally, and so also autonomously.

Autonomy, however, differs from the mere mechanism or causation that governs the phenomenal realm. As humans are physical subjects, of course, all causal laws apply, but unlike physical events, choices determined by reasons cannot be explained causally. If deliberation were causally determined there would be no need to formulate reasons why some actions are morally preferred over others. It is this distinction between the causal realm and the rational realm

that allows us to appreciate Kant's preoccupation with the role that reason and autonomy as self-governance play in ethics. Indeed, Kant claims that "by virtue of the autonomy of his freedom he [man] is subject of the moral law" and it is as a result of the accordance of the subject with the subject's self-imposed rational law that the subject is "never to be employed merely as a means, but as itself also, concurrently, an end" (*CPrR* 109).

Kant's conception of moral autonomy is necessarily limited to rational subjects and so cannot be used directly to support Katz's claim that non-rational nature is autonomous in the moral sense. Kant does not suggest that freedom includes all creatures whose behaviour is determined by their own inner causal capacities. Rather, moral freedom only pertains to those creatures that can be the sources of their own rational laws. This is what distinguishes positive or moral autonomy from freedom in the negative sense. It is precisely because humans have a will, or the ability to choose rationally between one action and another, and because we can thereby be subject to the moral law, or act dutifully towards the moral law, that we belong in the moral realm and are ends-in-ourselves.

Clearly, Katz's allusions to the Kantian moral imperative and concept of autonomy are not intended to be taken literally. Presumably, Katz is less concerned with devising a way of rendering an environmental ethic consistent with Kant's moral philosophy, as he is with using Kant's framework analogously in order to open up the possibility of conceiving of nature as autonomous and therefore as deserving moral consideration. Katz indirectly accounts for his departure from Kant's system in his essay, "The Liberation of Humanity and

Nature.” First, he suggests that he is less concerned with knowing nature as it is in itself (79). It appears as though he argues from analogy, claiming that just as we do not need a concrete conception of human nature in order to establish moral principles, neither do we require knowledge of nature in itself in order to appreciate its autonomy. Rather, its autonomy is intuitively apparent if we consider the difference between a landscape marred by human development and one left untouched by our projects. Here, however, Katz is not only appealing to how we understand humans in relation to non-human nature; his use of autonomy is meant to be normative.

While it is perfectly reasonable to claim that certain ecosystems are free from human projects, it is less clear why, on this assertion alone, such ecosystems are free in the moral sense—even if this sense of freedom is only a distant relative of Kant’s concept. Even if we accept the analogy between knowing human nature in and of itself and knowing nature in and of itself, this does not serve to justify the moral consideration of nature. As I explained above, Kant derives the moral imperative from a very specific conception of autonomy and it is only on the back of this notion that his moral imperative holds purchase. Without the appeal to the rational, law-abiding subject, it is unclear how to conceive of nature as a moral subject merely on the basis that it is free from human projects, and so it would appear that Katz’s position falls prey to the naturalistic fallacy.

The above discussion of two different senses of freedom explains why moral autonomy only applies to rational subjects. When Katz refers to natural entities and ecosystems as ends-in-themselves and then employs Kant’s

categorical imperative to justify our responsibility towards these entities, he is conflating Kant's description of autonomy in the negative sense with his explanation of the rationally autonomous subject. Thus, as mentioned above, it must be the case that Katz is less concerned with providing an ethic that consistently matches Kant's framework. However, even if Katz uses the framework analogously, the capacity to be independent from human interference is not justification in itself for an entity's moral consideration, especially if it cannot rely on Kant's notion of self-governance.

Given these interpretational challenges, we must ask whether it is possible to defend Katz's position by divesting it of its dependence on the Kantian system. To this end, we might consider the possibility of defining nature as autonomous in a teleological sense, such that moral consideration can be derived on this basis alone. All biological entities that are self-sustaining and which flourish independently of external factors might be regarded as autonomous; self-perpetuation becomes an end-in-itself worthy of moral consideration. For the sake of consistency, *homo sapiens*, on this account, might also be considered ends-in-themselves, since we too are self-sustaining biological entities. Initially, it might seem that this runs cross-purpose to Katz's project, since his framework depends upon a distinction between humans and other natural entities. However, it is not misguided to claim that humans are as autonomous as other natural entities. It may very well be the case that this same kind of autonomy justifies why humans are also deserving of moral consideration. Yet natural autonomy is not defined just in terms of self-perpetuation, it is defined normatively; that is, in virtue of

being ends-in-themselves, biological entities deserve moral consideration. This explains, for Katz, why human interactions with non-human entities tend to be of the domineering type—when we impose our own self-interested projects on nonhuman entities we are necessarily curbing the autonomy of those entities. Unfortunately, as I mentioned above, although the claim that we can conceive nature as autonomous is legitimate, Katz does not provide further justification, beyond his appeal to our intuitions, for why this descriptive claim should provide the grounds for moral consideration and thus runs the risk of committing the naturalistic fallacy.

Although the autonomy of nature and humanity's domineering tendencies serve as the foundational reasons for Katz's opposition to certain kinds of restoration projects or practices, he also suggests that these kinds of practices or restoration projects are morally disingenuous because they tacitly claim that the end result is identical in value to the original when, in fact, restored landscapes are human artifacts. As I intend to show in the next section, while the distinction between natural and artifactual entities does not in itself explain why restoration projects are unethical, it is worth exploring the distinction for the purpose of assessing the viability of the human-nature dichotomy.

### **III □ The artifactual versus the natural**

Katz provides a number of definitions of his artifactual-natural binary. In "The Big Lie" he says: "the concepts of function and purpose are central to an understanding of artifacts" (*Nature* 97). Furthermore, artifacts are essentially anthropocentric because "their existence is centered on human life," which gives

them their intrinsic function and design (*Nature* 98). He calls these “human-created artifacts” (*Nature* 98). In “Artifacts and Functions,” he calls them “tools for the achievement of human tasks” and that the “artifact would not exist at all if some purpose had not been foreseen for it” (*Nature* 122). The common elements of these definitions are found in his appeal to external teleology or intention and anthropocentrism. Unlike artifacts, natural entities cannot be explained in terms of their function or design as intended by an external creator.

One of the reasons why Katz imposes the artifactual-natural binary is to provide grounds for valuing the natural—he wants to prove that nature ought to be valued for what it is—as separate from human interests. For Katz, the difference in value between natural and artifactual objects is located in the “anthropocentric and instrumental origins” of artifacts (*Nature* 114). Accordingly, “the anthropocentric instrumentality of artifacts is completely different from the essential characteristics of natural entities, species, and ecosystems. Living natural entities and systems of entities evolve to fill ecological niches in the biosphere; they are not designed to meet human needs or interests” (Katz *Nature* 114). Value is not conferred onto these natural objects but, rather, it is constitutive of their ontological difference from artifacts. From a moral standpoint, artifacts and technology are not intrinsically valuable, but are measured in terms of their use-value. It is when such technologies are employed to subvert the autonomy of nature that questions concerning the moral permissibility of such subversions emerge.

Katz understands technology as a dominating and controlling force that humans exert on the environment to suit our pre-determined ends. Since restoration involves manipulating an environment to achieve a specific end, it falls under his definition:

The management of nature results in the imposition of our anthropocentric purposes on areas that exist outside human society. We intervene in nature to create so-called natural objects and environments based on models of human desires, interests, and satisfactions. In doing so, we engage in the project of the human domination of nature: the reconstruction of the natural world in our own image, to suit our purposes. (*Nature* 115)

Given his definition of technology as a controlling and dominating force, any and all technological interactions with nature that transform it to serve human interests must necessarily be judged accordingly. For Katz, “domination is the evil that restricts, denies, or distorts individual (and social) freedom and autonomy” (*Nature* 115). In the context of environmentalism, he says that “domination is the anthropocentric alteration of natural processes” (*Nature* 115). Such language intimates that there is something beyond technology that is subject to control and manipulation.

What undergirds this idea of domination is the notion that objects of nature and natural processes are self-realizing or autonomous. According to Katz, “nature is not merely the physical matter that is the *object* of technological practice and alteration; it is also a *subject*, with its own processes and history of development independent of human intervention and activity” (*Nature* 115-16). A kind of non-instrumental value, then, can be understood in terms of this process of self-development and it is this process that, when thwarted, results in the loss of

this kind of value of nature. As he puts it: “the existence of domination results in the denial of free and unhindered growth and development” (*Nature* 130). As I have attempted to show, however, this notion of autonomy in the moral sense cannot be applied to natural entities without further justification. While it may be the case that nature is manipulated and used instrumentally, as it stands, it does not necessarily follow that such manipulations are morally questionable. Unless we can find other reasons to understand why the sort of self-determination of which nonrational natural entities are capable is morally significant, we are left with little justification as to why it is morally wrong (or right) to interfere with nature. Even if we agree that natural entities are properly defined in terms of the absence of human interference or in terms of their ability to self-propagate, this does not entail that they deserve moral consideration. Rather, it is merely a statement of ontological fact.

As I described earlier, Kant’s reliance on the notion of autonomy as rational self-governance provides the necessary justification for moral consideration. Here, no such justification is given with regards to the moral consideration of nature, rather, it is merely assumed (Katz, “Call” 271). From a meta-ethical standpoint, this is a point of contention, since the object is to establish, prove, or justify the intrinsic value of nature. In the previous section I established why I am less convinced by this assumption. Presently my question is whether, granting this assumption, Katz’s framework nevertheless provides a consistent means of determining right action.



In order for Katz's distinction between natural and artifactual entities to work, he relies on an appeal to human intention. Thus, bees' nests and beaver dams and other non-living structures produced by non-human animals have a function that can only be accounted for by relating them to their producers; in a word, they can only be explained via external teleology. Since, however, they were not created by humans for humans, they keep their status as natural entities. So when Katz maintains that "natural individuals were not designed for a purpose," he really means that they were not designed for *human* purposes.<sup>12</sup> Since it is possible to construct teleological arguments about artifacts in nature, it must be the case that what makes human-generated artifacts unique is their essential *humanness*—they are after all, human-generated.

It seems then, that this feature of his definition, that artifacts are essentially anthropocentric, might provide the sufficient condition for Katz's distinction between artifacts and natural objects, which in turn explains why restored landscapes ought to be considered mere artifacts. For him, an anthropocentric product is one which is centered on human life, one that derives its status in terms of the function that it serves for humans specifically (*Nature* 98), and an anthropocentric worldview is one which "places humanity and human interests at the center of value" (*Nature* 122). Consequently, Katz understands technologies to be "social or cultural artifacts used by humans for the organization and control of nature and the world" (*Nature* 122).<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, he contends

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<sup>12</sup> Steven Vogel provides a thorough analysis of what he takes to be Katz's misapplication of intention in his article, "The Nature of Artifacts."

<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting at this juncture that his claim about technology does waffle. At the end of his essay "Imperialism and Environmentalism," Katz asks, "Do we humans seek a balance with

that “artifacts are instruments or tools for the betterment of human life. They can only be understood as “anthropocentric instruments” (*Nature* 123).<sup>14</sup> Finally, in “Artifacts and Functions,” Katz claims that “unlike an artifact, or an artifactual system, [natural entities are] ontologically independent from humanity” (*Nature* 127). Katz’s definition of natural entities, then, has nothing to do with composition or substance. So long as an entity is not created by humans or so long as it is not used by humans to serve anthropocentric purposes, that entity is natural. On this view, external teleology and anthropocentric origin provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for the definition of an artifact. A bird’s nest may meet the criteria of an artifact if it were not created by something which itself is independent of human projects or manipulation.

Thus, the difference between natural and artifactual entities stems from the anthropocentric qualities of the latter. If we take the example of a candle that is composed of materials that were not manufactured by humans (tallow or beeswax), we can nevertheless affirm its artifactual nature because those materials were transformed into a new product that serves anthropocentric purposes. What makes the candle an artifact is the person who manufactured it. Crucial for Katz,

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nature, a type of partnership, or a power relationship of control and domination? Are our agricultural processes, for example, organic, working with natural processes, or are they highly technological, seeking control through artificial fertilizers and pesticides?” (145). Two points come up: first, in “Artifacts and Functions” he claims that all technology, no matter how minimal, insofar as it is anthropocentric, can only ever be human-interested and defined in terms of control and domination. This would suggest, then, that even organic farming is *prima facie* artifactual, technological, and dominating. Second, given his definition of technology, it seems that no matter the type of processes invoked by humans, technology is necessarily an act of domination—if something is anthropocentric, it is artifactual and therefore technological; it is produced by humans for human interests and control.

<sup>14</sup> In his article, “The Nature of Artifacts” Vogel suggests Katz’s argument, which states that because they are produced by humans, all human artifacts are anthropocentric, is akin to the fallacious supposition that all claims uttered by women are feminist or that all actions performed by Whites are racist (157).

then, are the anthropocentric properties attributed to artifacts, and it is on the basis of this difference that he claims restoration practices are immoral:

Once we begin to redesign natural systems and processes, once we begin to create restored natural environments, we impose our anthropocentric purposes on areas that exist outside human society. We will construct so-called natural objects on the model of human desires, interests, and satisfactions. Depending on the adequacy of our technology, these restored and redesigned natural areas will appear more or less natural, but they will *never* be natural—they will be anthropocentrically designed human artifacts. (*Nature* 98, my emphasis)

Yet despite what Katz claims here, his reliance on human intention as the necessary condition for determining an entity's value and classification as natural is much less rigid than one might expect. This becomes readily apparent in one of Katz's most famous essays, "The Call of the Wild." In this essay he departs from his stringent distinction between human artifacts and natural entities when offering an account of his experience with neighbouring deer on Fire Island. He calls Fire Island a "hybrid environment" because certain areas are far less humanized than others ("A Pragmatic" 388). Inevitably, some fauna ignore the boundaries between the uninhabited and the developed areas. Such is the case with the deer population, which substitutes part of its regular diet of forest flora with garden vegetables:

Using the adjective *wild* to describe these deer is obviously a distortion of terminology... Yet, seeing them is different from my experience with any other animal, surely different than seeing white-tailed deer in the zoo. ...These animals are my connection to "wild nature." Despite their acceptance of the human presence, they embody something untouched and beyond humanity. They are a deep and forceful *symbol* of the wild

“other.” The world—my world—would be a poorer place if they were not there. (*Nature* 110)<sup>15</sup>

As noted above, Katz’s dependence on mere functionality and external teleology alone will not justify the distinction between the artificial and the natural—the distinction depends on human intention. In the above passage he calls these deer a “symbol” of the wild: they are “wilder” than their cousins held captive in a zoo, but more domestic than deer that forage exclusively in forests devoid of human interference. Given this description, it would seem that natural and artifactual entities are not mutually exclusive: indeed, an entity can persist both as an artifact and as a natural object. Thus he concedes that certain entities, even when they are in some way manipulated by humans, nevertheless retain the conditions necessary to persist as natural.

Perhaps, then, Katz believes that humans must significantly alter an otherwise untouched environment for it to be considered artifactual—it is not sufficient for artifactuality for a human to take a stroll through the bush or to feed a feral *cervidae* the occasional carrot. Instead, humans have to actively manufacture an entity or environment in some way. This is why, in his above example, the deer act as symbols of the wild—due to the dramatic alteration of their habitat, deer populations have increased, and the deer are less fearful of humans. Since the population’s survival does not depend entirely upon humans,

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<sup>15</sup> Note that Eric Katz also calls much of the American wilderness a “symbol” of wilderness. He does so in defence of charges of ethnocentrism, arguing that even if some human populations disturbed tracts of land that are designated wild, such disturbances, compared with modern industrialization, are minimal. Nevertheless, he grants the charge and concedes that these areas can be valued for their significance as symbols of those entirely non-humanized locations. Further, he notes that “the issue here is *not* the purity of the wild in frontier America, but rather the ethical significance of the Western belief that value only arises in nature with human intervention and modification” (“Call of the Wild” ff. 5, 267).

however, it remains a vestige of a kind of nature that is ruled by ecological and biological laws rather than the satisfaction of human desires. Thus, Katz is less concerned with a dichotomy that insists on a difference in kind: instead, he establishes a gradation of differences, with total technologization on one side and totally organic processes on the other. On this view, only human intention or the exertion of human design, on natural materials subsequently transforms those materials into artifacts.

In effect, this is what Katz proposes, admitting “that the concepts of ‘natural’ and ‘artifactual’ are not absolutes; they exist along a spectrum, where various gradations of both concepts can be discerned” (*Nature* 104). One way by which he suggests we appreciate this difference is by looking to evolutionary processes: “In this sense, then, human actions can also be judged to be natural—these are the human actions that exist as evolutionary adaptations, free of the control and alteration of technological processes,” which he deems to transcend the laws of natural selection (*Nature* 104).<sup>16</sup>

A difficulty now emerges, however: if it is the case that we can understand the natural-artifactual distinction as a spectrum rather than as a dichotomy, then restorative practices could arguably be more closely aligned with the natural end

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<sup>16</sup> Or perhaps the point is that the species *Homo sapiens* seems to occupy a unique place here. To use one of his examples, human procreation is governed more or less by certain instinctual behaviours accounted for by the theory of evolution. So on the one hand, humans must be considered essentially natural—insofar as evolution cannot be understood as having any external teleology, according to Katz. But on the other hand, any human who consciously desires, deliberates, and eventually propagates must be considered the intentional efficient cause of the infant. In this sense, humans are indeed a product of human labour. Steven Vogel takes up this point in “The Nature of Artifacts,” and suggests that Katz raises a false dilemma, insofar as one outcome (that humans are natural) negates his original distinction between humans and artifacts and the other outcome (that humans are artifacts) denies the very evolutionary basis of our propagation as a species, which he uses to distinguish artifacts from nature in the first place. It is on this basis that Vogel suggests that not all human-generated products are either artifacts or anthropocentric (“The nature of Artifacts” 156-57).

of the spectrum than the artifactual. By way of analogy to Katz's example of the deer on Fire Island, in the case of a restored landscape, not all of its components can be accounted for in terms of direct human manipulation—just as was the case with the deer. Although such landscapes are originally designed by humans, like the deer they retain some vestiges of “wildness.” For example, the restoration of a prairie might be effected in a way that is not very invasive and which allows species diversification to occur over the course of hundreds of years, unhindered by humans. Katz should grant that it can thus regain the status of wilderness, since humans have interfered minimally, and since (by assumption) the prairie was restored for its own sake rather than for human interests.

We should remember that Katz's argument is motivated by his concern with anthropocentric valuations of nature. A worldview in which nature is valued merely as a resource will be one that condones the manipulation of the environment merely to satisfy the needs of *Homo sapiens*. Perhaps what is most problematic for Katz then, are not individual instances of restoration projects, but what these projects represent: if restoration projects are undertaken merely for the sake of human interests, and even if this accidentally (or knowingly) results in the improvement of an ecosystem's health, such projects nevertheless deny the ‘otherness’ of nature and function as *ad hoc* solutions to problems endemic to an overwhelmingly anthropocentric worldview.

While such a worry is certainly legitimate, Katz's generalization regarding restoration practices appears to have been made in haste. It relies perhaps too heavily on the conviction that restoration projects can only be representative of

one particularly insidious worldview. If restoration projects can be motivated by the desire to improve the ecological state of a given ecosystem for its own sake, as I contend, then this should allay Katz's concern. Yet this introduces the almost impossible challenge of distinguishing between "good" and "bad" intentions. Katz expresses this worry in "The Big Lie," claiming that if management practices are employed to accelerate the processes of ecological change—even minimally—such involvement "compromises the natural integrity of the system being restored": such actions incriminate our human-centered motives (394). Accordingly, the degree to which we involve ourselves technologically may serve as an indication of the kinds of intentions involved.

Yet surely imposing such a strong link between the employment of ecological knowledge and technologies (in the example he uses, fire), and the subsequent transformation of a landscape into a mere artifact lacking intrinsic value, forces an unnecessary conclusion. Put simply: why can't we appreciate the intrinsic value of a transformed landscape? As Steven Vogel remarks, sometimes technology *is* used to create something worth valuing for its own sake. Vogel uses the analogy of an artwork: artworks are artifacts according to Katz's criteria, yet we appreciate them precisely because they are *not* instruments. In the case of restored landscapes, it seems even less plausible why we should be compelled to consider them artifacts and value them as instruments. Granted, we employ human know-how and technologies to design such landscapes, but the organic processes that occur there surpass our intentions and control. Katz himself notes that the anthropocentric worldview is problematic because of its arrogance, which

is based on the assumption that we can manipulate entities and predict outcomes: it is an arrogant worldview because we do not in fact possess such extensive powers. He claims that restoration projects illustrate this arrogance because we often fail to return ecosystems back to their original state. He is right that restoration projects are usually unsuccessful when measured against this standard. However, our failure here emphasizes the point that these biological processes extend beyond our predictions and control. In Katz's terminology, by virtue of recognizing our limitations and allowing these forces to exert themselves, we recognize the autonomy of nature—even as we involve ourselves in it. While restored areas are not as “natural” as environments untouched by human projects, they nevertheless provide the possibility for entities to pursue their own ends.

In “The Big Lie” Katz makes the further claim that restoration is unethical not only because of its claim to originality, but also because it denies the causal history that makes these locations unique. Unlike Robert Elliot, who employs the analogy of art forgery to criticize restoration projects as “faking nature,” Katz prefers to compare wilderness to dynamic and “fluid” art forms, since each instance represents a unique expression. Further, he thinks Elliott's analogy is inconsistent because an artwork has an established creator whose work is being forged, while nature has no such creator (“The Big Lie” 395).<sup>17</sup> Katz suggests that the reason it is unethical for ecologists to restore nature is because they assume

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<sup>17</sup> Contra Katz's claim here, it is not always the case that works of art were created by a sole artist. There exist collaborative artworks, such as performance art, and in which it is impossible to discern individual contributions, intentions, etc (plays, films, ballets, and the like). We also might include found art, such as Henry Darger's *The Story of the Vivian Girls* as an example of art-status being assigned independently of its creator; and finally, Earth art, or even landscape photography as instances of art-status being assigned to naturally occurring entities, with no known creators. Thus, it could be argued that similar to such artworks, nature has no single creator, but indenumerably many.



the role of artisans who attempt to create that which falls outside the category of “created work.” Furthermore, doing so denies the location its historical significance.

It appears, however, that we may take an even simpler approach—that we can accurately analogize between art restoration and ecological restoration rather than between an original and a forged work of art. Regardless of whether the entity in question is a work created by an artist or a self-propagating ecosystem, the aim of the restorer is to improve upon the integrity of the entity. In the art world, this entails returning the work to its original state. In restoration ecology, this entails improving the health of an ecosystem. On my view, this analogy also allows us to recognize the significance of historical causality in the designation and valuation of an ecosystem. Once humans have transformed a location, if the natural entities are left to themselves, then perhaps over a period of time it might be possible for them to regain their status as natural, especially if we concede that restoration efforts to do not necessarily impede the ability of non-human entities to flourish.

Given my conjecture that is possible to restore nature for non-anthropocentric purposes, might such interactions be ethically warranted according to Katz’s framework and, further, how might this affect the location’s designation as artifactual or natural? If we answer the first question in the affirmative, this indicates that either the natural-artifactual binary does not serve as the basis for moral valuation, or that non-anthropocentrically motivated restoration projects do not transform environments into artifacts. If we employ

Katz's rubric for distinguishing between natural and artifactual entities, then it would appear that the latter premise is consistent with his framework. If artifacts are so-designated because of their anthropocentric nature, then it is plausible to consider restoration projects to be more closely aligned with the natural and, accordingly, as morally permissible: they preserve the autonomy of nature.

Although the projects are initiated by humans and so the historical continuity of uninterrupted biological processes is far shorter than their pristine counterparts, as long as they are not designed exclusively to serve human interests, and as long as the biological processes are allowed to obtain, it would appear that the autonomy of these locations is protected. Ultimately, by focusing exclusively on the distinction between artifacts and natural objects, we lose our bearings, and risk throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

However, Katz is also worried about restoration because of what he calls "its ostensible claim to be the original" ("Call" 270). Restoration projects are morally questionable because they intend to imitate nature, and since the projects are intended by humans, the imitation is disingenuous. We can trace this worry back to his conviction that humans are somehow ontologically distinct from nature, as well as to his generalization regarding the tendency for humans to value and interact with nature anthropocentrically. It is also worth remembering that he is not categorically opposed to interactions with the natural world. As in the white-tailed deer example, he thinks we can engage in 'partnerships' where we minimize our impact in ways that allow natural systems to endure as autonomous subjects. Since he understands nature to be in its essence that which is farthest

from human control and manipulation, then the closer we can get to approximating this distinction, the more ethically we behave. From a pragmatic perspective, such a demand seems to impose a double-standard: while the ultimate moral goal is to keep humans and nature as distinct as possible, certain types of interaction are unavoidable, and so are morally permissible. Exactly what these interactions amount to, other than the suggestion that they be partnerships, remains unclear. Insofar as restoration projects aim to provide the space for biological entities to govern themselves, such projects, in my view, serve as prime candidates for examples of how we can engage cooperatively with the nonhuman world.

Given that Katz proposes we act such that the autonomy of nature is respected, but given his concession that it is possible to engage in a partnership with nature, I propose that if we turn away from his analogy to Kant, then we may find a more suitable mode of evaluating our actions. One alternative would be to limit ethical judgments to the holistic welfare of wilderness areas and to mitigate judgments about actions that effect singular entities within wilderness ecosystems. On this view, for example, it may be possible to use a piece of lumber for housing, while preserving the integrity and respecting the intrinsic value of the entire forest, especially since Katz's notion of autonomy is intended to apply to ecosystems as a whole. Indeed, the fact that we view the forest as intrinsically valuable in Katz's sense may perhaps serve as the primary motivation for employing non-invasive techniques to extract lumber from a forest. Using parts of the forest to meet our needs will result in the transformation of specific entities

within that forest into artifacts, but it should not prevent the entire ecosystem from maintaining its ontological status as a natural entity, free to govern itself. Taken in this sense, our actions would be neither permissible nor impermissible, they would simply belong outside the moral realm. Further, such a view remains consistent with Katz's claim that it is possible for an entity to be both natural and artifactual. The white-tailed deer remains natural, and this is because even though its surroundings are humanized and have been transformed to meet human interests, the deer itself still functions according to its own biological processes. For sustainable forestry, the reverse is true: the forest retains its status as natural while individual entities are transformed into artifacts.

### **Conclusion**

Ultimately, it appears that deferring to a Kantian framework as justification for both the autonomy of nature and for our requisite moral obligations towards it inevitably encounters problems. This is because it stretches the analogy between human liberation and the liberation of nature too far: nature simply does not possess the requisite morally relevant attributes to enjoy freedom as a moral agent. Furthermore, even if we ignore Katz's reliance on a Kantian framework and accept his description of nature as an end-in-itself, we are again left without justification as to why being an end-in-itself is a sufficient condition for moral consideration, unless we are willing to commit the naturalistic fallacy. Finally, I have contended that using the notion that nature is deserving of liberation from human domination imposes too strong demand on our behaviour

towards nature: if nature is only ever free when completely devoid of human projects, then all human interactions are unethical.

With regards to Katz's use of the human-nature dichotomy, it seems that if we are willing to assume that nature has intrinsic value if and only if it is not subject to human manipulation, then we are left with too strong a moral claim: pragmatically, this conclusion will leave us paralyzed to act, since any attempt to transform nature to meet our needs will be viewed as essentially anthropocentric and unethical. Further, while this framework suggests why presently existing wild landscapes should be preserved, it also prevents us from designating future environments that have been reclaimed by restorative efforts as "wild," which from the outset is impractical. If humans have intentionally altered a landscape, especially if the restorative efforts employ technologies to increase the speed of restoration, according to Katz it cannot be wild. Leaving developed areas untouched for several generations may eventually allow them to be considered wilderness, just as new ecologies form over the course of geological time, but this does not seem like a practical way to increase the amount of wild land, a goal which Katz surely supports.

Part of the problem stems from Katz's own seemingly confused stance on the matter. On the one hand, he relies on a strict binary in order to establish why all restorative efforts are morally misguided, but on the other he concedes that it is possible to engage with nature in such a way as to preserve its autonomy, especially in situations where certain entities are artifactual and others are not—in what he calls hybrid environments. This is worrisome as it stands because it

implies that Katz is not consistently adhering to the conditions he imposes regarding the valuation and designation of landscapes. Although his framework suggests that we curb the rapid rate of destruction of wilderness and its intrinsic natural value, which entails engaging in ‘partnerships’ with areas that are already in transition, such implications remain discouraging. As I suggested above, however, it may be possible to circumvent this inconsistency while allowing Katz to maintain that nature is intrinsically valuable if we stipulate that transformations of entities within a natural system are neither moral nor immoral, so long as the system is preserved in some way.

Given these problems, it would seem that the approach taken by Katz, that is, an approach centered on attempts to re-work anthropocentric moral systems to include non-human entities, is perhaps a misguided enterprise. Further confusion results from his attempt to distinguish restored landscapes from wild ones. Not only does this raise ethical dilemmas, it also prevents his definition of wilderness from meeting the criteria I proposed at the beginning of the chapter. As it turns out, nature is not distinct from humans in any meaningful sense.

On my view, the problems his particular position faces are endemic to any like-minded approach. However, as I will show in Chapter 5, recognizing the difficulties inherent in this approach does not necessitate the abandonment of these traditional concepts, although it does certainly demand that, at the very least, they be refurbished so as to apply more consistently to the entities in question. So while Katz’s approach may be unsuccessful insofar as it neither supplies an adequate definition of wilderness, nor provides a sound basis for moral

consideration, this does not render his approach fundamentally untenable. Indeed, it may be the case that nature is agential, but construing it as such will demand an entirely different—and as Plumwood will suggest, far more radical—conception of what agency entails. Furthermore, doing so will demand a revised framework divested of implicit hierarchical binaries, namely, the human-nature dichotomy.

### Chapter 3: Rolston and the Intrinsic Value of Wilderness

*"...to the humbler dwelling I lead you,  
Where with Nature as guide man is natural still." –Goethe*

#### I – Introduction

Holmes Rolston III also utilizes a variation of the human-nature dichotomy when discussing the merits of wilderness preservation in “The Wilderness Idea Reaffirmed,” in addition to his defence of the intrinsic value of wilderness and wild entities in “Values Gone Wild.” In Chapter 2 we saw that Katz offered a descriptive account of nature from which he sought to derive normative conclusions by appeal to Kant’s moral theory. Rolston, on the other hand, defines wilderness normatively, assigning it intrinsic value in two ways: objectively, in the sense that wilderness bears value independently of an observing subject, and prescriptively, in the sense that we ought to value wilderness as an end in itself. He also refines the dichotomy such that “wilderness” takes the place of “nature.” He assumes that humans are “natural” but that we are not “wild” (“Reaffirmed” 371). Thus, like Katz, Rolston is an objective realist when it comes to defining and valuing wilderness.

Rolston’s definition of wilderness is an improvement over Katz’s, mainly because he offers a set of conditions which are not all reducible to the separation of humans from wilderness. However, because he remains committed to a distinction between humanness and wildness while at the same time admitting that these oppositional concepts can be conceived along a spectrum, some ambiguities arise. For example, depending on what Rolston means when he refers to scientific



management or ecological restoration, he runs the risk of enforcing a double-standard. On the one hand, he imposes a strict distinction between humans and wild nature, claiming that no matter how benign, all human intervention is non-wild “in the pure sense” (“Reaffirmed” 376). This is because he thinks that human “deliberation is the antithesis of wildness” (“Reaffirmed” 370). Yet on the other hand, he also concedes that the degree to which humans impose change should also count as an indicator of a location’s wildness, thus modifying his commitment to a strict dichotomy (“Reaffirmed” 376). Presumably then, ecologically restored and scientifically managed ecosystems should retain their status as wild, since they cohere with the bulk of his conditions for wildness, which are listed below. Yet Rolston argues that such locations cannot be considered wild on the basis of their essential humanness, which does not accord with a spectrum-based evaluation of wilderness (“Reaffirmed” 371). Although these ambiguities do not necessarily dislodge his definition, they serve to emphasize the difficulties inherent in using human intervention as a central feature of wilderness definitions.

In my estimation his strategy, when deployed effectively, could allow for a far more nuanced account of what nature ultimately signifies and what obligations we may have towards wilderness. Since Rolston does not suggest that all human technology imposes an ethically problematic anthropocentric worldview, his version appears more flexible than the one Katz offers, which in turn allows him to avoid some of the conceptual difficulties that rendered Katz’s position inconsistent. Furthermore, Rolston ventures a well-needed investigation into the

possibility of assigning intrinsic value to wilderness. However, his reliance on a hierarchical view of wilderness could potentially be used in support of an anthropocentric argument for the preservation of wilderness, which runs counter-purposes to his aim. Additionally, in virtue of assigning intrinsic value to wild entities and wilderness ecosystems, conflicts of interest arise between these two levels of intrinsic value, rendering it almost impossible to discern which entities count for more, ethically.

Regardless, his position should not be dismissed outright—by investigating possible solutions, it brings us closer to understanding what kind of normative claims wilderness, and its constituents, might have on us. Rolston's explanation of intrinsic value in terms of positive characteristics unique to the wild, at the very least offers a way towards a workable framework by which we can understand wilderness and its potential value, even if that value has no immediate claim on us, for reasons I will establish below. Just as I suggested in my analysis of Katz's position, softening his conviction that humans and their products are categorically unwild would render his argument more consistent.

## **II □ Rolston's human-wilderness dichotomy**

According to Rolston, the entirety of Earth's surface can be divided into three types of environments: the urban, the rural, and the wild ("Can and Ought" 19). He laments that wilderness makes up the smallest portion of the three and is the hardest of them to pin down but that regardless of these problems it is valuable in its own right ("Can and Ought" 21). He provides a definition of wilderness that is both negative, in that it is defined in terms of what humans are not, and

positive, in that it possesses certain unique characteristics, such as autonomy as spontaneity (“Reaffirmed” 307).<sup>18</sup> In stating that the definition is on the one hand negative, I mean that wilderness in this sense is described merely in terms of its opposition to human culture. In the same way we posit that black entails the absence of white, whatever wilderness is, it is not human culture. For example, echoing the Wilderness Act, he claims that wilderness is a place untrammelled by man [sic] and where nature is free to “run itself” (“Values” 201) and that we “impact as little as possible” (“Values” 182). Left unrevised, such a definition would be irredeemably broad since it lacks the positive characteristics needed to identify a particular group.

However, Rolston does offer a set of positive conditions, and in what follows, I will assess them to establish whether they can satisfy the criteria introduced in Chapter 2. These properties pertain both to individuals and ecosystems. According to his analysis in “Values Gone Wild” and “The Wilderness Idea Reaffirmed,” wilderness areas:

1. are sources of generative processes (“Values” 184);
2. are largely unpredictable and irreplaceable (“Values” 204);
3. transfer information “intergenerationally” (“Reaffirmed” 368);
4. display primitive or primeval characteristics, or represent “constancy in change” (“Reaffirmed” 375); and
5. bear no traces of human culture (“Reaffirmed” 368).

The first characteristic, that wilderness areas are sources of “generative processes” refers to the kinds of self-perpetuating biological mechanisms that

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<sup>18</sup> Here, autonomy might be taken in its biological rather than its moral sense, referring to an entity’s ability to retain its functional integrity. It appears that for Rolston, autonomy obtains on the one hand to the biological processes vital to an entity’s or ecosystem’s existence, and on the other, to its evolutionary lineage. As he explains: “information in wild nature travels intergenerationally on genes...Animals are what they are genetically, instinctively, environmentally, without any options at all” (“Reaffirmed” 368).

sustain life. As Rolston explains: “In the wild, things are degraded, followed by nature’s orderly self-assembling of new creatures amidst this perpetual perishing” (“Values” 194). Wild places work systematically, and to a large extent symbiotically, to perpetuate the organisms that are characteristic of specific ecosystems. The notion of biological or “spontaneous autonomy and self-maintenance” characterizes the generative processes present in these locations; quite literally, these ecosystems are self-sustaining and continually propagate life in multifarious capacities (“Values” 192). Even when geological or climactic forces dramatically alter a landscape, evolutionary processes persist and organisms adapt to these transformed environments, growing in complexity over time. He describes these generative processes as “storied achievements”—wilderness areas remind us of the historical genesis of evolution (“Values” 192).

Implied in this description of wilderness, or nature more generally, is the assumption that the process of evolution is hierarchical, insofar as organisms and ecosystems tend to manifest a linear progression of complexity over the course of evolutionary history. Rolston claims that this progression has culminated in *Homo sapiens*: “Humans are nature’s richest achievement” (“Values” 192). Deliberation serves as the primary indicator of biological complexity, since other indices would relegate *Homo sapiens* to a far lower rank (for example, genetic content, diversity of cell-types, morphology, and so on). The relevancy of this hierarchical order of rank from an ethical standpoint will be discussed later; what matters here is that reason serves as the biological mark of our evolutionary superiority in terms of complexity. What makes this account significant is that it situates *Homo*

*sapiens* within the natural order of being. This is why Rolston describes wilderness as “roots”: we are integrally linked to these environments both symbolically and evolutionarily.

The second attribute, that wilderness areas exceed scientific predictability, refers to the way in which outcomes of the interactions of different entities are contingent upon such a diverse range of external factors that it is impossible to account for them causally. According to Rolston: “Physics and chemistry are thought to be about fundamental nature, but they ignore wildness...As sciences of law and order, they bring nature under laboratory control, being relatively exact sciences because they denature nature of its accidental and historical eventfulness” (“Values” 204). The laws of physics and chemistry are best revealed in controlled settings, and because of the complex organization of entities in wilderness, such laws are of little help to ecologists. It is impossible to measure, for example, the exact migratory patterns of fauna, or the seed dispersal of flora. These phenomena are best observed in their original environments, and each instance is inimitable. To use one of Rolston’s examples: although it may be possible to predict the increase of water flow during a flood—the resulting landscape transformations will always be unique to that specific location (“Values” 204). Thus, generally speaking, because of the distinct combination of chemical, biological, geological, and climactic forces at play, each wilderness area is unique and exceeds empirical testability.

According to the third condition for wilderness, information is transferred primarily through genes and instincts: “information in wild nature travels

intergenerationally on genes” (“Reaffirmed” 368). Non-human organisms do not deliberate and transformations that occur in their communities result from adaptations due to natural selection. For Rolston, the prevalence of the transmission of genetic information in wilderness explains why humans should be excluded from it: the degree to which humans are capable of sharing information rationally rather than genetically far exceeds any other known organism. Since Rolston does not intend to deny that humans also share genetic information, prevalence of genetic transfer might be more accurately characterised as a lack of rational deliberation.

The last two conditions, that wilderness areas represent “constancy in change,” and that wilderness is uninhabited by humans, can be considered co-extensive (“Reaffirmed” 375).<sup>19</sup> According to Rolston, the primitive or primeval character of an environment refers to the “constancy in change” that occurs in these places—climatic and geological patterns affect the biological processes at work, and they function according to “deep” or geological timeframes (“Reaffirmed” 374-75). We can only observe evolutionary change using timelines that span millions, if not billions, of years. Accordingly, rates of evolutionary and geological change occur over protracted periods of time compared to fast-paced anthropogenic change (“Reaffirmed” 375). The construction of a large-scale dam,

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<sup>19</sup> It might be worth considering why the characteristics ‘intergenerational transfer’ and ‘site of evolutionary processes’ are designated as two distinct properties of wilderness. Perhaps the best way to clarify the distinction is by referring to that which the characteristics most accurately apply. The former characteristic might be most relevant to individual wild entities, since it is primarily through reproduction that such intergenerational transfer transpires. The second characteristic most readily applies to entire systems, since adaptation is predicated upon changes to the environment and is therefore dependent on external forces. In other words, intergenerational transfer is specific to individual instances of natural selection, whereas evolutionary processes encompass changes relative to the ecosystem as a result of environmental factors and species-specific adaptations and mutations.

for example, will dramatically alter the course of a river in a few short years rather than taking a few millennia when geological forces are solely at work. To this extent, he posits an essential difference between anthropogenic and ecological changes to a landscape.

Taken in combination, these five properties establish a working definition of wilderness. Although Rolston remains committed to the notion that humans are not wild, he does enumerate other criteria that are independent of this distinction. If we assume that he thinks human culture and wild nature can be measured by degrees, and that human intervention is just one among several other conditions relevant to the concept of wilderness, we might question where ecologically restored environments might be situated along the spectrum.

For instance, it might be the case that the changes that occur during ecological restoration projects might not be considered strictly anthropogenic. This is because these environments are predominantly influenced by the same factors as in wilderness (climate, geology, and evolution) and they appear to satisfy his remaining criteria. Humans may have designed and to a certain extent, manufactured, these areas, but the forces that predominate remain of the “wild” type; rational deliberation may be employed, but this does not transform those objects into human artifacts, as I established in my investigation of Katz’s account. This also suggests that “anthropogenic change” as a category, contrary to the title, does not include all types of human-induced change. Accordingly, we might inquire which kinds of change do not count as of the wild-type.

Presumably Rolston would be remiss to exclude geological change on the basis of the speed at which it occurs. Surely he would describe the dramatic transformation of the surrounding ecosystems following the eruption of Mount St. Helen's as of the wild-type. Accordingly, mere length of time does not sufficiently capture what is meant by "rate of change." Thus, we should establish whether Rolston is concerned with the causal history of a landscape or with the kinds of properties that the landscape bears, regardless of origin. By way of a response, Rolston insists that nearly all human transformations are un-wild: "Wilderness management, in that sense, is a contradiction in terms—whatever may be added by way of management of humans who visit the wilderness, or of restorative practices, or monitoring, or other activities that environmental professionals must sometimes consider" ("Reaffirmed" 371). Perhaps in this case Rolston is referring to intensively managed lands that bear constant traces of human intervention, such as the pine plantations he mentions later in his article. It may be the case that he is less adamantly opposed to assigning the title of wilderness to landscapes that are restored but whose human origins remain invisible, and which do not require constant human intervention to persist. As it stands, this remains unclear to the writer.

Rolston does concede, on the other hand, that historical land-use practices employed by some indigenous populations did not drastically alter the environment, but nevertheless landscapes they transformed "were not wilderness in the pure sense" ("Reaffirmed" 376). Due to the primitive technologies employed, however, the environmental transformations cannot be considered



equivalent to those imposed by modern industrial technologies, which effect irreversible change (“Reaffirmed” 377). Seemingly, point of origin does matter, given that restored or managed landscapes often do possess the other properties he considers to be of the wild-type. This in turn leaves open the question of whether scientific management and observation deprives entire ecosystems of their wildness. On the other hand, it may be the case that interventions are themselves un-wild, but can be performed in such a way that preserves the wildness of the whole system. It may be the case that Rolston is more sympathetic to this latter view, given that he does differentiate between wild bighorns and feral mustangs, for example, on the basis of origin: while mustangs were transported by Europeans, bighorns “are what they are where they are by natural selection” (“Reaffirmed” 376). Regardless, the Nevada desert remains wild (“Reaffirmed” 376).

As mentioned above, when discussing anthropogenic rates of change, it is clear that Rolston has specific instances in mind. He calls them “modern forms of development” (“Reaffirmed” 378) and they can be contrasted with transformations caused by less sophisticated forms of technology such as burning (“Reaffirmed 375”). Taking this distinction into account, along with his claim that wild landscapes are those that preserve evolutionary processes, it seems that his argument appears ambivalent towards restoration projects. Although he outright denies the inclusion of such projects as wild, given his concession that certain forms of human technology do not modify landscapes to the same degree, it may be possible that certain types of restoration projects could be included as wild,

similar to the way that Katz attempted to distinguish between more “natural” and consequently more permissible land partnerships.

Bearing Rolston’s definition in mind, it is now possible to consider whether, taken together, these five properties meet the criteria introduced in the second chapter. The first criterion proposed is that the range of properties that comprise wilderness must be specific enough so as to permit the possibility of moral consideration; the concept cannot be reducible to nature, taken in its broadest sense. Rolston satisfies this criterion, since he distinguishes between the concept of nature and the concept of wild—humans while natural, are not wild.

On this account reason supervenes on evolutionary processes since human interruptions of evolutionary processes differ in kind to those caused by geological or climactic forces. However, note that the justification for the difference is not reducible to the difference itself—namely, that humans are distinct. At this point, we may concede that wilderness is a site of evolutionary change that exceeds scientific predictability and that bears no traces of human intervention. On this account, humans still enjoy a place in the evolutionary order of being, and so retain our status as natural, but the grounds for distinguishing humans from wilderness lies in the fact that, defined negatively, wilderness locations are places devoid of rational deliberation. Nevertheless, it appears less clear whether restored landscapes can be included as wild according to his listed conditions. Moreover, if we grant that humans are unwild due to our capacity for rational deliberation, but inquire as to what is specific about reason that renders it wholly distinct, we may run the risk of unearthing a sort of human

exceptionalism, or worse, a circular argument. Perhaps no other creatures possess this characteristic to the same degree, but it is similarly the case that other species possess equally exceptional attributes that are not replicated in others. Why not point out those singular features and place the organisms that possess them in a separate class as well?

Although it is the case that the “generative processes” which Rolston designates as specifically wild are broad enough to include humans, as mentioned previously, these places can be singled out as possessing this feature precisely because they lack signs of human deliberation. For Rolston, the point of distinction between nature and wilderness are the changes imposed by humans, no matter how innocuous. However, the degree by which these changes occur and the degree to which ecosystems can recover, will determine whether these places are wild in a conditional sense.

Finally, Rolston’s definition must provide a consistent account for the role that time and change play in these landscapes. Despite contrasting “constancy in change” with the humanization of landscapes, it remains questionable whether all acts of restoration or any other human-caused transformations that employ sophisticated forms of technology or otherwise, interrupt this causal history (“Reaffirmed” 376). This suggests that human actions that interrupt evolutionary processes are antithetically wild. Rolston does satisfy the fourth criteria on this account: wild places are those which possess a unique evolutionary history. However, this returns us to the question of the status of different types of human interaction, which, as I suggested remains unclear. If employing a short time-

frame it may be possible to delineate which types of human interaction will prevent the designation of wilderness from obtaining after interactions desist. For example, the urban decay and subsequent take-over of non-urban plant and animal life in some areas of downtown Detroit still would not be considered wild because traces of human habitation remain visible. Nevertheless and aside from mere speculation, no clear directives are given in terms of how time should inform our judgments concerning the application of the concept to landscapes. If we can be fooled into conceiving that certain locations have an evolutionary history that was never impeded by humans, then we might as easily be fooled when encountering recently restored areas.

### **III □ Intrinsic value in wilderness systems**

As previously mentioned, Rolston aims to prove that wilderness areas are intrinsically valuable, in both the sense of being non-instrumental and in the sense of possessing value independently of human subjects. He utilizes what appears to be an Aristotilean notion of the good to ascribe objective value to wilderness and wild entities. However, as John O'Neill points out in his essay, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value," to claim that something has a good independently of a subject does not necessarily entail prescriptive judgment (120). The challenge then, is to derive a middle premise to justify prescriptive judgments about the entities in question. Presently, it is unclear whether Rolston's position successfully does so.

Rolston's position is a holist one; all wild entities are intrinsically valuable, but so too is the system in which they thrive. Accordingly, a second challenge emerges regarding conflicts of interest of the various intrinsically

valuable entities contained within the system. Rolston addresses this problem by suggesting that value can be transmitted from one entity to the next, and further, that both intrinsic and instrumental values are present in wild nature and contribute to the greater intrinsic value of the system. This implies that the intrinsic value of the individual entities comprising the system is subordinate to the intrinsic value he ascribes to the system itself.

The reason Rolston is critical of anthropocentrically motivated preservationist arguments is because they tend to divest wilderness of intrinsic value. By situating humans at the center of value, the worth of wild nature is measured merely in terms of instrumental value. Opposing such strategies, Rolston aims to parse out a set of values intrinsic to wilderness. Rather than assuming humans are the primary locus of value, he reverses the relationship, so that values extend first from nature. By this logic, he presupposes that nature possesses intrinsic value. That is, value is a property of wilderness which persists regardless of an observer. He proposes that wild nature has value in and of itself, offering the concepts of “roots,” “neighbours,” and “aliens” to elucidate this natural value-set (“Values” 184).

From an empirical standpoint, humans are evolutionarily connected to the nonhuman: *Homo sapiens* is a product of a long history of natural selection. This connection therefore implies that our value-systems are also evolutionary products. As he explains: “In humans, an evolutionary ecosystem becomes conscious of itself” (“Values” 207). Nature is the prime originator of value and so prescriptively, we are compelled to recognize the generative process of value-

making in nature and in turn, value it as an end-in-itself. It is in this sense that we can understand Rolston's assertion that nature is the "root" of value ("Values" 184).

These roots connect to the concepts "neighbour" and "alien," each of which are separate components of the value-set, triangulating from the concept of "roots." After establishing what these concepts are, he explains how they relate to the others. Nature, as the root or source of value, generates value in each concept. The concepts "neighbour" and "alien" designate a different type of relation that humans have towards entities assigned to either group.

Since many wilderness locations exhibit rich biodiversity, they act as reminders of the generative processes which have produced *Homo sapiens* and our requisite value systems. Regardless of whether we recognize value, however, the value of these places lies within the natural system itself. We learn to value the "compound units of integrated biological achievement," but the value is always already located in the system. This is why the value is of a wild-type ("Values" 186). The issue for Rolston, then, seems to have less to do with establishing the value of nature and has more to do with creating a framework that necessitates the acknowledgment of that value.

Rolston thinks that "although we may learn such things in an emotionally weak sense in our cultural education, we are prone to undervalue them" ("Values" 186). For him, wilderness is unique because it allows us to experience this type of value first-hand: "the uneveryday experiences in wilderness help us to appreciate these phenomena as larger than ourselves... The trip into wildness gives visceral,

intimate access to bodily experience in surrounding nature, unmediated by the protective cushions of culture” (“Values” 186). It is our subjective experience, then, paired with our knowledge of the generative processes working to sustain these locations, that makes possible our appreciation of the intrinsic value of wild nature.

Wilderness is the conduit for our lessons about the nature of value and about the value of nature. As he explains: “In the wilderness I am reminded of what culture lulls me into forgetting, that I have natural roots. I value that learning experience. But more, I value the wilderness out of which I have historically come and continue to come ecologically” (“Values” 187). We do not just value the learning experience itself, but through this learning experience we discover that wilderness is the “source of what we now intrinsically value” (“Values” 187). When we learn it has intrinsic value, we learn to value it intrinsically. Nature literally produces value. The things we value in ourselves “are natural products,” which suggests that nature or wilderness at this point has not been explained in terms of its holistic value, but rather, ecosystems produce things which are valuable for their own sake and which we concurrently value as such (“Values” 187).

One way by which we value these entities is as wild “neighbours.” Just as we employ the principle of universalizability to extend consideration to others that share the same ethically relevant attributes, if we extend our range of values so as to include the wild-types that Rolston discusses, this same principle applies. Here, the generative roots which as he says “flow” into humans, flow equally into

nonhuman entities (“Values” 187). This means that naturalistic properties are morally valuable properties. As he explains, “there is a great similarity between humans and other organisms, whether at experiential, psychological, or biological levels. If I value these qualities in myself, by parity of reasoning I should likewise value them when manifested in other organisms” (“Values” 188).

The challenge is to determine which “degrees of kinship” are available to us, and whether they are real or perceived (“Values” 188). Consistent with his realist account, Rolston explains this kinship on the basis of biological similarities. He offers the example of endorphins, since they account for the feelings of euphoria we identify as good and because they are present in nonhuman life forms (“Values” 188). Further, Rolston thinks that “this sense of kinship need not be restricted to shared subjectivity, for it can be somatic” (“Values” 188). Not only do we relate to nonhuman animals because we know they can experience pain and pleasure, we are also biologically similar entities—some of them have nervous systems and so do we: “perhaps value judgments need to be made not merely on the basis of *sympathy* for sentient kin, but on the basis of what biologists call *sympatry*, shared organic origins” (“Values” 189). The shared properties have objective value and since these properties are relevant to inter-human moral systems, they must also count morally if they appear in other organisms.

According to this reasoning, and keeping in mind his definition of wilderness, we should value our biological kinship with non-human others while also recognizing that *Homo sapiens*’ capacity for rational deliberation is unique.



However, given that wilderness is a subset of nature, the biological processes which we are encouraged to value appear in nature as a set (which explains our biological connection to wilderness), making it less clear why wilderness makes for an especially worthy candidate when it comes to these kinds of moral valuations. Rolston does suggest that encountering wilderness provides a visceral experience that is not repeatable in everyday life, but this is merely a subjective conjecture. Why should it be the case, for example, that an entomologist's astonishment at the evolutionary similarities between herself and the ants she studies be less keen in a lab than in the field, especially given that this realization is dependent upon scientific knowledge? If valuation as "neighbours" stems from biological similarity alone, then nature as a whole deserves to be valued, and not wilderness independently of that whole. While our experience of these similarities might differ viscerally depending on our location, what is valued is not captured by the concept of wilderness.

Finally, Rolston suggests that if we orient ourselves such that we question our relation to nature rather than the reverse, we will immediately be confronted with entities that are biologically and viscerally unfamiliar to us—that are "aliens." He thinks we are capable of admiring differences, and further, that these differences ought to be admired. As he suggests: "human experience would be the poorer for ignoring or scorning what exceeds *our* powers of sentience" ("Values" 190). If we assume that wild nature is objectively valuable, then we need not rely on the principle of universalizability to extend moral consideration to these alien

others—they already are objectively valuable on the basis of being organic problem solvers (“Values” 190).

Rolston’s concern is that if we do not learn to value that which is ultimately different, we will measure the values of others only in terms of the attributes they possess which are similar to our own, such as freedom, sentience, and reason (or endorphins). Given that other entities do not display the same proportion of these attributes, we will inevitably de-value them. Thus, we must recognize that their own ways of being are equally valuable; we must measure their value according to their kind (“Values” 190). According to Rolston, anything that “makes an assertive claim over its surroundings”—anything that has a “genetic set” also “proclaims a life way” and therefore displays its own set of values (“Values” 192). As previously mentioned, the kind of value he is discussing here is similar to Aristotle’s notion of excellence in kind (“Values” 191).

It is here that Rolston introduces the premise missing earlier in his defence that what is good for an entity ought to be realized. For him:

“Every genetic set is a propositional set, a *normative* set, proposing what *ought* to be, beyond what *is*, on the basis of its encoded information. So it grows, reproduces, repairs its wounds, and resists death. Wildness, activity outside the scope of human concern, is not a sign of something valueless, but of foreign freedom, of spontaneous autonomy and self-maintenance.” (“Values” 192)

The argument then, runs as follows: living organisms require certain conditions to flourish, satisfying these conditions leads to the flourishing of the organism, insofar as the organism intends to exist, flourishing must be the end or good of the

organism. Consequently we might ask whether we should be satisfied with this appeal to value—that genetic material and potential stands as the basis for moral evaluation. Note that we want to avoid falsely inferring that all entities possessing objective value ought to have that value realized. If the propagation of life is a good in itself, this does not necessitate moral obligation one way or another. Further, even if it turns out that organic entities do possess intrinsic worth and that these entities have the right to flourish, countless conflicts of interest would arise. Resolving these conflicts would be impossible without superimposing a kind of instrumental calculus which would deny prioritizing the intrinsic worth of the entities in question.

Although this account yields a novel way of justifying the intrinsic worth of all organisms, including humans, it has the potential to lead to unsavoury conclusions. Namely, insofar as it is a naturalistic account, and insofar as it permits or recognizes the imposition of instrumental value, then it keeps open the possibility that humans—as natural as any other creature—are permitted to act according to the rule of self-preservation, which entails prioritizing the instrumental use of other entities. Rolston circumvents this problem by attributing rational deliberation as a uniquely human property, which in turn compels us to question what kind of behaviour is morally justified. However, as I demonstrated in the preceding section, his naturalistic account of wildlife entails that reason is also an evolutionary product, which means the same value system and requisite evaluations he deemed permissible for wild entities, must also apply to humans. We therefore are left without the necessary premise to establish why it is good for

some entities to pursue their own ends to the detriment of others, but why this is not the case for humans.

One of the difficulties that Rolston highlights is that if we assume wild nature and its constituents are intrinsically good, then we encounter problems when reconciling the good in nature with its destructive tendencies. If entities within an ecosystem possess intrinsic value, and if the survival of these entities entails the destruction of others, then conflicts of interest arise: for one parcel of intrinsic value to persist, another must perish. Insofar as humans possess the same intrinsic value, the framework undercuts any moral obligation that we may have to preserve species and ecosystems. If it is permissible for non-human entities to act according to their own interests, then in principle, it is equally permissible for humans to do the same. Aside from questions of how to distinguish humans from wild entities, as Rolston's framework sets out to do, the problem of conflicts of interest emerges as a significant challenge to his approach.

One way of resolving this problem, is by assigning more intrinsic value to ecosystems than its constituents. Hence, Rolston suggests that in conjunction with the intrinsic value of distinct entities within wilderness, instrumental value persists, and both types of value contribute to the intrinsic value of the system as a whole. When individuals in ecosystems act according to their own interests, they value others instrumentally; in effect, they reveal "valuational systems in interaction" ("Values" 194). If we recall that wilderness as a system, is the generative source of value, then it follows that individual parcels of intrinsic value must be subordinate to the system: the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

The destruction of some organisms entails the flourishing of others, and in turn contributes to the evolutionary growth of an ecosystem, which is the root of value. Although this helps soften our visceral reaction to the destructive tendencies in nature, it does little to resolve the axiological problem just raised, namely: if the good of an individual is its self-perpetuation, then intrinsic value is lost upon the demise of that individual, unless it is transferred to others. On this account, however, it might appear that humans are justified in causing the demise of other entities because we partake in the same value-exchange as other entities.

It may be the case that we can value the system as a generative source. Indeed, Rolston suggests this is a primary source of value as mentioned earlier, but affirming this value entails two consequences: first, it leaves open the question of how intrinsic value is transferred to others, and second, rather than addressing the problem, it raises the level at which ecosystems hold value, to the extent that ecosystems may also share conflicts of interest. This problem is exacerbated if we acknowledge that wild nature has a special kind of value that differs from urban and rural nature. If the kind of ecosystemic value Rolston is explaining here is unique only to wilderness locations, then we will continually incur moral debt as we inevitably encroach on these landscapes. If this value is present in all forms of nature—wild or otherwise—then it may be either impossible to determine right action, or if the transmission of value is possible, all action would be morally legitimate.

Certainly, the generative processes of evolution are perhaps most explicit at the level of ecosystems rather than at the level of individuals, but if he wants to

maintain that individuals are also bearers of intrinsic value, then he cannot shirk the problem of conflicts of interest. The closest Rolston comes to resolving this issue is the following:

Each is against the others, but each locus of value is tied into a corporation where values are preserved even as they are exchanged. From that point of view, we see conversions of resources from one life stream to another. (“Values” 195)

Thus, wild nature as valuable as a generative process is also valuable as a stage of competition:

seen this way, organisms inherit value not only in their genes but from their competitors, enemies, and prey. On the short scale, values may seem hopelessly relative and impossible to evaluate, but in the whole, for all the borrowing and spending, biomass and energy are transubstantiated and recycled so that wildness is a no-waste world, frugal in its economies. (“Values” 195)

Just as Rolston derived intrinsic value from a natural state of affairs, he also explains the exchange of value from one entity to the next, naturalistically, in terms of the life-cycle.

The problem endemic to Rolston’s view, beyond providing an account susceptible to charges of the naturalistic fallacy, is that he presupposes a hierarchical view of evolution. He thinks that “over evolutionary time, these individual searches for advantages steadily yield systematic advancements” which in and of itself presupposes that some forms of life must be intrinsically worth more than others. Ecosystems grow in complexity in two ways: by creating more biodiversity, and by creating more complex individuals. Earlier, he had suggested that *Homo sapiens* is evolution’s richest achievement, implying that for him, the kinds of organisms present in an ecosystem are as important as the biotic richness

of the system, and that our rational capacity signifies the height of evolutionary complexity. This seems to imply that as the highest and most complex life forms on this pyramid, according to Rolston, humans possess more value and therefore more of a “right-for-life” than non-human others (“Values” 196). Granted this implication, we can infer that the intrinsic value of nature lies in the continuous propagation of ever advancing complex entities and systems. There are two forms of value at work here. The first is the intrinsic value of the entire system and the second is the intrinsic value of those entities—the more complex the entity, the more value it has, insofar as they have managed to survive and insofar as they consume other parcels of value which are then transferred to them. From this we discern: 1) humans possess the most intrinsic value, and 2) ecosystems ought to be preserved for the sake of the whole. Given that humans are the bearers of the most intrinsic value, then it would appear that the natural course of action, and therefore the right course of action, would be for humans to do as necessary to retain our standing. Doing so may lead to the destruction of other species, and perhaps of entire wilderness ecosystems, but it will likely entail the preservation of others which are necessary for our own survival. Value is preserved in the flourishing of the system and is consistent with his claim that different life forms are consumed and transfer their value to others.

However, given the intrinsic value of entire ecosystems, Rolston has introduced a caveat that prevents his argument from becoming a hopelessly anthropocentric one—but it does so at the risk of committing the naturalistic fallacy, and of imposing too strong a demand on our own moral obligations.

Presumably, if the value of ecosystems lies in their capacity to continue gaining in complexity, then it is morally wrong to prevent them from achieving this end.

Humans, as evolutionary creatures, may continue to thrive according to the laws of natural selection, but we do so at the expense of entire ecosystems, which in turn results in the diminishment of intrinsic value. Accordingly, insofar as humans tend to reverse this evolutionary progression, our actions are unethical, but this in turn, demands actions of us that transcend practical measures, or else the moral impetus becomes too shallow to be of any practical use. Just as we saw with Katz, all interference with nonhuman nature takes on such extreme ethical significance that we may be incapable of right action.

### **Conclusion**

What makes these conclusions untenable is that in some sense, the mode of valuation becomes exclusively instrumental, or at the very least, we are left without much in the way of determining when intrinsic value should take priority over instrumental value. The object of the exercise is reduced to ensuring the survival of nature's richest achievement, and secondarily, of the propagation of the system that enables us to do so. This, however, certainly runs cross-purposes to Rolston's aim, and it appears that the way he resolves this tension is by appealing to the uniquely human ability to deliberate morally. Humans have the choice to preserve these wild places or otherwise, and we ought to choose the former over the latter, since doing so will preserve more intrinsic value. Yet a series of problems emerges from this suggestion. First, it is hardly sufficient to claim that because we can deliberate, we should deliberate properly. Second, we



have yet to see a resolution of the problem of conflicts of interest. If it is indeed the case that wild entities ought to be valued intrinsically, and that we should choose to act to preserve such entities, then we will immediately be faced with the problematic scenario of choosing between saving human life or else the lives of non-human others. If we take an anthropocentric view, and consider nature in terms of use value, an immediate resolution emerges: for the sake of securing human life, we are morally permitted to eradicate other organisms. But if we commit ourselves to his view of intrinsic value, in addition to his suggestion that we act to respect this intrinsic value by preserving as many creatures as possible, we are left without room for choosing a more practical middle-ground.

Finally, we must ask how to compute intrinsic value such that it transfers to other entities. If there is a finite source of intrinsic value held by these ecosystems, then presumably, that value must transfer somewhere, and in some cases to humans as part of the natural system. But this would entirely remove any ethical basis for protecting such ecosystems. If the reverse is true, that there is an infinite source of value, then the same problem emerges. The only viable solution seems to be that non-human ecosystems possess a kind of finite intrinsic value that cannot be transferred to humans, but again, the problem of distinguishing humans from nature or wilderness resurfaces.

Consequently, it appears that Rolston's position veers off course when he appeals to intrinsic value as a naturalistic fact. However, if by way of a solution, anthropocentric arguments are employed to justify the preservation of these ecosystems, these arguments will contradict Rolston's primary intention—to

establish non-anthropocentric grounds for preserving wilderness. Ultimately, then, the human-nature or human-wilderness dichotomy that Rolston uses to undergird his framework is problematic, largely due to his naturalistic account of ethics and the imposition of a double-standard when distinguishing humans from wilderness. I suggested that if he is willing to include humans as wild, then his position becomes tenable, since it does not face the contradictions I have mentioned throughout this section, namely, why it is right for some species to cause the demise of others, but why it is wrong for humans to do the same, given his naturalistic account of wilderness. We might note that Rolston thinks that so long as the possibility of self-regeneration of ecosystems is possible, then these human interactions are more permissible than those which prevent self-regeneration. He does submit that humans cannot be wild, even if using the most benign technologies and imposing insignificant changes. However, from a geological time-frame, all human developments, no matter how devastating, have the potential to be reclaimed by other organic entities. If to be wild is to be intrinsically valuable, then all human alterations will be ethically impermissible. Or, the measure of the permissibility of our impositions will depend upon a shorter time-frame by which to determine the entities' capacity for spontaneous self-restoration.

I have attempted to show that Rolston's appeal to the intrinsic value of nature creates a situation where either everything in nature is intrinsically valuable, which leaves us paralyzed to act, or where only specific ecosystems have value, which does not follow from his premises. In the following section, I

introduce a third alternative offered by J. Baird Callicott, which departs from the objectivist-realist positions maintained by Eric Katz and Holmes Rolston III.

## Chapter 4: Born to be Wild? Callicott and the Refutation of Wilderness

*“We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect” –Aldo Leopold*

### I – Introduction

In the previous chapters I have suggested that Rolston’s strategy is an improvement on Katz’s because he renders explicit the difference between nature and wilderness. In turn, J. Baird Callicott avoids the challenge of finding key features unique to wilderness by rejecting the idea of wilderness altogether, which renders his position preferable to Rolston’s. However, because Callicott rejects the word and definition of wilderness, his position requires that we ignore our intuitions about wilderness; the absence of human interference can no longer serve as the assumed basis for the definition. Accordingly, a new set of challenges emerges—the most significant being whether his approach can do the necessary prescriptive work that an environmental ethic demands. As in previous chapters, I will measure Callicott’s revised notion of “biosphere reserves” against the criteria I introduced in Chapter 2. This will be followed by a discussion of his ethical approach, which diverges from the objective realist stances held by Katz and Rolston.

According to Callicott, since we always already are part of nature we can never behave unnaturally towards it, though this does not preclude us from behaving in morally harmful ways. As a result, the naturalistic fallacy does not pose the same kind of problem as it did with Katz and Rolston. Further, unlike Katz and Rolston, Callicott suggests that human interactions with nonhuman

nature can occur in ways that preserve nature's systemic and moral integrity. He suggests that rather than focusing primarily on non-interference as a conservation goal, we should develop ways of engaging with nature that will work to mutually benefit all parties. Thus, we must ask: what kinds of human interventions are morally permissible?

In response to critics of his adapted theory of moral sentiments, Callicott argues that an environmental ethic does not require normative "force," in the sense of rationally derived obligations ("Moral Sentiments" 184). Rather, instead of relying on rational principles which compel us to act on pain of contradiction, moral sentiments can legitimate our judgments and motivate our behaviours. In this respect Callicott is a moral non-realist; intrinsic value is subject-dependent and the moral "ought" is accounted for through sentiments instead of reason.

What made the human-nature/wilderness dichotomy seem useful for Rolston and Katz was the relative ease with which it appeared to allow them to grant nature moral standing. Since humans are distinct from wilderness, the moral standing of wilderness cannot be captured by anthropocentric values: natural values are not reducible to human values, nor can they be replaced by the promotion of human values. Since Callicott rejects the dichotomy, however, he cannot invoke the same strategy. He must preserve the intrinsic worth of these locations even if they are transformed by humans. Accordingly, the definition cannot be reducible to non-human nature but it must be stringent enough to exclude some kinds of human development. Thus, new grounds are needed to

justify why the destruction of natural entities and their value cannot be replaced by the promotion of human values.

Both Rolston and Katz assumed that non-interference resulted in the promotion of natural values, which were assumed to be morally considerable on the basis of being natural (or wild) as opposed to human. Another premise was required, however, to justify our obligation to respect the intrinsic worth of non-human nature so as to avoid committing the naturalistic fallacy. Conversely, one of the singular challenges Callicott faces is how to distinguish between natural actions and moral actions—unlike Katz and Rolston, this is not something he takes for granted. The spectre of the naturalistic fallacy reappears in Callicott's approach, but not because he assumes nature to be objectively intrinsically valuable, but because he assumes humans fall under the category of nature. In other words, he must find alternative grounds for establishing right action because he cannot assume that all human actions are good on the grounds that they are natural.

Worth noting is that despite his seeming rejection of the received wilderness idea, Callicott insists that his position is not meant “to deny or undermine the importance and necessity of wild lands” (“Revisited” 339). Callicott's contention is a nominal one, granted its ethical consequences. The real objects which are denoted by the idea of “wilderness” are not subject to scrutiny. Rather, it is the definition itself that he thinks is problematic. Nevertheless, changing the features of the definition will also modify the range of real objects enshrined by the definition. Thus, while his definition certainly seeks to include

those areas presently designated as wilderness, presumably it will include other landscapes that might otherwise have been excluded, and it will condone forms of human intervention that might have otherwise been considered immoral. As a result, Callicott's definition is far broader in scope than the ones offered by both Katz and Rolston.

In terms of his approach to valuing these areas, Callicott is heavily influenced by Leopold's land ethic, and as such, his ethic is holistic in the sense relevant to this discussion, wherein the moral consideration of ecosystems takes priority over the individuals which comprise them. Since Leopold's position claims that we are obliged to preserve the integrity of whole ecosystems, and that this obligation arises from the acknowledgement that we are embedded in a community comprising multiple species, his position is indebted to Darwin's theory of evolution. Accordingly, Callicott seeks to bolster Leopold's land ethic by grounding it in a Humean moral framework, which influenced Darwin's own theory of morality.

In the spirit of Hume, Callicott is a subjectivist moral non-realist.<sup>20</sup> Instead of imposing universalizable moral maxims that prescribe right action, an ethic of moral sentiments is subjective—intrinsic value is subject-dependent and moral obligation stems from moral feelings rather than rational principles. These feelings are not prescribed, but are accounted for naturalistically—humans tend to be predisposed to altruism, and we justify right action on the basis of whether our

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<sup>20</sup> Not everyone agrees that an "easy solution" to the is/ought dichotomy in environmental ethics can be derived from Hume's moral philosophy. Y.S. Lo, for example, contends that Callicott's argument improperly interprets Hume's account of how reason propels us to act morally. See: "A Humean Argument for a Land Ethic?"

actions can be legitimized from the perspective of a third-party observer. The normative dimension of this ethic appears in the form of “consensus of feeling” (“Sentiments” 191). In brief, Callicott thinks intrinsic value is conferred by the subject, and to the extent that we possess the capacity to feel sympathy for others, it follows that we are capable of including the environment in our moral sphere (“Sentiments” 196). Consequently, in addition to his definition of wilderness, Callicott’s ethical framework sharply diverges from Rolston and Katz’s—indeed Rolston and Callicott have dialogued intensively on these differences.

## **II □ What’s in a name? Definitional problems with the received wilderness idea**

Broadly speaking, Callicott opposes the received wilderness idea for four reasons: first, he thinks it entails arbitrarily extracting humans from nature. Second, he thinks it leads to outdated and problematic policies for protection (“Critique” 440). Third, he argues that the wilderness idea is hopelessly ethnocentric, and fourth, he thinks it does not effectively deal with time and change. Consistent with his attempt to naturalize humans, he suggests that the concept “biosphere reserve” should be used in place of “wilderness” because biosphere reserves are selected for their ecological qualities and not because they possess scenic qualities or are otherwise useless (“Critique” 440). Finally, he ardently rejects all attempts to base environmental ethics on a conception of humans that puts them in opposition to nature in both a moral and conceptual sense.

In his article, “The Wilderness Idea Revisited,” Callicott explains the problematic venture of employing an outdated form of pre-Darwinian dualism



between “man” and “nature” to undergird the concept wilderness (“Revisited” 348). Ensuing from this dualist position is the assumption that those human societies that do not possess the kind of technologies we associate with the modern industrial world are more “natural” and therefore less “human.” He claims that Rolston, for example, commits this error in his article, “The Wilderness Idea Reaffirmed” (“Reaffirmed” 376). Rolston nevertheless maintains that because the technologies available to non-industrial societies are less invasive, these societies should be located on the natural end of the human-nature spectrum. Implicit in this conclusion is the presumption that since industrial technologies are explicitly regarded as manifestations of the human capacity for deliberation, those who do not build or deploy such technologies are not as rational or deliberative and therefore are less “human” than their modernized counterparts. To distinguish humans from wilderness on the basis of reason alone sets a dangerous precedent, hence Callicott’s contention that the received wilderness idea is ethnocentric.<sup>21</sup>

One means of bypassing this potentially prejudiced generalization is to do away with the dichotomy that forms the basis of the definition of wilderness altogether—no human society can be regarded as more natural than others since all humans belong under the category nature. However, the question of whether or not all humans should therefore be considered wild remains open, and it would certainly seem counter-intuitive to include all humans and all human technologies within this category.

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<sup>21</sup> I discuss these implications in more detail in Chapter 5.

If the opposite tact is deployed such that all humans are construed as categorically unnatural or unwild, Callicott thinks it tends to lead to unsavoury policy implementations. When taken literally, the human-nature/wilderness dichotomy has resulted in the forced relocation of peoples living in newly designated wilderness areas. One need look no further than the Ik people of Uganda, or the indigenous people of North America, to recognize the kind of upheaval that results from forced eviction (“Critique” 438).<sup>22</sup> For Callicott, these examples indicate that basing the wilderness idea on a strict distinction between humans and nature leads to morally and practically untenable conclusions. Mitigating these unpalatable side-effects entails rejecting the wilderness idea altogether. The challenge then, is to formulate a definition that does not rest on the distinction of humans from wilderness alone, and perhaps more importantly, does not use rational deliberation as the primary indicator of humanness.

Callicott also suggests that the pristine character attributed to areas designated as wilderness is a mere historical anomaly, since prior to European colonization, much of North America had already been inhabited and these presumably wild landscapes were heavily managed by humans. Denying these ecological changes imposed by the humans inhabiting these locations results in the outright denial of their cultural legacies—it erases their history (“Revisited” 349). Moreover if pristine nature is a defining characteristic of wilderness, then

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<sup>22</sup> The Ik people are a Ugandan hunter-gatherer tribe who were evicted from their homelands when the Kidepo National Park was instituted in the country (“A Critique” 175). Rather than allowing the tribe to continue their traditional lifestyle in the park, the Ugandan government forced them to adopt sedentary lifestyles outside of it, which caused them severe social and psychological harm. Similarly, when Yosemite National Park was founded, the indigenous population was forced off their land, which had equally devastating effects. For a more thorough account of the wilderness idea and the majority world, see works by Ramachandra Guha.

the only true landscapes deserving of this honorific are those situated in Antarctica (or perhaps the farthest reaches of the universe), and given anthropogenically caused climate change, no terrestrial locations can be considered pristine.

Lastly, Callicott thinks that the definition of wilderness does not sufficiently accommodate the role that temporality plays in such locations, relying on H. Ken Cordell and Patrick C. Reed's claim that "preservation implies cessation of change" (qtd. in "Revisited" 349). Even if policies try to preserve the dynamics that contribute to the modification of ecosystems, if they deny human-caused changes, then they suppress the historical relationship that *Homo sapiens* have enjoyed with much of the presently designated wilderness areas, resulting in an "incomplete" conception of wilderness preservation ("Revisited" 349). It also precludes the possibility that *Homo sapiens* can "re-establish a positive symbiotic relationship with other species and a positive role in the unfolding of evolutionary processes" ("Revisited" 349). What results is a wholly *unnatural* framework for wilderness preservation.

Since Callicott argues that humans are not categorically unwild, and that it is possible to intervene in wilderness in ways that do not degrade its value, he needs to explain what makes for morally permissible interactions with wilderness on the one hand, and what symbiotic relationships with the environment consist of, on the other. In effect, we might ask whether it is possible to preserve the moral permissibility of human interactions with nature, even though interventions tend to cause more harm than good. As Rolston and ecological historian Gilbert

Lafreniere point out, it is almost impossible for humans not to degrade the environments they transform, even if they do so minimally, and even if the practices employed are sustainable (Lafreniere 352).

They may even be sustainable in Callicott's preferred sense, which means the "initiation of human economic activity that is limited by ecological exigencies; economic activity that does not seriously compromise ecological integrity; and, ideally, economic activity that positively enhances ecosystem health" ("Revisited" 355). Nevertheless, the richness and complexity of the ecosystems tend to be downgraded in virtue of the extractive nature of many of these practices. Ultimately, the question of whether humans are capable of forging a harmonious relationship with nature can only be answered empirically, and it requires that we clarify the meanings of "harmonious," "sustainable," and "symbiotic," etc., given their prescriptive connotations. If we assume that human interaction (unless taking the form of ecological restoration) tends to hinder the health of ecosystems rather than help them, then we must question how this reality affects the moral outcome of these interactions.

Yet, even if we are willing to assume that it is possible for humans to enhance the ecological health of the ecosystems they manage, a broader question emerges, as mentioned above, regarding the viability of concepts such as "harmony," "health," and "symbiosis," and even "community." In effect, the concepts to which Callicott attributes prescriptive worth must be compatible with their application in ecological theory.

Unfortunately, this kind of compatibility is more elusive than one might expect. As Kristin Shrader-Frechette points out, “community” from a biological standpoint, is only definable stochastically and statistically—indeed the dynamics of ecosystems are so complex that it is only possible to evaluate the health of an ecosystem once we have determined what counts as a community (89). Even then, such evaluations only make sense relative to very brief lengths of time, which in turn, entails ignoring other aspects of ecological theory (Shrader-Frechette 90).

As Shrader-Frechette explains, there is “no ecological consensus, that natural ecosystems proceed toward homeostasis, stability, or some balance, and almost no support for the diversity-stability” (87). While Callicott admits that the definition of “biosphere reserve” is preferable over “wilderness” precisely because it does not ignore ecosystemic change, if we take a closer look at ecological theory, we find that this truism regarding what Rolston deems “constancy in change” also destabilizes the notion of community that the prescriptive element of Callicott’s definition requires. According to Shrader-Frechette’s findings:

“biotic ‘communities’ cannot be identified by any specific properties or species that give predictive power over them. Nature does not merely extirpate species or cause them to move elsewhere because their niches are gone. And, if not, then no clear scientific grounds exist for defining and preserving some controversial notion of balance or stability.” (88)

Finally, while it might be possible to optimize the health of one particular, small-scale community of organisms, doing so does not necessarily entail improving the health of “another community, nor...that of the biosphere...nor that of a particular association” (Shrader-Frechette 89). As a result, claims Shrader-Frechette,

Callicott's choice to improve the condition of one 'whole' over another appears either to be based on arbitrary grounds, or is incoherent (89). Thus, despite efforts to use ecological theory to bolster his claims regarding the possibility of maintaining the health of specific ecological communities, the science itself leaves little room for such broadly construed definitions. From an ecological standpoint, according to Shrader-Frechette, the notion of community is vague at best and can only work if we are willing to ignore the time-frames in which these processes occur, which in itself suggests that we have to ignore certain ecological exigencies. Either way, further discussion is needed regarding how to implement these terms in a way that satisfies both Callicott's framework and ecological science.

Further, Callicott contends that any preservation framework that ignores the ecological legacy left by past indigenous populations is incomplete. Advocates of the received wilderness idea presume that wilderness sites are pristine in the fullest sense. We might then ask whether the acknowledgement that these exemplars have their present features due to past human interactions requires that preservation goals change to accommodate human interference. Simply put, acknowledging the historical genesis of a given location does not imply permitting the same practices to persist which resulted in their recognizable features.

Ultimately, the problem of time and change remains as pertinent here as in Rolston and Katz's accounts. Previously, the problem was presented as a by-product of their commitment to the exclusion of humans from wilderness

environments. Rolston and Katz did not seem to indicate at what point a landscape may be deemed wild after humans ceased to interfere, nor what time-frame we should use to measure the severity of human interactions. Given that Callicott's model does not entail the exclusion of humans, he avoids this obligation. However, if the model is flexible enough to include humans, then it must demarcate the breadth of change that is permissible, since failing to do so would render his definition impractically broad.

As mentioned previously, although Callicott rejects the definition and concept of wilderness, he does not deny the existence of the entities to which the concept refers. Accordingly, there must be some properties attributable to those entities that allow them to persist, regardless of how the concept used to denote them is defined. If certain human activities alter locations such that the concept cannot apply, then we must be clear as to what kinds of activities those may be. From his article "The Wilderness Idea Revisited" it is possible to outline what he takes to be the central elements of his definition of "biosphere reserve," including acceptable forms of human interaction.

Central to the definition is that these areas act as *refugia* for species that are not commensurable with humanized locations. Consequently, such locations should also display robust biodiversity relative to similar ecosystems, according to ecological standards. Biosphere reserves may be managed and to some extent transformed by humans so long as their practices contribute to the overall health of the ecosystem, or at the very least, are not deleterious. As he suggests: "If the concept of land health replaces the popular, conventional idea of wilderness as a

standard of conservation, then we might begin to envision ways of creatively reintegrating man and nature” (“Revisited” 355). Finally, according to his definition, we might distinguish between these reserves and other ecosystems by pointing to the primary intent of their existence: “biosphere reserves are selected not on the basis of scenic qualities and not because they are otherwise useless, but on the basis of ecological qualities” (“Critique” 440). Since biosphere reserves are chosen specifically for their ecological properties rather than for their scenic or economic ones, Callicott claims the concept can be universalized, extending beyond the National Parks of North America to include any locations globally that have ecological significance.

In my view, Callicott’s definition of biosphere reserve appears to satisfy my proposed criteria more robustly than the definitions presented by Katz and Rolston. This is because, first, his definition is more flexible, and yet it remains stringent enough so as to be useful for prescriptive purposes. It is flexible in the sense that it does not preclude certain forms of human interaction—humans may be implicated in the creation of the ecosystem, as he explains in terms of the aboriginal contributions to many of the landscapes we familiarly call “wild” today, and they may continue to impose transformative practices on these ecosystems, so long as they preserve the ecological integrity of such locations. That is, they cannot disrupt the health of the ecosystems in which they thrive. Furthermore, since humans may interact with biosphere reserves without depriving such locations of their title, Callicott does not beg the question.



Interestingly, the problem of assigning the descriptor “wild” does not arise on this account—an entity may persist in a biosphere reserve (be it human or otherwise) but this does not grant it special nominal status. Instead, only the locations which are comprised of these entities can be denoted as biosphere reserves. The question of whether humans are wild or not, or natural or not, is circumvented: humans may inhabit a biosphere reserve but this does not transform their ontological status as human beings, and the same applies for all of the species comprising the ecosystem. Finally, with regards to time, Callicott argues, similarly to Rolston, that certain kinds of human induced change, while not wholly unnatural, can be abnormal. However subtle, this distinction serves as an important reminder that it is possible to ascertain what kinds of changes are anomalous without introducing human exceptionalism. Some human-caused changes may transform a location over periods of time that are abnormal in relation to similar types of ecosystems. This calls to attention the unique features of those changes while remaining empirically consistent with evolutionary theory. Just as with Rolston, Callicott argues that certain types of human-caused changes are significant enough that the environment cannot be judged as it once was—most urban centers cannot be considered biosphere reserves, as an obvious example. However, since Callicott condones human interactions with the environment, the problem of distinguishing between restored landscapes and wild ones is no longer relevant. Humans may even harvest some goods available in these ecosystems without thereby altering their designation.<sup>23</sup> What matters for Callicott are the types of changes that occur as measured against the standards for

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<sup>23</sup> See Callicott’s two examples offered in “Wilderness Idea Revisited” (356-358).

ecological health of those particular ecosystems. Accordingly, it appears that Callicott has successfully met the criteria I outlined in chapter 2, however, not without difficulty. In particular, it remains to be seen whether the ideal he espouses, of humanity behaving symbiotically with ecosystems, is consistent with current ecological theory.

### **III □ Moral sentiments and moral obligations**

In my view, just as with Katz and Rolston, the success of the outcome of Callicott's argument is dependent on how he proposes to replace the human-nature dichotomy as the foundation for his definition, and how he accounts for our moral obligation towards these environments. Unlike Katz and Rolston, who admonish human impingements on otherwise non-human environments, Callicott thinks that it is possible and preferable to foster sustainable and symbiotic relationships with areas presently designated as wild ("Critique" 440). Although he repeatedly asserts that he is not opposed to protecting landscapes from certain types of human intervention, he thinks that we ought to look beyond the present strategy of sectioning-off land as a means of protection: "the past affords paradigms aplenty of an active, transformative, managerial relationship of people to nature in which both the human and non-human parties to the relationship benefitted" ("Revisited" 357). The question then, is what kinds of interactions might be deemed suitable from a definitional and moral standpoint, especially if it remains unclear as to whether humans are in fact capable of forming symbiotic relationships with their nonhuman counterparts.

At this juncture, it is worth reflecting on the general motivations the philosophers in question have for devising an ethic that deals with specific landscapes, rather than all ecosystems. The issue at hand has to do with what is perceived by Katz, Rolston, and Callicott, alike as the unnecessary and/or immoral ecological damage inflicted on specific environments. While urban environments might be deserving of environmental reform, the issue is how to treat those environments that are largely uninhabited by humans, or which do not display the same kind of properties found in urban or rural landscapes. As Callicott himself suggests, we cannot deny that despite humanity's claim on a vast majority of the earth's surface, there remain places that are significantly different from urban centres, and they require protection from human development, even if merely for the satisfaction of anthropocentric ends. Thus, regardless of whether wilderness is an appropriate concept, these ecosystems still manifest a unique set of properties and deserve another kind of normative definition. Callicott suggests we call them biosphere reserves, since doing so brings to focus what is of central concern—the ecological well-being and rich biodiversity of these ecosystems. However, given that these locations persist—if not as wild, but as biosphere reserves—then so too does the problem of devising a non-anthropocentric moral framework with which to treat these locations as intrinsically valuable.

I take Callicott's central claim, that humans are as natural as any other species, as equally applicable to the position held by Rolston, and to a lesser extent, Katz as well. Rolston readily admits that humans are natural, but the sense in which he uses nature is extremely broad. As he explains: "if nature is defined

as the aggregate of all physical, chemical, and biological processes, there is no reason why it should not *include* human agency” (“Can and Ought” 10). As Rolston points out, the geological and climactic forces at play intervene in human dominated landscapes as much as elsewhere, even if humans are able to adapt by building structures to preserve ideal conditions. We have not distanced ourselves from nature on this view, since we are not supernatural beings—we are beholden to natural processes as much as any other organism.

Conversely, humans are distinct from nature construed as wilderness, just as we are distinct from nature construed as a biosphere reserve, though biosphere reserves may also be sites of specific kinds of human interactions with nonhuman nature. On this account, the same basic moral problem of how to deal with these environments persists in Callicott as much as in Rolston and Katz, insofar as they are all concerned with justifying the intrinsic worth of these landscapes. The difference between Callicott on the one hand and Rolston and Katz on the other, is that Callicott’s moral basis is subjective and non-realist, as opposed to the kind of objective intrinsic value that Rolston and Katz ascribe to wilderness. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly from a definitional standpoint, Callicott remains committed to including landscapes interfered with by humans within the domain of biosphere reserves.

As suggested previously, one of the central challenges to Callicott’s approach is how to derive a prescriptive ethic now that he has dissolved the human-nature dichotomy, since as empirically accurate as his position may be, if he cannot provide an account of how to preserve the “ought” to value these

landscapes and act such that their biodiversity is preserved, we will be no further ahead than we were with Katz's and Rolston's strategies.

As I had mentioned, the problem of the naturalistic fallacy does not emerge in the same way as it did for Rolston and Katz. This in part, is because Callicott relies on Leopold's land ethic and Hume's solution to the "is/ought fallacy." Initially it would seem that Callicott is not subject to the same criticism because he does not differentiate humans from nature and assume that nature *qua* nature is intrinsically good. However, even though he does not deem humans to be categorically distinct from landscapes designated as "wilderness" or "biosphere reserves," he does provide a naturalistic account of humans and nonhuman nature. Thus, if humans are to have some moral obligation towards these environments, it cannot be on the grounds that they are good because they are nonhuman.

Callicott's description of the resolution of the is/ought problem is succinct: according to Hume, sentiments (as opposed to detached deliberation) play an integral role in the formulation of moral judgments and occasionally, these sentiments are either implied or hidden in the premises of an argument, which results in the misapplication of the is/ought fallacy ("Hume's Is/Ought" 168). Thus, to borrow Callicott's example, smoking tobacco may be considered morally repugnant because it is bad for one's health. It would initially seem that the immorality of the act is derived purely from fact given that medical studies have proven cigarette smoking to be terrible for one's health. Yet according to Hume, such a moral assessment does not commit a fallacy because all moral judgments are formed not by reason, but by sentiments ("Hume's Is/Ought" 167). When

making a moral judgment, a subjective feeling spontaneously arises in the individual and is directed towards the object of the judgment, and it is this spontaneous sentiment that ultimately impels the agent to behave in a certain way.

However, this does not entail a kind of moral relativism—moral evaluation is evaluation from an intersubjective point of view. That is, moral judgments are deemed appropriate by focusing on how those in the circle of persons the agent affects are pleased or pained and by basing our evaluations on what we feel when we allow ourselves to sympathetically respond to the agent. In other words, every third-party observer ought to arrive at a similar assessment of the agent as good or bad. If we all feel strongly that someone is morally good or bad, our attitudes will affect our actions towards them, but not as a result of any sort of principled obligation. Instead, our feelings ‘oblige’ us causally, not logically, since feelings are not created by logical derivations. As Callicott explains, “a sentiment-based theory of ethics may find a ‘normative dimension’ in what might be called a ‘consensus of feeling’. An agent’s abnormal moral sensibilities may not be untrue, but by the human consensus of feeling, they may be ‘wrong’, morally, if not epistemically” (“Moral Sentiments” 191). Thus, rather than deriving an ought from reason alone, an ought is derived from sentiments—which are then associated, and often confused, with facts (Kirkman 6).

For his part, Darwin thought that morality is a function of instinct—humans must act altruistically in society and these actions are motivated in part by the instinctual desire to flourish. For Darwin, sentiments are a product of our instincts while for Hume they are caused by the overwhelming desire to act in the

best interest of one's community (Kirkman 6). Since Leopold borrows heavily from a Darwinian perspective of nature, and since Darwin's explanation of the sentiments so closely resemble Hume's own, such that they can be grafted onto Hume's account, then it seems possible to preserve Leopold's land ethic without having it commit the is/ought fallacy.

What makes Callicott's position stronger than those of Katz and Rolston is that he is able to derive a resolution of the human-nature dichotomy while working to preserve a basis for normative judgments. Humans are not necessarily distinct from natural or wild entities, and we ought to establish relationships with non-human natural entities that work to mutually benefit both while contributing to the rich biodiversity on Earth. We can formulate moral judgments about the environment based on sympathy, beneficence, loyalty, and patriotism—feelings which we traditionally only apply to humans. As Callicott explains: “Are we, along with plants and animals, co-evolved, distantly kin members of a biotic community, as ecology alleges? If so, then indeed we ought to feel sympathy or benevolence toward our fellow-members and loyalty and respect toward the community as such” (“Moral Sentiments” 196).

However, As Y.S. Lo points out in his article, “A Humean Argument for the Land Ethic?” Callicott's attempt may not be as straightforward as we might expect. In Rolston's account, we determined that although it is possible to show that wild entities have their own intrinsic good, this in itself does not suggest that we ought to behave morally towards those entities. Similarly, Callicott's reliance on Hume's explanation of how we are compelled to act does not necessarily result

in moral obligation. Ultimately, Hume's moral framework is descriptive. That is, it accounts for how moral actions occur, but beyond that, it does not make any judgments about how we ought to act. Granted, Callicott does not think that we should be 'forced' to act by pain of rational contradiction, as an objectivist realist might presume, but his claim that we are naturally inclined to feel sympathy for the environment seems to be based on an account of human predispositions that is empirically falsifiable. Furthermore, even if we are willing to grant that humans are predisposed to developing feelings of sympathy towards nonhumans, it does not appear as though the causal motivation to act holds very much sway over our behaviours. We need look no further than the Anthropocene extinction for such a counterexample.

For his part, Callicott maintains a difference between our naturally derived capacity for moral feelings, and the objects/subjects to which they are ultimately applied. Although moral sentiments are evolutionary products, "A culture's values and ethical ideals rest upon and are justified by suppositions of fact and supposed relations among supposed facts" ("Moral Sentiments" 195). In effect, culture plays an integral role in directing our moral sentiments. To this end, humans have the potential to develop feelings of sympathy towards ecosystems and the individuals comprising them, through moral education. We can learn to appreciate the intrinsic value of ecosystems, since, as he suggests, "the moral sentiments are in themselves undetermined and plastic" ("Moral Sentiments" 194). Although Callicott's approach goes a long way towards providing the metaphysical basis for laying out a moral theory of the environment—as he himself admits, we have



farther yet to go in terms of discerning what obligations we may indeed have (“Moral Sentiments” 197).

### **Conclusion**

As I have suggested, the strategy of employing the human-nature dichotomy to undergird the concept “wilderness” is misguided despite its intuitive strength. For example, as revealed in the first chapter “nature” and “wilderness” have different referents, and the concept of wilderness in particular is dependent on social and scientific prejudices which engender conflicting interpretations. So far Callicott has come closest to providing a normative definition of wilderness, albeit by replacing the concept with “biosphere reserve.” His definition of biosphere reserve meets the criteria introduced in the second chapter, namely:

- 1) The definition must have a combination of unique properties attributable to wilderness so as to keep the concept normatively and ethically relevant.
- 2) The properties must be robust enough so as not to rely on a form of human exceptionalism.
- 3) The definition must be able to accommodate the role that time and change play in the environment so as to preserve its normative status.

Eric Katz was unable to satisfy the four criteria because his definition of wilderness was too stringent and because he relied too heavily on the human-nature dichotomy. Further his account of the autonomy of nature could not be supported by importing a Kantian framework. Rolston, on the other hand, ended up with conflicting claims because he resorted to a naturalistic account of intrinsic value on the one hand, while denying humans their naturalistic standing on the other. Thus it appears that Callicott’s account is the most successful, since he is not immediately faced with the two problems central to Rolston and Katz’s

account: the naturalistic fallacy and human exceptionalism. However, it appears that his valuational system, while the most coherent (as it is based on sound conceptual grounds and has no internal conflicts), is also perhaps the least forceful. Indeed the singular challenge that has so far remained an obstacle is trying to derive a normative basis, even if that basis is not a rational principle, to justify why we ought to value wild ecosystems intrinsically.

Despite their divergent backgrounds (Rolston as an objectivist moral realist and Callicott as a subjectivist moral non-realist) these two thinkers share much in common when it comes to deriving a basis for their moral claims. Both rely on ecological assumptions about how humanity relates to nonhuman entities. They both submit that humans share some properties with others, and that from a moral standpoint, this acknowledgement of community serves as an important reminder of how integrated we are with our natural environment, even if we tend to deny this truism by surrounding ourselves with artifacts that seemingly share nothing in common with “wild nature.” However, the same fundamental problems that afflicted Rolston and Katz’s position are relevant here also: if the ecological basis is not sound, then we are left without the naturalistic thrust of the argument that legitimized their claims in the first place. Given the dramatic advancements made in the field of ecology since Leopold’s era, it would seem that although environmental ethics ought to be amenable to ecological science and to some extent, informed by it, we should also be careful to avoid relying purely on a naturalistic account of ethics, not only because it appears that it will always be susceptible to the naturalistic fallacy, but also in case our empirical presumptions

turn out to be false. This, in part, is why I turn now to the framework offered by Val Plumwood. She looks at the structures of the relationships we forge with nonhuman others in order to assemble a foundation from which we can justify right action towards our evolutionary counterparts. In what follows, I will defend Val Plumwood's position, since her account aims to avoid any dichotomous rendering of humans and nature/wilderness and also attempts to preserve the concept wilderness that is commensurable with her environmental ethic.

## Chapter 5: Beyond the Human-Nature Dichotomy

### I – Introduction

Val Plumwood formulates a successful eco-feminist critique of the wilderness idea and the human-nature dichotomy. She borrows from feminist accounts of rationality to remark on the problematic nature of overly-dichotomous worldviews that arbitrarily centralize certain characteristics as universalizable indicators of moral worth. Her critique touches upon different aspects of the positions held by Katz, Rolston, and Callicott; she identifies what is both helpful and problematic about prescriptive assessments of the natural-artifactual distinction, stresses the necessity of positively assessing ‘otherness’ in non-human entities, and provides a positive definition of wilderness that does not require that we dismiss the concept altogether. Strategically, her position appears stronger because its basis lies in feminist critique, which provides a cohesive set of concepts that can be deployed relatively seamlessly in the realm of environmental philosophy. So while Rolston and Plumwood may share certain sentiments regarding the role that ‘otherness’ plays in defining wilderness, for example, Plumwood’s account is more developed and so circumvents the problem of imprecision that made Rolston’s position less defensible.

Although Plumwood’s approach may serve to clarify the wilderness debate and offer a solution to the human-nature dichotomy, the position is also susceptible to criticisms imposed by another framework—the social constructivist view of nature—which is defended perhaps most ardently by Steven Vogel. Earlier, I brought Vogel’s position to bear on aspects of Katz’s views (See fn. 10,

12, 14), and I do so again in my investigation of Plumwood's account. Vogel offers objections to otherwise implicitly assumed premises, which in turn serve to hold these positions accountable. Despite their divergent backgrounds, I think Plumwood and Vogel share complimentary ideas concerning how to contend with the dichotomy. While both deal with the problem of wilderness, they devote the bulk of their work—and accordingly I will devote the bulk of my attention—to providing a critical response to the problems endemic to the human-nature dichotomy as conceived in the 1990s debate. While Steven Vogel, like William Cronon, contends that the idea of nature is historically contingent and that any discussion of nature must account for its socially constructed origins, Plumwood suggests that we can appropriate some of the language used in feminist theory to account for our moral interactions with non-human others. Given that their conclusions are relatively similar, by bringing the social constructivist critique to bear on the eco-feminist position, I hope to further clarify why I think the latter framework is the most successful.

I will spend the bulk of this chapter exploring Val Plumwood's view, and raise Steven Vogel's position as a counterpoint to her assertions. This involves outlining her position regarding the problematic formulation of the human-nature dichotomy, and describing her broader goal of establishing a meta-ethical approach that does not rely on excessive forms of dualism. I will utilize Vogel's critique of otherness and to assess the viability of her account. In the last section, I re-introduce the concept of wilderness and assess whether her definition can meet the criteria I set out in Chapter 2.

## II □ An eco-feminist critique of the human-nature dichotomy

Val Plumwood thinks that the reliance on the human-nature dichotomy to establish moral claims about nature is a misguided approach. In the previous chapters, I mentioned a possible reason why using the human-nature dichotomy is such a compelling strategy when it comes to establishing moral consideration for non-humans. This is because it allows nature to be recognized as an independent entity. So long as nature, wilderness, or even entities within nature possess certain properties that we deem intrinsically valuable, they ought to be included within the moral sphere. According to my critique, however, autonomy as self-governance cannot apply to entities that do not possess the rational capacity to self-legislate, and the notion of complexity (or as Rolston calls it “spontaneous self-restoration”) is too broad in scope to capture the specific landscapes that he thinks ought to be included as intrinsically valuable.

Yet it would seem that these critiques might easily be overcome simply by broadening the definitions of autonomy and complexity so that more entities could be included in these categories. The problem could be construed as a mere superficial inconsistency: the same method of using essentialist claims and imposing those on clearly defined entities remains. Plumwood calls this strategy “moral extensionism” and it refers to the attempt to extend moral boundaries to include entities that possess the properties that are considered necessary for moral consideration, but which have traditionally been excluded from the moral realm. According to moral extensionism, Katz would merely need to prove that there are natural entities that can be characterized as autonomous. If we take a utilitarian

approach, for example, and consider sentience an indicator of moral worth, then the challenge would be to prove that a certain entity is sentient and has its own interests which ought to be considered. Moral extensionism has been the strategy of Peter Singer and Tom Regan for example, and could also indirectly apply to Rolston's account.

Plumwood's approach, however, has little to do with establishing intrinsic worth or of proving that certain entities are sentient or rational in the traditional sense. Instead, she thinks moral extensionism—including deriving essentialist claims in order to establish moral worth—is symptomatic of a “crisis of monological forms of both [reason and culture] that are unable to adapt themselves to the earth and to the limits of other kinds of life” (*Environmental Culture* 15). She thinks that the strategy fails because it re-affirms an arbitrary distinction and because it is simply not the case that we can map these properties onto natural entities. For the most part natural entities are not rational or self-governing, nor are they sentient. And even though there are instances in nature where these properties do appear, to only value those characteristics is to impose a hierarchical framework of values that cannot deal with the complex interconnectedness of ecosystems. Consequently, it renders the moral extensionist strategy untenable because it can only account for a very narrow set of properties. For example, something like soil might be regarded as the foundational ground required for biotic communities to flourish—but on the moral extensionist view, soil might be considered the least morally valuable, since it lacks agency and sentience.

On Plumwood's view, this system is inherently flawed because it relies on a false dualism that prioritizes human-centric properties such as reason and displaces or subjugates other properties that natural entities possess. According to Plumwood, dualism represents a kind of exaggerated dichotomy: "dualism is an emphatic and distancing form of separation (hyper-separation or disassociation) which creates a sharp, ontological break or radical discontinuity between the group identified as the privileged 'centre' and those subordinated" (*Environmental Culture* 101). So long as reason or sentience is taken as the primary source of value, any ethical approach that is undergirded by this tacit assumption is subject to Plumwood's criticism. Additionally, insofar as the definition relies on a strict distinction, it denies or has difficulty accounting for otherwise potentially legitimate characteristics, without providing sufficient reasons for committing to the distinction.<sup>24</sup>

This is why Plumwood suggests that we turn to alternative modes of valuation, or more radically, that we disengage from these kinds of frameworks that promote what she views to be hyper-exclusive definitions of intrinsic value. Doing so entails that the subjugation of traditionally subordinated entities, including non-human animals, ecosystems, and even human minorities, might be replaced by an ethic that makes the way for the "formation of properly integrated selves and of certain beneficial and satisfying kinds of relationships with others and with nature" (*Environmental Culture* 142). To this end, she is concerned with

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<sup>24</sup> For more on the problem of moral extensionism, see Christian Diehm's "Minding Nature: Val Plumwood's Critique of Moral Extensionism."



establishing a meta-ethical framework which might be used as the basis for prescriptive guidelines.

In response to her rejection of exaggerated dualism and hierarchical frameworks, Plumwood suggests that an alternative conception of human identity and our relation to nature can be captured by concepts that first appeared in care ethics, including: relationality, intentionality, and contiguity. Although she concedes that there are some incommensurable differences between humans and other natural entities, she does not think they justify the imposition of a hierarchical framework that prioritizes human-like qualities over others found in nature. Rather than using human-specific properties such as language and reason to validate our authority over other entities, they should be recognized as mere differences.

This is not to suggest, however, that all hierarchies and systems of ranking are categorically unsound. For Plumwood, retaining definitional properties only runs contrary to an ecological ethic if they end up essentializing and arbitrarily prioritizing where merely acknowledging difference suffices. For example, we cannot infer from our rational capacity or our range of unique artifacts that we are ontologically distinct and superior to all other life forms. To claim, as Rolston does for example, that humans are exceptional creatures—even if this description is used to engender moral concern for non-human others—is to implicitly rely on a hierarchical schema that systematically displaces other intentional structures. At the risk of being too inflammatory, one could argue that relying on assumptions about our evolutionary superiority to urge us towards moral action is akin to

formulating anti-racist frameworks on the assumption that whites are racially superior. To suggest that humans can be all the more exceptional if we recognize the needs of non-human species is like claiming that whites can re-assert their superiority by respecting people of colour. Alternatively, we might say that our predisposition to manipulate our environments to suit our ends makes us a morally bankrupt and inferior species. Both positions are too emphatic and deny other possible ways of entering into ethical relationships with others.

Instead of relying on an exclusionary dualistic framework, Plumwood points to a range of other properties that we possess which reveal that the reverse is true—that we are wholly dependent on ecological systems, even if we possess unique characteristics. This move is not in itself an assimilationist one. It is not meant to dissolve all demarcations for the sake of a more egalitarian approach to assessing ours and others' properties. Rather, it represents a move towards what Plumwood calls “ecological rationality,” which aims to preserve not only sameness and difference but also a way of determining moral action. According to her, ecological rationality can be used to guide inter-human and inter-species relations. The central precept of ecological rationality is distributive equality:

If a process of political communication is working well, if it is inclusive and open in a real and not just formal way to all, it should be articulating the needs of all communicants and thus producing a certain kind of distributive product. *That product is substantive social and distributive equality.* (*Environmental Culture* 96)

By de-centering the human in addition to prioritizing the needs of the unfairly marginalized over the needs of the powerful, ecologically rational societies would seek to involve all stakeholders through an open and participatory communicative

democracy. Above all, “such a structure would need to *eliminate* class as a position of silence and radical marginality, and would need to adopt substantial social equality as a major redistributive and transformative objective” (96). When applied to the arena of environmental ethics, this puts a high demand on humanity’s openness to various forms of intentionality that can be interpreted as claims on distributive outcome.

Just as a keen openness to difference does not *de facto* call for the elimination of all forms of hierarchy, the inclusion of multiple stakeholders, on this account, does not imply dismissing human interests. Rather, on her view, humans ought to be prudential in our self-care, meaning we should consider our interests just as we consider the interests of others. People and natural entities need not be treated primarily instrumentally—they should always be recognized in their own right—not merely as means, but as interdependent beings in the fullest sense. As Plumwood puts it, “what is prohibited is unconstrained or total use of others as no more than means, reducing others to means” (129). Thus, Plumwood delineates between objects-for-use and ‘others’: she aims to forge a middle-ground between a misanthropic, self-destructive, and impossibly strict ethical demand, and one which is overly anthropocentric. She calls this “biospheric egalitarianism” (“Intentional Recognition” 409).

### **III □ Nature as other?**

One of the central concepts that Plumwood deploys in her analysis of the human nature dichotomy is the notion of otherness. She uses it as part of her account of natural entities. Plumwood thinks that non-human others are capable of

inter-species communication, and so to be ecologically rational entails accepting these voices into the process of moral deliberation.

The question for Plumwood, is whether her own description of otherness can maintain its prescriptive force. I think it can, however, a potential problem persists if Plumwood's account does not recognize the built aspect of all human interactions with the material world. That is, the notion of otherness should apply to relations between humans and our artifacts as much as to the relations between different non-human life forms. Nevertheless, if ecological rationality entails taking responsibility for the ways in which we choose to interact with non-human entities then perhaps it is possible to interpret her approach in such a way as to comprise all environments, including those that dualists often associate merely with humans.

Plumwood relies on the idea of otherness to defend her notion of ecological rationality, but this idea of othering should not be compared to what she views to be a harmful tendency whereby "the Other is conceived monologically as a form of the self, and cannot be truly encountered" (*Environmental Culture* 119). She attributes this kind of othering to a human-centred framework that self-maximizes in order to gain superiority over other entities in a way that ignores and is insensitive to their needs (*Environmental Culture* 119). She claims that:

*The logic of centrism naturalises an illusory order in which the centre appears to itself to be disembedded, and this is especially dangerous in contexts where there is real and radical dependency on an Other who is simultaneously weakened by the application of that logic. (Environmental Culture 120)*

This logic of domination, which devalues the other, negatively affects those entities captured by the concept since their needs cannot be met. Furthermore, when the inter-dependency and embeddedness of humans in ecosystems is de-emphasized or ignored, it also negatively effects those in power (namely, humans) since such a framework cannot contribute to the overall well-being of the entire system. But insofar as the power is pervasive, it prevents the hegemonic group from recognizing the ways in which its power is distributed, and therefore the power itself goes unrecognized (*Environmental Culture* 120). On this model, others are viewed only instrumentally through the creation of barriers of separation that prevent those in power from associating with nature and non-human entities dialogically (*Environmental Culture* 120).

Thus, for Plumwood, it is not otherness as a concept that is the problem, but rather it is the monological relationship that results from a human-centric position that confines otherness to a role of subordination, and which glosses over all difference within the category. As such her definition clarifies that otherness actually refers specifically to the way in which non-human entities express themselves intentionally. For Plumwood, it is on the basis of her discussion of relationality and contiguity that her notion of otherness can be best approached and understood.

#### **IV □ Nature as presence: towards a communicative ethic of the environment**

In *Environmental Culture*, Plumwood proposes that the West's predisposition for centrist and marginalizing attitudes be replaced with a

framework that borrows heavily from care ethics. Such a framework entails delegitimizing the subordination and homogenization of Others,<sup>25</sup> and instead entails recognizing them as different—as “positively-other-than,” and as “other nations” (*Environmental Culture* 194). The aim is to decentralize the human-Other binary such that otherness is imbued with a positive sense of alterity that accommodates inter-dependence and the ecological embeddedness of all entities. Otherness, then, might not be conceived primarily as an exclusionary category that cannot locate intrinsic properties that indicate group membership. This however, implies a paradox, since on the one hand it must be taken as a non-group specific placeholder concept meant to indicate that which is different from humans, and on the other, as a concept pointing to the presence of these entities: they appear to us, make demands on us, and yet somehow they are different from us. Further, the concept of otherness cannot function to exclude humans from the definition of wilderness. Plumwood, then, identifies the object specifically as other and locates subjectivity within this sense of otherness.

Resulting from this revised conception of otherness, a relational framework would replace a dualist and hierarchical one: it would recognize difference by appealing to dialogical forms of communication rather than disengaged monological assessments that are confined to human-specific properties. Accordingly, Plumwood’s proposed alternative is a kind of virtue ethic

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<sup>25</sup> “Other” here might be taken to refer to groups unfairly marginalized by hegemonic institutions.

based on open communication, and the acknowledgement of relatedness as much as difference.<sup>26</sup>

Plumwood relies on her conception of communication to describe what an ecologically rational ethic might entail. On her account, if communication is conceived broadly enough, then it can include modes of intentionality that might otherwise be excluded from human-centric definitions, which in turn, allows non-human entities to enter the arena of public discourse, and to be conceived not so much as others, but as specific stakeholders defined in terms of their requirements to persist as an entity or species. Although she does not think that an entity's propensity for communication is a prerequisite for moral consideration, she does argue that a broader conception of communication, and likewise of mind, allows us to recognize the plurality of interests and modes of being of entities we might otherwise ignore, and which an environmental ethic should seek to include. Thus a re-consideration of mind and of communication might propel us towards a type of conscientiousness that is impossible when relying on a stricter, logo-centric definition. What is needed, then, is for humans to recognize the myriad ways in which others are responsive to the environment, and to take this responsiveness,

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<sup>26</sup> Plumwood identifies Habermas's discourse ethic as particularly appealing because it resembles her own conception of ecological rationality, whereby "the liberal public sphere approximates the ideal speech situation of communicative rationality, constituting 'a warning system with sensors that, though unspecialised, are sensitive to the entire gamut of society. That is, the liberal public sphere is taken to represent a deliberative arena where everyone, despite other inequalities, has an equal opportunity to speak' (*Environmental Culture* 92). The primary difference between Habermas's discourse ethics and the ethic suggested by Plumwood (and Vogel) is that non-humans might gain as much consideration as humans in deliberative processes. But this demands a drastically reformed conception of what it means to participate in discourse, and what communication ultimately entails.

however it manifests itself, as a form of communication that should be included in moral deliberation (*Environmental Culture* 91).

Since her definition is meant to be flexible and inclusive, the accommodation of the non-human other is built into the framework from the get-go. On this view, since the capacity for reason is not a precursor for communication, non-human others need not be measured against human-like properties. Rather, the framework demands a higher sensitivity towards the presence of others. Appreciating this presence presupposes the acknowledgment of these intentional forms, since it is on the basis of their modes of intentionality that these others present themselves. Clearly, such a revisionary project with its ambitious scope challenges very fundamental questions about our commitment to certain forms of communication, as well as our ability to discharge those very commitments.

For Steven Vogel, this challenge is all but surmountable; he thinks that attempts at broadening the definition of communication, and likewise intentionality, are counter-productive because they lack the very truth-claims that he thinks make moral deliberation possible in the first place. For Vogel, communication implies mutual understanding—to communicate is not merely to listen, but to engage in dialogue (“Silence” 155). It is through dialogue that universalizable truth-claims can be established and these claims form the basis of ethical deliberation. Moral judgments require that we agree on the truth claims that make those judgments possible initially—without these safeguards in place, communication would be reduced to relativised assertions (“Silence” 160). Since



most non-human entities cannot speak in such a way as to confirm or deny truth claims, then they cannot dialogue, nor can they agree with the claims being made by other interlocutors on their behalf. In a word, they cannot participate in the conversation, even when the conversation is about them. For Vogel this is a considerable danger: it leaves those entities mute when it comes to moral deliberation, or worse, it forces those capable of communication to speak for others, thus risking misinterpretation (“Silence” 158). Perhaps even more dangerous, is the assumption that these entities are capable of being misinterpreted, when in fact, they lack the capacity to communicate at all (“Silence” 164).

However, as Plumwood suggests, overcoming a dualist, human-centric framework entails opening up certain definitions such that their meanings can apply to non-human entities. Such is the case when applying communication and intentionality to non-human entities. For example, her definition of communication is one which is based on openness and receptivity: “what is required in order to be ‘a receiver’ of communicative and other kinds of experience and relationship is openness to the other as a communicative being” (*Environmental Culture* 175). Just as communication takes on a different form (that is, rather than being merely a linguistic phenomenon, communication can be somatic or based on receptivity as much as dialogue, etc.), so too does her conception of mind. The two are interconnected—and so she must provide an adequate concept of mind that can deal with the kind of openness this alternative form of communication entails:

In short, we can allow for mind to take radically different forms, and thus allow for the incommensurability between the abilities of certain species and groups that is now increasingly attested by evolutionary theory and scientific study, thus providing a viable and rational interspecies option to the usual human-centered way to think about mind. (*Environmental Culture* 180)

She calls this revised notion of mind “weak panpsychism”: the concept is not reducible to deductive reason alone, but instead recognizes different properties that can be associated with ‘mind.’ These properties in turn, proliferate in non-human, non-rational entities, or as she describes it, “elements of mind (or mindlike qualities) are widespread in nature and are not confined to the human sphere” (“Intentional Recognition” 400). Plumwood views the recognition of intentionality in non-human entities as an indicator of the proliferation of mind-like properties in nature (“Intentional Recognition” 401). Although she does not think that a commitment to panpsychism necessarily entails establishing the moral worth of entities, it does open avenues of at least recognizing the modes of being that might otherwise be closed-off when utilizing a more limiting conception of mind (“Intentional Recognition” 401).

Intentionality can be understood in this sense to refer to the “potential for communicative exchange and agency” (*Environmental Culture* 181). Plumwood does not deny that human projections onto natural entities do sometimes occur—we also project onto other humans—but instead of viewing this as a knockdown argument against her approach (since it would also be a knockdown argument against communication between humans), she thinks that “the fact that there is such a distinction and that we do have a sense of the difference between more and less veridical attributions here shows that we cannot write off intentional

attributions to non-humans as universally of the ‘projection’ type, in which there are no criteria for accuracy” (*Environmental Culture* 183). The real challenge lies in determining which interpretations we make of others’ intentional forms are of the projection type. Again, this would demand a heightened sensitivity and responsiveness to other types of ‘language’ and would also include attempts to speak “in common terms” if this is at all possible (*Environmental Culture* 189). Essentially, Plumwood’s framework involves re-defining the notion of the subject and then imposing a subject-subject framework onto a subject-object one (*Environmental Culture* 190).

Thus, where Vogel still relies on a narrow sense of communication, Plumwood seeks to expand it and to allow for the real possibility of inter-species dialogue. Nevertheless, I think that Vogel’s contention that truth-claims necessitate mutual understanding is justified, so long as we agree with him that moral judgments, even if they do not take the form of principles for action, rely on universalizable truth-claims. Yet, this does not mean that Plumwood has missed the mark. Instead, her argument concerning the plurality of ways in which intentionality is recognized is enough to show, I think, that communication need not always imply the recognition of truth-claims. Perhaps then, Vogel’s hesitation is applicable only in those instances where mutual understanding already occurs. The problems of relativism and misinterpretation are only relevant in the cases when the kind of dialogue Vogel is referring to is possible. Placing these constraints on the intentional modes of non-human entities that are incapable of communicating according to his narrow definition is a misplaced demand. It is not

the case that our inability to communicate with non-human others in this narrow sense implies that their intentional modes of being cannot be brought to bear on our ethical decisions. Further, it does not imply that these entities cannot be participants in a democratic communicative ethic. Instead, it places additional emphasis on the requirement that humans be, as Plumwood suggests, open and responsive to the needs of others. The problem lies in how to recognize the demands that these non-human others are placing on us.

The ethical arena must be wide enough to include those unable to make truth-claims, and in this sense it does imply “speaking” on their behalf. As moral agents, it is necessary that we take the needs of others into consideration, but as Plumwood, Vogel, and to some degree Rolston, warn, this includes doing so without projecting our own voices onto theirs. Part of our responsibility as moral agents is recognizing the agency of others in addition to our inter-dependence. But agency here has a double-meaning; part of agency refers to the human capacity to make moral judgments, but the agency of non-human entities might refer to the biological sense, indicating the kinds of self-perpetuating processes that allow them to flourish. This is why Plumwood prefers to recognize non-human entities as subjects rather than mere objects. Subject here does not imply the capacity for self-governance, but rather, entails the capacity for self-disclosure, and intentional recognition entails being receptive to these forms.<sup>27</sup> Thus, by expanding and

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<sup>27</sup> I should note, however, that I’m not entirely convinced by this attempt to expand the arena based on this notion of subject, simply because it does not seem to be conceptually rigid enough. There are many types of self-perpetuating entities—and it is difficult to ascertain what kinds of influences we impose on those entities might be considered respectful or utilitarian (in the negative sense). Tables, artificial intelligence, or even mountain ranges could fit under this definition, yet intuitively, while we might find surface mining irredeemable, chopping up a table for firewood, might not even register as a potential moral/immoral action. The closest we come to

clarifying communication, otherness, and intentionality, Plumwood overcomes the problems of dissociating humans from nature which occurred in Katz and Rolston's account.

Understanding other species and possibly inorganic natural entities as subjects does not involve incorporating the notion of subject in the generalized Cartesian/Kantian sense, where a subject is defined in terms of the capacity for deductive thought and self-legislation. Rather, it is to understand subject as an intentional being, whose interests and sense of flourishing can be understood only on a contextual basis. Thus while it would seem that Katz's, and to a lesser degree, Rolston's reliance on the notion that nature is a subject are actually quite similar to Plumwood's, she does not want to render difference or otherness (as devoid of internal teleology, or autonomous in terms of its independence) a necessary attribute or characteristic of subject. What matters for her notion of the subject, is that it possesses some sort of intentional features and communicative capacity—be they somatic gestures, or direct dialogue. Plumwood notes that after all, "reading embodied action is part of all our lives, and is the common language of embodied beings" (*Environmental Culture* 192).

Under Katz's framework, the only way that a subject can instantiate itself is by demarking itself from others—as a self-contained entity that has "an

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what she means by intentionality is in her reverence for individuals who break down the subject-object knowledge framework, including the likes of Darwin and Humboldt. She says: "When Darwin speaks of the Galapagos as 'the great laboratory of evolution,' or when Humboldt speaks of rocks and pumice a speaking the history of the earth, we are encountering a practice of treating nature as active in the production of knowledge, as inviting the attentive observer to receive her disclosures. The dialogical paradigm stresses instead communicative methodologies of sensitive listening and attentive observation, and of an open stance that has not already closed itself off by stereotyping the other that is studied in reductionist terms as mindless and voiceless" (*Environmental Culture* 56).

ongoing subject of a history, a life process, a developmental system” (Katz qtd. in Dhiem 13). Thus, for Plumwood, the hierarchical rules that often govern the kinds of systems that Katz adheres to, where an entity can only ever be counted morally if it is demarcated as a disembodied and autonomous subject, is rejected in favour of a more contextually based conception of subject. Instead of relying on hierarchical systems of rank, we might consider appealing to “world-narratives [that] figure nature and life in gift-exchange terms as an egalitarian ethical system of reciprocity in which all benefit, participate and ultimately themselves are in turn consumed” (*Environmental Culture* 171).

#### **V □ The problem of anthropocentrism**

In terms of the problem of relying too heavily on an anthropocentric notion of communication, or what she calls “implicit anthropocentrism,” Plumwood suggests the notion ought to be broadened so as to maintain “due respect for difference” which treats “communicative behaviours as highly diverse and part of a plural set of grounds for relationships” (*Environmental Culture* 192-93). This includes developing ways of recognizing communication within particular species and amongst different species (*Environmental Culture* 192-93). It also involves “listening and attentiveness to the other, a stance which can help to counter the deafness and backgrounding which obscures and denies what the non-human other contributes to our lives and collaborative ventures” (*Environmental Culture* 194-95). Thus, despite being limited by our own intentional modes and the ways in which we experience the world, insofar as we are also embedded within ecological systems, we *de facto* have the means

necessary to communicate with others and to recognize different forms of exchange utilized by others to communicate amongst themselves. Her stance then, is radically biocentric even if it concedes the limits of our own communicative capacities. Further, her stance allows us to relate to individual entities and to entire ecosystems: under her framework, we no longer need to lump all nonhuman entities under the title “nature” and then ask how to treat this homogenous group which possesses complex, conflicting interests. Instead, we can evaluate the permissibility of our actions from localized standpoints, relative to specific entities or communities.

Plumwood addresses the issue of anthropocentrism out of necessity, not for fear that her account might be misinterpreted as anthropocentric but because her position is so radically bio-centric. Given that her aim is to establish a relational framework that does not exclusively prioritize human interests, she faces the opposite criticism: that her approach cannot deal with inevitable conflicts of interest—it has no means of balancing between human interests and the interests of other entities. In response to such potential criticisms, Plumwood invokes the notion of moral prudence.

Before exploring this concept, it is worth outlining what exactly is meant by the notion of anthropocentrism. In her book entitled *The Natural and the Artificial*, Keekok Lee lists two types of anthropocentrism that appear in environmental philosophy:

The first may be called ‘axiological anthropocentrism,’ the view that only humans are (intrinsically) valuable. The second may be called ‘existential anthropocentrism,’ the view that humans who alone can be participants in communication—as moral subjects—

are necessarily socially and normatively constituted....[A]ll accounts of nature are necessarily socially constructed in the sense that humans who articulate them are themselves socially and normatively constituted beings. (248)

As suggested by Lee, Vogel's approach is not susceptible to axiological anthropocentrism, but his account does appeal to existential anthropocentrism. As we saw in his discussion of communication, Vogel does think that humans' unique communicative capacities enable us to form moral judgments. Plumwood, on the other hand, attempts to distance herself from both types of anthropocentrism by suggesting that we act prudentially rather than anthropocentrically when satisfying our interests. It is not morally reprehensible to admit that humans are dependent creatures, just like any other entity and that this will inevitably lead to treating other entities merely as instruments. Moral prudence becomes axiological anthropocentrism only when humans *always* treat other entities exclusively as instruments. This is why she reminds us that all entities, "ultimately themselves are in turn consumed" (*Environmental Culture* 171).

For Plumwood, what matters is the recognition of the autonomy of other creatures. Autonomy here might be taken to refer to the countless biological processes that contribute to an entity's well-being, and to this end, her account refers to biological autonomy in the same way that Rolston's does. What is significant about Plumwood's assertion is her claim that most biological creatures are mutually dependent as much as they are independent. By emphasizing this co-dependency, she is able to overcome the contrived structure of dualism. Even though most creatures share the same fundamental needs, and even though those



needs can be satisfied by climactic and biotic processes, the myriad complex requirements of entities within these ecosystems points to the independence that Plumwood seeks to reveal. Our independence as distinct entities is predicated upon our unique requirements in order for us to exist at all.

However, other considerations crop up here. For example, just because the parasite *P. falciparum* has its own specific environmental thresholds does not necessarily entail that we ought to (or would want to) respect it in a moral sense. This is why Plumwood introduces moral prudence: it allows us to navigate between our needs and the needs of others. It frees us from what might otherwise be a kind of moral paralysis where the web of interconnectedness rendered explicit by Plumwood's framework means that human activity always results in the subjugation of the needs of other morally considerable entities, as might be the case in Katz's account. Again, moral prudence should not be confused with axiological anthropocentrism.

## **VI □ Wilderness re-defined**

After investigating the accuracy of the human-nature dichotomy, one of the central questions I have posed is whether wilderness is a viable normative concept, and additionally, whether restored landscapes should be considered morally or ontologically separate from wilderness. As suggested previously, the concept fails insofar as it depends on the human-nature dichotomy. The challenge now is to discern whether the concept can be employed by frameworks that deny this dichotomy, and further, whether the framework presented by Plumwood can help determine the moral worth of ecological restoration. In previous chapters

these two issues were interconnected and they remain so here: since wilderness was valued in its own right as a unique entity it mattered whether restored landscapes should be valued the same way. If valued equally, the assumption was that this would lead to the willy-nilly destruction of otherwise pristine landscapes. Thus, after determining whether wilderness can be used as a normative concept, it is equally crucial that the above concern be addressed.

Additionally, if we recall the criteria I offered as required to establish a workable prescriptive definition, then these criteria must also apply to Plumwood's account. First, the definition must maintain a narrow enough scope so as to remain ethically relevant to the discussion. Second, the definition cannot merely rely on the distinction between humans and nature. Third, the definition must account for the role of time and change. I will explore whether Plumwood's definition meets these criteria at the end of this section.

In her article, "Wilderness Scepticism and Wilderness Dualism," Plumwood attempts to define wilderness, while Vogel defends the worth of restoration practices against Eric Katz and Robert Elliott in his article, "The Nature of Artifacts." At this point, it appears that similar to the human-nature dichotomy, the strength of the concept of wilderness lies in its direct appeal to our intuitions about landscapes that seem to possess unique properties that cannot be located in urban or rural environments. However, the concept loses ground once those intuitions are exposed and certain continuities between these different landscapes are revealed. What seems to be required, then, is a way of judging the worth of those landscapes that can deal with these continuities. In other words,

there appears to be something attributable to those landscapes that compels us to preserve them as they are. As I have attempted to show, however, the claim that restored landscapes can never be as valuable as their ‘pristine’ counterparts is a dubious one, partly because it is often impossible to determine the causal histories of certain landscapes, and partly because these landscapes often bear the same attributes. Furthermore, the aims of protecting wilderness and restoring landscapes are similar: both attempt to achieve or preserve a relative state of ecological health. If ecological health, however it is defined, is the primary concern, then a framework like the one proposed by Plumwood, which not only integrates the priority of biodiversity into its ethical approach, but also positively characterizes the entities which dominate these areas, can provide more flexibility than those which aim merely to categorize and protect based on specific properties that may or may not appear in those landscapes.

Plumwood rejects what she calls a “colonial version of the traditional European concept” of wilderness (“Wilderness” 655). Her description of what such a concept entails mirrors Frederick Turner’s—wilderness on this view is a chaotic, yet empty “vessel” devoid of meaning and receptive to industrially and economically “productive” transformation (“Wilderness” 655). Plumwood thinks that present normative definitions of wilderness still manifest vestiges of this prior conception, since they often construe wilderness in opposition to humanity, and as equally ‘empty’ in terms of intention, even if the value of those landscapes is reversed: “The “virgin” conception retains masculinist understandings of human identity as oppositional to and separate from the earth, still conceiving wilderness

as the feminized Other to be filled, perhaps no longer by civilizing works of engineering, but by a dominating knowledge of recreational, spiritual, or scientific conquest” (“Wilderness” 659). Thus, her criticism is first and foremost a political one:

To escape this colonizing dynamic defining Otherness as vacancy, we need to recognize various prior presences. A conceptual precondition for this, I argue, is to move from an “empty” feminized to a “full” feminist conception of the wild Other as potential presence. (655)

Ultimately, Plumwood finds definitions of wilderness that retain traces of colonial attitudes unpalatable, but thinks that the concept can still be viable if it is discharged of these vestiges. She aims to preserve the concepts wilderness and nature by employing a feminist framework—one which rejects this colonizing attitude and the subsequent feminization of the land (“Wilderness” 659).

Similar to criticisms raised earlier, Plumwood suggests that if wilderness is only defined in terms of its opposition to humanity, the standard will be too high and will exclude too many landscapes which might very well be deserving of protection (“Wilderness” 660).<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, she echoes criticisms voiced by Thomas Birch that the propensity to respect wilderness as nature in reserves encourages us to further distinguish ourselves from nature, and to forget that urban and rural landscapes are ecosystems in and of themselves that ought to be beholden to the same kind of respect as more remote, and often uninhabited

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<sup>28</sup> This criticism is also mentioned by Mark Woods in his article, “Federal Wilderness Preservation” in which he cites the findings of RARE II (Roadless Area Review and Evaluation) and investigations by the Bureau of Land Management intended to find landscapes that contain no trace of human interference, not just in terms of developed land but in terms of noise and light pollution. Of the federally designated wilderness areas under investigation a relatively small proportion of land met any or all of these requirements (“Federal Wilderness Preservation” 141-43).

places (“Wilderness” 668). Finally, Plumwood suggests that just as the tendency to separate ourselves from wilderness areas promotes a kind of double-standard when it comes to respecting our urban environments, it also ignores the degree to which culture is implicated in the preservation of these remote landscapes. After all, wilderness reserves depend on culture in the form of management practices, financial support, and even morally, by promoting attitudes which foster “their protection and respect” (“Wilderness” 668).

Accordingly, Plumwood suggests that “the respect presently confined to virgin land should be extended to nature in all our contexts of life” (“Wilderness” 671). She argues that “Wilderness... [is] one of our best teachers of the limits of the self, and of the agency and wonder of the Other” (“Wilderness” 670-71). Plumwood is dismissive of social constructivist accounts that reject the concept of otherness altogether because she thinks they are subject to the use-mention conflation: “wilderness is said to be a ‘product of civilization,’ on the grounds that we conceive it in terms of the concepts of our civilization; these grounds would support the same overweening conclusion about the planet Venus, the Sun, or indeed, about anything else we can think of” (“Wilderness” 673).

Plumwood therefore suggests that instead of emphasizing the absence of humans from wild places, the presence of “wild Others” should be emphasized and should take moral priority (“Wilderness” 688). She claims that doing so prevents the appeal to monological forms of dualism that deny the fact that what makes these places wild are the kinds of biotic life that flourish there. Furthermore, she thinks that conceiving wilderness in this way allows us to

recognize the continuity between ourselves and non-human others—it requires that we recognize ourselves as implicated in nature and that nature is implicated in us, and this is as equally true on wilderness reserves as it is in urban centres (“Wilderness” 688). This then, would make us more receptive to “responsiveness and mutuality” (“Wilderness” 683). As she explains, wilderness areas represent:

the *presence* of the Other, the presence of the long-evolving biotic communities and animals species which reside there, the presence of ancient biospheric forces and of the unique combination of them which has shaped that particular, unique place. (“Wilderness” 682)

Such a conception would prevent anthropocentric attitudes from dominating these spaces, and instead recognize:

the free animal species and wild, uncolonized biotic communities, the great ancestral earth forces and their children, the landforms, that we should regard as the real occupants and users of the wilderness... [And] by conceiving wilderness not negatively as a sphere of emptiness but positively as a sphere of presence and freedom for these Others, we can open the way conceptually for non-oppositional accounts of the relationships between humans and the wild other. (“Wilderness” 683)

Plumwood insists that a successful revision of the wilderness concept involves denying nature-culture dualism. So even though thinkers such as Rolston and Katz seem to share in the language of autonomy, independence, and flourishing that Plumwood is invoking here, she thinks their effort to re-insert these kinds of properties back into nature after defining it in terms of absence results in “incoherence” (“Wilderness” 682).

Even though both Plumwood and Vogel utilize the notion of otherness to explain how wilderness can be conceived, Plumwood’s account of otherness is a positive one that is used to explain how other entities present themselves in the

world. She still retains the notion that wilderness is in fact a type of land, but rather than conceiving it in terms of the absence of humans, she thinks that it is a place where other entities flourish and persist according to their own intentions and purposes. It may very well be the case that humans exist alongside these other entities, or that they were integral to the creation of the landscape. What makes these places wild is the proliferation of biotic processes. This focus on the presence of others, in addition to the recognition that humans can play a role in these wilderness areas, means that Plumwood's account of wilderness meets the first and second criteria.

If we recall Katz's distinction between artifactual and natural entities, we determined that he was unable to retain a strong enough distinction to render, as he would like, restored landscapes less valuable. In Plumwood's position, we are given further reasons as to why this divide should not undergird a prescriptive definition of wilderness, and why restored landscapes are not antithetically wild. This is because organic entities especially seem to contain within them what Plumwood calls "mixed intentionalities":

For our present times of bio-engineering especially, we need to be able to take account of the significance of mixed intentionalities which combine in one individual autonomous and artifactual forms of intentionality. ("Intentional Recognition" 412-13)

While it is possible, and indeed important, to distinguish between different kinds of intentionality, or to attribute different kinds of teleology to entities, when it comes to non-human organic entities—it is often impossible to distinguish between the two. As a result, a different kind of characteristic is needed to undergird the concept wilderness. For Plumwood, this amounts to the recognition

of otherness, and perhaps if we incorporate Steven Vogel's distinction between historical and current ecological processes, the account might be all the more precise, such that it could conceivably retain its prescriptive status. Just as Plumwood's notions of communication and intentionality are broadened so as to include numerous forms that might otherwise be excluded, so too might this revised concept of wilderness, which would include restored landscapes and which would be informed by principles of ecology.

Finally, it is by incorporating Steven Vogel's account of the difference between historical and contemporary ecological processes at work that we can derive a way to explicitly define the role of time and change in these wilderness areas and effectively meet the third criterion. Vogel thinks we ought to respect the historical processes at work in landscapes, but that we need not define them in terms of the absence of humans. It might very well be the case that human involvement in those places does not require that we deny designating them as wilderness. Instead, they can be appreciated for the unique biotic attributes and interplay of human and non-human entities in those locations. As he suggests:

Once we abandon the fetish that only a landscape that humans have never touched could possibly be natural or wild, we might begin to see that even ongoing human action within the landscape could be consistent with its ongoing wildness, and could indeed help to maintain it. ("Nature of Artifacts" 162)

Furthermore, Vogel approximates wilderness with a form of otherness that coincides with human activity. For him, nature or even wilderness consists in those circumstances where what humans create through their labour extends beyond their initial intentions. Even if humans are responsible for the creation of



an object—even if this means simply planting a tree—we depend on “forces [that] operate independently of human beings” (“Nature of Artifacts” 161). In this sense, wildness is always already present in restored landscapes<sup>29</sup> because wildness represents those forces that we put into motion but which extend beyond our control and manipulation—when we allow for these unpredictable forces to exert themselves, we are in a sense, making room for wildness (“Nature of Artifacts” 161-62). It is for this reason that he thinks restoration practices are morally valid options:

once we see that a landscape is dynamic, always undergoing transformation through the actions of the animals and plants and weather and geological forces that form it, we might come to realize that the point of restoration is not the reproduction of a particular *thing*, but rather the putting into play of natural processes—of wildness—that we then allow to operate, unpredictably and unimaginably in ways that are outside our ability to control. To recognize this point would in turn be to see that the wildness that we’re after *is there all the time*, throughout the restoration process. (“Nature of Artifacts” 162)<sup>30</sup>

Analogously, just as wilderness is always already there in the restoration process, nature always already appears in our everyday interactions—humans are inseparable from nature, and this is not merely an empirical point. Rather, we cannot help but to effect change in the world and this means setting things in motion that extend beyond what we intended by those actions: “we change the world around us with our every act, but in doing so we never leave nature” (“Nature of Artifacts” 164). Thus we may find that Vogel’s account of wilderness can bolster Plumwood’s own, since their conceptions of otherness are compatible,

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<sup>29</sup> He says, “for this moment of wildness arises in *every* artifact, not just in restorations” (“Nature of Artifacts” 163).

so long as we recognize the distinct referents used by each. It also serves to satisfy the third criterion, since on this account, the definition no longer needs to outline a temporal distinction on the basis of human interaction.

So it seems we have come upon a workable definition of wilderness: wilderness locations are those which are sites of comparatively rich biodiversity in which nonhuman entities presence themselves, either independently, or along side human entities. They may include in their histories evolutionary changes, including changes imposed by humans. Wilderness reserves might be those ideally suited to fulfill this criterion of rich biodiversity, even if that richness can only be contextually specific (for it would make little ecological or conceptual sense to compare a rainforest with a desert ecosystem). Insofar as they are places where a vast array of organic entities engage with each other and pursue their own interests, and insofar as we ought to behave in such a way as to open the possibility of recognizing these alternative forms of communication, the definitions remains normatively relevant. Finally, the concept of wilderness should be understood as holistic—and wild entities should be so-determined on the basis of their relation to this concept.

## **Conclusion**

Plumwood's account is effective because she is willing to concede that wilderness areas are those where biotic communities flourish and presence themselves by asserting their own autonomy (even if this autonomy is unrecognizable to a Kantian), and this serves to justify why they deserve moral consideration, or more importantly, why we should act in ways that render their

presence explicit. Being sensitive to their presence entails recognizing their intentional forms of disclosure, and we can only do so by giving them room for self-expression. By orienting ourselves communicatively in this way, we automatically behave in ways that are ethically appreciative, and which empower otherwise ignored or subjugated entities. It provides us with means of measuring (and questioning) the ways in which we interact with these others. Although Vogel hints at this in his discussion of the historical processes at play, he appears to be more hesitant to claim that these are spaces of presence; instead he relies on language that merely points to humanity's lack of control. But this independence in terms of humanity's lack of control can occur in places traditionally designated as wilderness as well as in our everyday lives in urban places.<sup>31</sup> By attributing a positively characterized alterity to these non-human entities, and by relying on a feminist framework for the basis of her critique, Plumwood's assessment of both the human-nature dichotomy and the wilderness idea provides a successful

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<sup>31</sup> I think that one of the most fascinating aspects of Plumwood and Vogel's approaches is that both leave open a sense of optimism and opportunity when it comes to the natural sciences. Each separately deals with the natural sciences and the problem of subject-object knowledge frameworks, in addition to the manipulative tendencies of technocratic societies. But some of these manipulations can be defended through Plumwood's conception of moral prudence, while Vogel builds our technological propensities into his ontology of what it means to be human. Since neither rejects empiricism outright, their views can still be compatible with evolutionary and ecological sciences. Intuitively, it seems to me that one of the foundational objectives of these sciences is to reveal the extent to which entities operate in systems. They expose in a sense the very ways in which these biotic and inorganic entities communicate and co-exist. By studying the geographical, geological, climactic, evolutionary, chemical, and biological forces at play in ecosystems we become privy to an ever-expanding and complex picture of how nature discloses itself—but we are not simply third-person voyeurs. Instead, by learning how these systems function, we are engaging with them in a way reminiscent of Vogel's conception of nature. And as Plumwood suggests, the closer we can get to exposing these relational properties, the more explicit the degree of our continuity and inter-dependence becomes, even if this is taken as an epistemological point. Their frameworks help divest us from overly arrogant assumptions about the degree to which we possess the power to control, but it also frees us from imposing a misanthropic attitude on our technologies and scientific investigations. Neither gods nor goats, we are free to reframe our relationships with others and what nature means, and in so doing, to continue developing an ethic more consistent with our experience of the world.

alternative to the traditional attempt of assigning intrinsic value as the basis for ethical consideration, as exemplified by the foregoing philosophers.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

Over the course of this paper, I have attempted to discern whether the thinkers in question have been able to derive a normative definition of wilderness. At this juncture, we might question whether this is a propitious strategy. For Eric Katz, Holmes Rolston III, and J. Baird Callicott, the most promising approach is to affirm the existence of wilderness (or biosphere reserves) and to argue that it possesses intrinsic value. In each case, however, we saw the attempt to assign intrinsic value to a nonhuman entity fall short of its goal.

Sometimes we must acquiesce, and allow a premise to go unchallenged for an argument to gain traction. If we are unwilling to assume even the possibility that wilderness can have non-instrumental, nonanthropocentric value, then we prevent ourselves from entering the arena of discourse even before an argument has been formulated. While it would seem utterly uncharitable to deny this luxury to the thinkers at hand, in my view, the problem of assigning intrinsic value is one which cannot be solved simply by positing the bare premise. This is because intrinsic value demands a certain kind of respect that even the most vigilant observer of the environment will ultimately fail to confer.

Herein lies the paradox concerning our ethical behaviour towards nonhuman entities—it at once brings the moral viability of our actions into question simultaneously as we depend on consuming or transforming wilderness to satisfy our own interests. Indeed, perhaps one of the most difficult problems facing these philosophers has been how to reconcile these opposing exigencies.

We continue to question how it is possible to both value something as intrinsically good, and yet value it equally as instrumentally good. The assumption being, that intrinsic value entails protection, while instrumental value entails transformation, or worse, destruction.

This paradox is especially pertinent in the case of the definition of wilderness. If assigning intrinsic value to wild entities and wilderness reserves is the only means of guaranteeing their protection, then we are indeed at a crossroads. If pristine, non-human nature is that which has been damaged over countless millennia to satisfy human needs, then this, perhaps, is the most original environmental sin; we cannot do without wilderness and yet we cannot do without destroying it. If to be wild is to be nonhuman, and if to be wild is to be intrinsically valuable, then our actions always are already morally questionable. Our biodiversity-poor urban centers and farmland, after all, stand where once vast forests and prairies flourished—we tread on the graves of countless lost species and ecosystems. We are forever in a state of moral bankruptcy and we commit transgressions perpetually in the name of fostering our civilizations.

Surely, we cannot allow such morally damning conclusions to be drawn from these inferences. Assuming each thinker shares the assumption that wilderness, whatever it is, deserves a kind of moral consideration that ought to be extended beyond philosophy textbooks and classroom lectures into the greater world where economics, policy, and legislative decisions ultimately control the future of these locations, then a framework that continually reaffirms our guilt will do little to persuade us to act differently. Such impositions are far too severe,

as I have suggested elsewhere, they leave us paralyzed to act. After all, how might we proceed, or perhaps, how *should* we proceed if every extraction is immoral?

Aside from these broader problems, each thinker has met internal conflict when it comes to deploying a strategy that both affirms the intrinsic value of an individual and the intrinsic value of a whole. Rolston attempted to address this issue by suggesting that intrinsic value can be transferred from one entity to the next, after one entity consumes another, so long as this consumptive action benefits the entire system. The intrinsic value would move onwards in this chain, and somehow extend outwards to include all of the entities it contains. In a very real sense, he argues, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This argument provides great insight insofar as it brings to focus and demands that we confront what it is truly about these environments that we think is worth protecting.

Ultimately, this strategy failed because it required a seemingly arbitrary exclusion of humans from this value economy. We perform transactions of our own, but when we do, we always incur debt. Rolston's point, however, may be true from an ecological perspective—his naturalistic account, however ideal, is reflected in ecological measures of ecosystemic health, even if those measures differ greatly from their ethical counterparts. Yet it is impossible to claim that something is good insofar as it is natural, for even if humans do possess the capacity to deliberate morally, we must be included within this same assertion on pain of internal contradiction.

Eric Katz, on the other hand, suggested that human interference with these wild locations not only transforms them into artifacts, but that we behave

disingenuously every time we attempt to remediate lands that have already suffered ecological destruction. What seemed useful about Katz was that he was able to provide a framework that works intuitively, but it failed insofar as he extended this framework and created a kind of *reductio* of his own account. After all, it cannot possibly be the case that all human interactions with nonhuman entities are of the manipulating type, and we can never be certain that the outcomes we intend will be the ones that occur. He invokes a moral extensionism position, attempting to show that wild entities are intrinsically valuable because they are autonomous in the moral sense. The problem with his account, beyond being able to prove that the kind of autonomy he discusses should have any moral sway over our actions, is that it is simply not the case that all interactions with nonhuman entities are expressions of our domineering tendencies.

Finally, J. Baird Callicott, perhaps comes closest to achieving the goal of assigning intrinsic value to these nonhuman locations. For him, although the idea of wilderness is littered with vestiges of colonialism, ethnocentrism, and pre-Darwinian human-nature dualism, he does not deny that there exist special locations that ought to be valued for what they are—as biodiversity-rich ecosystems. These ecosystems may bear traces of human involvement—they may even be actively managed by humans in order to sustain their ecological richness, yet this should not deprive them of their intrinsic value. This is because what makes them valuable is the very fact that they are homes to such a wide array of life forms. Echoing Leopold, a thing is good because it is rich in biodiversity and because it is a thing of ecological beauty. We might find a way of measuring right



action from wrong action by comparing different forms of resource extraction, or different ways of interacting with the land. However, echoing the others, ecosystems are valuable on the basis of being rich in biodiversity. The one caveat being that the intrinsic value of these locations can still be preserved even if humans transform them, so long as their biological richness remains intact. So, we may introduce new species, or take away old ones—what matters is the relative state of health enjoyed by each ecosystem.

I am most sympathetic to this view—it takes into account the practical constraints of our 21<sup>st</sup> century context and it attempts to overcome the paradox I had mentioned earlier. Something can be intrinsically valuable and instrumentally valuable, but we should not always replace an entity's value strictly for economic gain—his standards are not so high that every time we interact with nature we are left at a moral crossroads. Humans, too, are natural, and we may be as helpful to environments as the other species that make up Earth's biological communities. However, insofar as he relies on evolutionary science to undergird his moral ideals, we are left facing the same problem as before—how can it be that these environments are good in themselves precisely because they are natural?

So far, I have tried to keep open the possibility that the concept of wilderness is indeed a viable idea—but as I hoped to have shown throughout this paper, the received wilderness idea, as Callicott phrases it, is steeped in conceptual problems of its own. Perhaps the most significant being the assumption of the human-nature dichotomy. Finding appropriate grounds for assigning intrinsic value to nature remains elusive, and so too does solving the

question of why humans are distinct from wilderness. This is why I found Callicott's notion of "biosphere reserve" to be so helpful—it denied this problem because the criteria required has nothing to do with the humanness of the location and has everything to do with its biological integrity. Nevertheless, it seems less clear why the idea of wilderness ought to be rejected outright. So long as the concept is divested of its inconsistencies and problematic associations, and especially since "biosphere reserve" is meant to refer to those areas presently designated as wilderness, very little stands in the way of keeping the concept in use. On this view, we may simply employ the concepts of "wilderness" and "biosphere reserve" interchangeably.

Conversely, unlike Callicott, Val Plumwood seeks to maintain the relevancy of the concept of wilderness, while broadening the definition. One might note here, that a particularly fascinating feature of bringing these differing positions into dialogue, is just how similar the motivations of each position are. Plumwood's definition of wilderness, for example, appears to compliment Callicott's, since both deny a pre-Darwinian dualism between "man" and "nature" and both recognize the conceptual problem of how to include the management practices and land-histories of indigenous populations, both past and present, in a workable definition of wilderness. Further, ecological science appears to play some role in both their positions. Yet, on this account, it appears as though Plumwood is more successful. This is because her position is flexible enough to handle changing ecological paradigms. Her framework is not governed by the precept that a thing is right so long as the beauty or integrity of land is

preserved—as we saw “integrity” and even “beauty” are already loaded concepts that do not map as easily onto ecological realities as one might expect. For her, it is certainly important that we understand how ecosystems function, and part of our ethical duty lies in exploring these complex functions and processes. Yet, her framework does not lie at the mercy of universalizable maxims concerning ecological health. Rather, it demands that we continue to question the consequences of the kinds of relationships that we engage in with nonhuman others. This entails taking into account the interests of others, and these ‘interests’ might be informed by ecological science. Thus, we need not concern ourselves with establishing what “balance” means both ethically and ecologically, but we ought to be certain about how ecosystems function and what acts might be deleterious for the particular, localised entities.

On this account, human interference is not by necessity morally problematic, not because humans form part of a greater ecological community, and not because all human action is good action. Rather, if we engage in relations that do not by their very nature cut off the possibility of others to express their intentional modes of being, then these relations result in ethically preferable behaviours. Plumwood’s framework, then, could be considered a kind of virtue ethic. We are not driven to achieve some end, and this is particularly important, given the complications I mentioned regarding conflicting values. Instead, we are challenged to engage in relationships dictated by openness and care, but which are conditioned by environmental constraints. We are not left to choose between culling humans in favour of nonhuman species preservation, but we are

challenged to re-order our social structures to mitigate such conflicts. Doing so improves upon our moral characters and provides further opportunity for us to exercise virtuous behaviours, such as care and receptivity.

Further, although Plumwood's position is certainly informed by ecological science, it is only peripherally so, much in the same way that she affirms the intrinsic value of wilderness only secondarily. Her aim is not so much to find some justificatory grounds for including nonhuman entities in the moral sphere, as it is to open up the possibility of acknowledging the intentional modes of being of other nonhuman entities. For her, we can contrast the tendency to ascribe a framework that either espouses or denies instrumental/intrinsic value, with a framework that acknowledges a diverse range of relations which can inform our ethical behaviours. Included in these relations are "modest, and particularistic virtues and values, such as attentiveness, surprise, generosity, and care" ("Androcentrism" 124). Thus, although such particularized concepts as "friendship and attentiveness" do not refer explicitly to, nor depend upon, a formalized notion of intrinsic value, according to Plumwood, they nevertheless "resist instrumental analysis" ("Androcentrism" 124).

What makes this strategy particularly useful is that it resists charges of the naturalistic fallacy. Her ethical argument is not grounded on the assumption that because these entities are natural, they are good, or vice versa. Rather, she suggests that by expanding the traditional concepts of mind and communication, we always already are compelled to acknowledge the intentional modes of being of nonhuman others. If we accept her theory of communicative ethics, then these

nonhuman others must already be included within ethical discourse.

Notwithstanding the impossibility of exploring the full implications of such an ethic here, it seems that her position already improves upon the others because she avoids the problem of assigning intrinsic value as the sole means of establishing moral consideration.

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