WILD PRACTICES: TEACHING THE VALUE OF WILDNESS

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The notion of wildness as a concept that is essentially intractable to definition has profound linguistic and ethical implications for wilderness preservation and environmental education. A survey of the ways in which wilderness value is expressed through language reveals much confusion and repression regarding our understanding of the autonomy of nature. By framing discussions of wilderness through fact–driven language games, the value of the wild autonomy in nature becomes ineffable. In removing wildness from the discourse on wilderness we convert wilderness value from an intrinsic value into a distorted instrumental value. If we want to teach others that wilderness value means something more than a recreational, scientific, or economic opportunity, we need to include other ways of articulating this value in our education programs. Through linking the wildness of natural systems with the wild forms in human language games, I examine the conceptual freedom required for valuing autonomy in nature. The focus on what is required of language in expressing the intrinsic value of wilderness reveals that wilderness preservation and environmental education need complementary approaches to the current science–based frameworks, such as those used by the National Park Service. The disciplines of poetry, literature, ethics, and aesthetics offer alternative language games that allow for a more fluid, imaginative, and open–ended understanding of the autonomy of nature, and a means for articulating the value of this wildness that implies an ethical position of humility.
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CHAPTER 1

ATTENTION TO WILDENESS

Introduction

To lose our life in nature is to lose freshness, diversity, surprise, the Other—with all its tiny lessons and huge spaces.¹

When I began my study of environmental ethics in 1990 I was an 18-year-old freshman at a state school in South Florida. Officially an English major, I checked that section in the fall course listings first. Not exactly stirred by eighteenth century British literature, medieval poetry, or the history and theory of rhetoric, I found myself scanning further to the philosophy section and a course titled People and the Planet taught by Dr. Don Marietta, Jr.

From the first day of class I was enthralled. Dr. Marietta was very knowledgeable in the field of environmental ethics and also a terrific instructor. Class discussions were lively and fast paced, zooming from one aspect of a topic to the next. The views expressed by students represented an extremely broad range of positions with regard to the relationship of humans and the environment. These perspectives often conflicted with one another and at times resulted in emotional and heated exchanges. Dr. Marietta was quick to point out, however, that in ethical discussions, it is necessary to respect views that do not correspond with your own. The students were given quite a large degree of freedom of expression, but with that also came the obligation to respect the freedom of others to express themselves.

That class was my very first college experience and in many ways shaped my academic career since. I owe much to Dr. Marietta for his knowledge of philosophy and his understanding of students. I am perhaps most grateful for the opportunity to discover that doing philosophy involves both the construction and deconstruction of knowledge. In fact, any type of critical analysis requires the combination of both approaches in order to be successful. That philosophy acknowledges this synthesis between construction and deconstruction perhaps more overtly than other disciplines does not make it any less rigorous or “soft,” but rather illustrates the complexity and sophistication of philosophical investigation.2

After receiving degrees and spending (probably too) many years in graduate school, I am still learning from the experience of being part of that first class. Perhaps it is not unusual, for this type of knowledge entails reflexivity and reevaluation. It is not so much a lesson that will be completed, but a formal way of practice to be followed. This endeavor involves the ability to cross and recross boundaries and operate in different contexts simultaneously. Often roles seem conflicting, such as the freedom and obligation of the students in People and the Planet, or the constructive and deconstructive components of philosophy. The form employed by this practice allows for the articulation of the rich tension present in these types of dualisms. At once it recognizes distinction but also connection through conditions of intelligibility. So while we can imagine the possibility of conflict between freedom and obligation, or construction and deconstruction, we can also comprehend that each becomes meaningless without the other. To speak of one involves the other, or more generally, otherness.

In the years since, I have come to see that this practice is not unique to Dr. Marietta’s classes. Nor is it strictly the property of philosophy and ethics, though in some ways it is fundamentally ethical. Through the study of ethics and poetry we can see that the practice of giving attention to otherness is in fact part of language itself, not in the sense that otherness is linguistic, but in the sense that any use of language necessarily has to deal with otherness. Ethics and poetry are examples of language use that negotiate the boundaries of theoretical dualisms in an effort to meet this challenge. In both fields, one is continually confronted by otherness, and must respond in a way that does not negate, assimilate, or domesticate the wild essence of otherness.

It is in this way that I want to begin to explore what is meant by the concept of wildness. Rather than an inherent or essential “wilderness” characteristic of nonhuman places, beings, things, or systems, I consider wildness as a form or quality that might be used to cross and connect the human and the nonhuman. Wildness facilitates attention to otherness by providing a form in which otherness can be articulated. Because I want to focus specifically on the culture/nature impasse, I stress that attention to otherness through wildness is vital to understanding the relationship of humans and the

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2 Will Wright describes a similar connection between language and a specific type of other, the physical, external world. See Will Wright, *Wild Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 114. While Wright’s focus concerns the linguistic and epistemological aspects of this relationship, I want to also discuss its ethical implications. Harpham asserts that “the other does not simply exist; it imposes responsibilities, obligations, constraints, regulations.” Harpham, *Getting It Right*, p. 7.
environment, and to practicing environmental ethics. Through linking the wildness of natural systems with the wild forms in human language, I examine the conceptual freedom required for valuing autonomy in nature. If we want to take intrinsic value seriously in environmental education, it is necessary to develop an approach that allows students the ability to articulate this value. Such a model could serve as a vital complement to current science based environmental education programs that focus on instrumental values.

Wildness and Postmodern Deconstruction

Chokesetting today. Madras in the evening for beer. Under the shadow of Mt. Jefferson. Long cinnamon–colored logs. This is “pine” and it belongs to “Indians”—what a curious knotting–up. That these Indians & these trees, that existed for centuries, should suddenly be possessor and possessed. Our concepts for sure.6

One of the main goals of postmodern deconstruction is to sensitize us to language and its function in culture. While some have reduced the postmodern view of language to post–structuralism, or the notion that “it’s language all the way down,” postmodern critiques are more subtle and sophisticated.7 In Derek Bickerton’s book Language and Species, we can see how the capacity for language has facilitated the placement of human civilization on what John Firor calls the high impact path.8 The powers unleashed by the development of human language were never seen previously on Earth, as Bickerton explains: “Language had given us, not enough, but too much: not just the stewardship of earth but the capacity to destroy species weaker than ourselves, and even features of the environment on which our own survival might depend.” One of the problems with

6 Gary Snyder, The Practice of the Wild (New York: North Point Press, 1990), p. 120.
7 See, for example, Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
language Bickerton presents is that “the ordered world that it shows us seems very convincingly to exist.”

This linguistic dilemma is in part a result of the fact that language shapes us and our world; yet, strangely this shaping happens without us knowing it is taking place, as Bickerton describes: “Seeming to be no more than the glass through which we see our world, language is in fact the subtle, many-layered lens that created that world—the lens without which all that we know would dissolve into chaos.”

But we forget that much of the order we project onto this chaos is bound up with powerful social constructions. Language secretly frames and systematizes the world in which we live.

While the naming of objects we encounter allows us to talk about them in meaningful ways, it also carries with it some problematic epistemological implications.

Although we may be at times unaware of the role language plays in knowledge, as Will Wright explains:

Language always constitutes our world, the world we know, the world we live in—not in the sense that the world is language, or that language controls the world, but in the sense that the structure of language must be an inherent part of any world we can know. If knowledge is to be possible, the structure of language must be compatible with the structure of the world, and in this sense the world must be linguistic.

Language use and the physical structure of the world each set up conditions of intelligibility for the other. Though there is certainly an important distinction between

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10 Ibid., p. 257.
11 This topic is broad and stretches beyond the scope of this paper. For several more thorough discussions of language and its relation to knowledge about the world, see John R Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995); Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969); Arthur Pap, *Semantics and Necessary Truth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958); and Wright, *Wild Knowledge*.
13 For more on conditions of intelligibility and constitutive rules regarding language and knowledge of the world, see Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, especially chaps. 6-9. For interesting discussions of
knowledge, or stated more traditionally “mind,” and the world, or “matter,” each is defined in part by its distinction from and relation to the other. Such is the case with most theoretical dualisms, and the recognition of this wild quality starts us on the path to a deeper understanding of their rich, complex relationships.

Bickerton goes on to assert that language is not simply a tool of our own creation, but part of our biology, part of our very being. If this is the case, then it seems that if language has placed us on a self-destructive path, such a placement, it might be argued, was inevitable “although language made our species and made the world we inhabit, the powers it unleashed drove us to understand and control our environment, rather than to explore the mainspring of our own being.”

As this quote implies, however, the path that unfolded as a result of language involved a choice among other alternatives. Although language may have enabled us to step on the high impact path, it did not necessarily place us there, nor does it condemn us to follow this path to its end. Instead the structure it provides made this path and its alternatives available to us. Bickerton explicitly rejects the deterministic view of language, as he asserts that while the power of language may have contributed to our current environmental problems, “language is at the same time the nurturer and facilitator of all that is best in us, all that seeks to avoid such a fate and to bring us back into unity with the rest of creation.”


14 Bickerton, Language and Species, p. 257.
15 Ibid., p. 256.
In the field of environmental ethics, we can see a view of language similar to Bickerton’s and Wright’s in Jim Cheney’s seminal work on bioregionalism. Oelschlaeger has argued that in Cheney’s essay, “Postmodern Environmental Ethics: Ethics as Bioregional Narrative,” we see that “postmodern environmental ethics . . . does not reduce the biophysical world to language, but rather incorporates that world into human discourse.” Like Bickerton, Cheney rejects the determinism of post–structuralism by suggesting, “to accept the premise that language overdetermines human behavior does not also entail the conclusion . . . that reality is language all the way down.” 16 Cheney argues the problem with this type of conclusion is that it depicts language as floating free of the world: “What we are left with are conversations sustained only by the criteria of internal self–coherence and adequate to the purposes for which they are constructed—which, of course, are freely constructed purposes of conscious human beings, not purposes given to us, as it were, by the world.” 17 In other words, a postmodern view of language as free floating does not escape but perpetuates modernist ideas since it presupposes the dualistic notion of the self apart from the world.

In response, Cheney asserts that “[w]hen this transcendental subject is also deconstructed, we are left with the world and words in it, emergent from it.” 18 Rather than conceive of our understanding of the world as something which is solely projected through language onto that which is external to us by the Cartesian self, we can recognize it as something which results out of our being embedded within the world. In other

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18 Ibid., p. 25.
words, “the truth of the truth of ‘It’s language all the way down’ must be understood in
light of the equal truth of ‘It’s world all the way up.’” Instead of a projection of
meaning, the world is revealed to us through language by our being “rooted” in it, as
Cheney maintains: “Language doesn’t trap us in a world of words but is the way in
which the world is present to us.”19

But how can language be at once the cause and solution of the environmental
problems we face today? Why does language simultaneously connect us to and separate
us from the world? How can language both describe the world and constitute that world
as well? How can it concurrently form, inform, and deform our knowledge of the world?
The answers to these questions are difficult and in some ways appear impossible to know
with any degree of certainty. However, if we look at what is required of language in
order to be able to fulfill these very different roles, we might get a glimpse of its
underlying wild form and structure.

Wildness and Language

To be truly free one must take on the basic conditions as they are—painful, impermanent, open, imperfect—and then be grateful for impermanence and the freedom it grants us. For in a fixed universe there would be no freedom. With that freedom we improve the campsite, teach children, oust tyrants. The world is nature and in the long run inevitably wild, because the wild, as the process and essence of nature, is also an ordering of impermanence.20

As the questions at the end of the last section illustrate, at times language appears
to take on multiple double roles. It can be both subject and object, constructive and
deconstructive, connecting and alienating, descriptive and constitutive, perceiving and
interpreting, reference and rhetoric, general and specific, form and usage, signifier and

19 Ibid.
20 Snyder, Practice of the Wild, p. 5.
signified, literal and figurative, poetry and prose, and so on with many more lexical
binarisms, each depicting language caught between two different modes, so to speak.
What is fascinating is that most of these dualisms involve roles that appear to be mutually
exclusive of one another.\textsuperscript{21} So how is it that language is able to fulfill \textit{both}, and do it
\textit{simultaneously}?

One reason involves the fluidity of its form. Words, meanings, even syntax, all of
these things change with time. Language is an active and dynamic enterprise, and this
movement is reflected in the fluidity of its form, as Snyder puts it:

Languages meander like great rivers leaving oxbow traces over forgotten beds, to
be seen only from the air or by scholars. Language is like some kind of infinitely
interfertile family of species spreading or mysteriously declining over time,
shamelessly and endlessly hybridizing, changing its own rules as it goes. Words
are used as signs, as stand–ins, arbitrary and temporary, even as language reflects
(and informs) the shift in values of the people whose minds it inhabits and glides
through.\textsuperscript{22}

Here Snyder connects the wildness and fluidity found in language with the wildness and
fluidity found in nature. What we see in nature and in language is both structure and
freedom. Following others, Snyder uses the metaphor of a river to express this
coexistence of regularity and change.\textsuperscript{23} But he recognizes the epistemological problems
and lack of certainty that this fluidity brings to language: “We have faith in ‘meaning’ the
way we might believe in wolverines putting trust in the occasional reports of others or on

\textsuperscript{21} See Harpham, \textit{Getting It Right}, especially chap. 2.
\textsuperscript{22} Snyder, \textit{Practice of the Wild}, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{23} See Charles H. Kahn, \textit{The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation
and Commentary} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Another river metaphor appears in
the authority of once seeing a pelt. But it is sometimes worth tracking these tricksters back.”

Like Cheney, Snyder is concerned with the post–structuralist view of a language floating free of the world that might be implied by this fluidity. In such a model, truth becomes impossible resulting in solipsism, nihilism, and apathy. To overcome this problem, Snyder also attempts to connect language to the physical environment, and to our physical bodies, “Language is a mind/body system that coevolved with our needs and nerves.” So while language can be used as a means to alienate us from the world, it also provides a fundamental biological link for humans to the world. It is the way we exist in that world, and the way the world exists to us.

Snyder is well aware of the double roles language is often asked to play, but takes the analysis even a step further. Otherness is uncovered not only in the double roles language negotiates in reference to itself, but also in reference to other nonlinguistic forms of knowing. He suggests that perhaps we can look at language as going two ways:

[One of] the more familiar views of language is . . . intelligence is framed and developed by language. But one can turn this around to say . . . Intelligence is framed and developed by all kinds of interactions with the world, including human communication, both linguistic and nonlinguistic; thus, language plays a strong—but not the only—role in the refinement of thinking.

Earlier I referred to Wright’s argument that the structure of language and the structure of the world must be compatible. I suggest that the relationship of linguistic and non–linguistic knowledge requires a similar wild type of compatibility, each being part of and in part defined by the other. Each side of the dualism sets limits on the other in that without this connection, the other would become meaningless. However, the structure of

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24 Snyder, Practice of the Wild, p. 8
25 Ibid., p. 17.
26 Snyder, Place in Space, p. 178.
these conditions of intelligibility is fluid and therefore the definition of either side of the dualism is never fixed. The adaptable form of the relationship enables a double role where otherness both defines and then immediately calls that definition into question. Otherness casts doubt on essences, but by this process sets the boundaries of those essences.27

The fluid form in this description of the relationship between the linguistic and nonlinguistic is key to understanding Snyder’s definition of wildness as “an ordering of impermanence.” Here again is the interplay of two seemingly incompatible ends of a dualism. Yet language provides us with a means to articulate this relationship as complementary. Language can do so in accordance with two accounts. First, its fluid form allows for negotiation across categorical boundaries. Second, this flexibility facilitates both difference and connection at once, recognizing distinction and calling essences into question. Here we see a real attention to otherness that does not assimilate or domesticate. In short, what we see in language is a wild practice. It is neither a static body of knowledge nor a passive tool of description, but requires constant reordering of impermanent exigencies.

Wildness and Ethics

The longing for growth is not wrong. The nub of the problem now is how to flip over, as in jujitsu, the magnificent growth–energy of modern civilization into a nonacquisitive search for deeper knowledge of self and nature. Self–nature. Mother nature. If people come to realize that there are many nonmaterial, nondestructive paths of growth—of the highest and most fascinating order—it would help dampen the common fear that a steady state economy would mean deadly stagnation.28

27 For an interesting discussion on language as strong and weak resistance to otherness in binary dualisms, see Harpham, Getting It Right, pp. 100-05.
In “Silent Wolves: The Howl of the Implicit,” Irene Klaver explores the relationship of silence to human interaction with wild creatures: “Only when I am silent do those animals take me up in their presence; only when I stand out and disappear at the same moment, can they be with me. Only when I am just there, without being present too much, do they come back.” Through this implicit silence, this appearance and disappearance, Klaver gains access to a human other, nature. The experience causes her to reflect on a connection between wildness and silence: “The wild is not confined and does not confine, just as the silent does not define and is not defined.” Klaver becomes aware of what is required of her in order for this interaction to take place and it is through the act of being silent that she opens a dialogue with otherness. We can compare this silence to the wild form of language that I have been describing. Both allow for interaction and negotiation, difference and connection, and open-ended definition, as Klaver herself asserts: “Silence is not–naming, it is letting things appear without interpreting, translating, or casting in static forms; silence affords a place for many sounds. . . . The silent and wild appear and disappear, ever evading closed definition.”

Just as silence is sometimes required in order to experience otherness in nature, a wild and fluid form is required of language in giving attention to otherness and articulating the dynamic tension present in dualisms. In this way, we can overcome the problems associated with the strict binary oppositions posited by modernism, such as mind/body, human/nonhuman, and nature/culture. Seen through the form of wildness, these dualisms become not mutually exclusive, but complementary.

30 Ibid., p. 121.
31 Ibid., p. 127.
In the practice of ethics, language use is often required to negotiate dualisms. The dynamic tension between freedom and obligation, theory and practice, life and death, male and female, sentience and nonsentience, rights and duties, etc., is of great importance in making ethical decisions. Yet the meaning and relationship of these terms is always contested. So if we cannot know with certainty the definition of these various concepts, how is it possible for ethics to provide guidance for our actions? The answer to this question is: it is not really possible for ethics to provide guidance, in the strict sense of a moral code of conduct. In a way, the answer to this question is not what ethics is about. Rather ethics provides us with the means to articulate ethical problems and deliberate between a range of alternatives as to how one *ought* to behave. It is precisely because ethics does not provide final and fixed definitions or specific rules that it is able to fulfill this role. The dynamic tension between objectivity and subjectivity provides the domain for the practice of ethics, as Harpham explains: “In ethics, *is* and *ought*, descriptions and prescriptions, facts and value can be turned inside out, and can easily, if not logically, convert into each other. A prominent feature of ethics is its structural hospitality to such fusions and conversions.”

Ethics can thus be connected to wildness through these evolutionary and hybridizing requirements.

One of the dualisms constantly confronted in the practice of ethics is the relationship between universality and contingency. Moral rules and principles are supposed to apply to everyone equally; yet the specific personal dilemmas to which we wish to apply these rules are imbedded in qualified circumstances. This disconnection is why we sometimes make exceptions for murder in cases of self–defense, etc., and

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32 Harpham, *Getting It Right*, p. 23.
despite the apparent incongruity between our principles and actions, such an exemption is considered ethical. Here again we have the human self confronted by an other, which Harpham describes as quintessential of “the ethical moment.”

How are we to negotiate between universality and contingency without negating or assimilating one or the other? In order to do so we need to see these concepts as complementary rather than exclusive and their definitions as open to alternatives. When we begin to know what these concepts require (in practice), we realize that naming or defining them, or nailing down their essences is not what is needed, but rather a redefinition of essence itself. One that allows us to talk about things, but also gives us the freedom to be silent and to let otherness speak for itself. One which allows for discipline, distinction, and an “ordering of impermanence,” but also provides room for deconstruction, creativity, transition, and evolution in our ideas and meanings. As Klaver contends, we need to “leave open a space for wandering and wondering.”

When looking at an essence reflexively, that is to say when letting go of any one particular definition in language, we see that it is possible to open up such a notion to a number of different interpretations. And it this opening, this wilding up, which is the function of the reflexive questioning process, that allows us access to otherness. While in language, otherness involves alternative meaning, in ethics, it provides a range of alternative courses of action. To illustrate this point, I would like to explore the notion of “universality” reflexively to see if it is possible for its meaning to evolve from modern appropriations of the term to a postmodern construction of universality, in order to fulfill what is required of it by the practice of ethics.

34 Harpham, Getting It Right, p. 7.
35 Klaver, “Silent Wolves,” p. 124
Wilding Up Universality

Wildness is not just the “preservation of the world.” It is the world.36

In his groundbreaking essay “The Incarceration of Wilderness: Wilderness Areas as Prisons,” Tom Birch describes wildness as being “by definition . . . intractable to definition.”37 Though we can talk about it and often describe it with great detail, wildness by its very nature calls those descriptions into question. Thus Birch emphasizes that wildness is the essence of otherness:

An other cannot essentially be what it is objectified, defined, analyzed, legislated, or understood to be if it is to be and remain an other. The maintenance of otherness requires the maintenance of a radical openness, or the maintenance of the sort of unconditioned freedom that permits sheer spontaneity and continuous participation in the emergence of novelty.38

I have tried to show how this same fluid, self–reflexive, wild form is a fundamental part of human language and in fact required by specific uses of language. The practice of ethics is one such use. In the application of universal rules to contingent circumstances, the essence of universality itself must be deconstructed. Language use within ethics requires its own sort of radical openness.

Universality has been incorporated by what we might call modern thought in a variety of ways. In ethics particularly, through developments such as Kant’s categorical imperative and various formulations of the Golden Rule, universality has functioned as a

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36 Snyder, *Practice of the Wild*, p. 94.
practical and theoretical criteria of evaluation and has become a generally accepted ethical principle. In epistemology, universality has been associated with Descartes’ idea of certainty to become part of criteria of evaluation for knowledge, especially for disciplines of the sciences. Through postmodern deconstruction, however, some of these modern appropriations of the term *universal* have come into question. Some have argued that the term itself should be abandoned altogether, while others think that it might be possible to continue to revise it to allow for some of its usefulness, especially with regard to its function as an ethical principle.

One such author is Judith Butler. In an essay entitled “Universality in Culture,” she looks at the problems created by deconstructive reflexive questions about universality in an atmosphere of increased awareness of multicultural diversity. Butler speculates that there might be some room for playing with the term *universal* in response to a recognition of cultural variability:

This is not to say that there should be no reference to the universal or that it has become, for us, an impossibility. On the contrary. All it means is that there are cultural conditions for its articulation that are not always the same and that the term gains its meaning for us precisely through these decidedly less than universal conditions.39

Here we see a position that walks the theoretical line between the deconstructive and constructive components of philosophy. While appearing at first to be more like an attempt to cling to the modernist notion of universality, based on a criteria of certainty, etc., Butler is actually using a deconstruction of this notion as an occasion for a change, evolution, or what I call a “wilding up,” of the meaning of the term, and a change in the criteria of evaluation as well. This mixing of deconstructive and constructive elements is

important because it reflects the double roles in language that I discussed earlier. By taking postmodern deconstruction seriously as a reflexive tool in shaping the evolution of language and thought, Butler avoids the trap of simply perpetuating a modern myth about universality. Our definition and understanding of the term remains open. At the same time, Butler does not become hopelessly trapped within this deconstructive process by recognizing the practical significance and consequence of the term as well: “The contingent and cultural character of the existing conventions governing the scope of universality does not deny the usefulness or importance of the term universal.”\textsuperscript{40} In fact, Butler points out that there may be some very serious political and ethical reasons why we want to hold on to a notion of universality.

In addition to the interesting practical questions raised in her essay regarding the deconstruction of universality, Butler also discusses the role that reflexive questioning plays in the articulation of meaning through preserving the dynamic nature of the constraints between the speakable and the unspeakable. Here we begin to see notions of freedom and wildness creeping into the language, as Butler explores the concept of universality as an “open ended ideal,” one which has existent conventions governing its scope, but whose scope has not been fixed, not even by modernism. In this way, universality is able to “resist domestication.” As Butler argues, the fact that modernism has failed to fully appropriate and domesticate the meaning of the term should not cause us to retract into nihilism or drop the term altogether without regard for its practical usefulness, “it simply means that the claim of universality has not been fully or finally made and that it remains to be seen whether and how it will be further articulated.”

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 46.
While the notion of a wild, open-ended ideal means we may never be “successful,” in modern terms, at developing one, cross-cultural, and “certain” notion of universality, Butler asserts that “the uncertainty of success is not enough of a reason to refrain from making the claim.”41 In fact, when it comes to a practice such as ethics, some sort of claim regarding universality may be a condition of intelligibility without which the enterprise itself would become meaningless.

Butler shows us that while we may not be able to formulate the claim to universality, we can still find usefulness in talking about it. It is only through this “contested dialogue” that the real meaning, the wild, dynamic, impermanent essence of concepts such as universality becomes spoken: “the universal begins to become articulated precisely through challenges to its existing formulation.”42 Here again we see the importance of attention to otherness in understanding the relationships of a seemingly exclusive dualism. We are able to move back and forth between the universal and contingent modes when confronted by the ethical moment, and in doing so the wild, dynamic relationship is revealed. This fluidity allows us to make a choice among alternatives as to what ought to be the correct course of action. The availability and access to a range of alternatives is reflected in the definitively ethical linguistic term ought, which implies multiple existent conditions (“is’s”) and those which are preferable (“ought’s”).43 In confronting yet another dualism, between is and ought, we see the connection between the wild form of language and the requirements of ethics, as Harpham explains:

41 Ibid., p. 47.
42 Ibid., p. 48. Butler’s notion of “contested dialogue” is also important in that, like Snyder’s “ordering of impermanence,” it implies an continual, ongoing practice.
43 See Harpham, Getting It Right, pp. 18-27.
Out of the ashes of Hume’s attempt to discover in language a guide to specific moral evaluations has risen another and better hypothesis: that language . . . does not solve our problems, instruct us in or lead us toward the good, or tell us what we should aspire to; language rather provides us with model, program, map—our best example of ethical thinking, and our point of entry into an ethical world.\textsuperscript{44}

Wildness and Poetry

The evidence of anthropology is that countless men and women, through history and prehistory, have experienced a deep sense of communion and communication with nature and with specific nonhuman beings. Moreover, they have often experienced this communication with a being they customarily ate. People of good will who cannot see a reasonable mode of either listening to, or speaking for nature except by analytical and scientific means must surely learn to take this complete, profound, moving, and in many ways highly appropriate worldview of the yogins, shamans, and ultimately all our ancestors into account.\textsuperscript{45}

In poetry we also see language being used to negotiate boundaries, including the space between the contingent and the universal. In an essay entitled “Poetry and the Primitive,” Snyder defines poetry as “the skilled and inspired use of the voice and language to embody rare and powerful states of mind that are in immediate origin personal to the singer, but at deep levels common to all who listen.”\textsuperscript{46} This position requires the poet to constantly confront otherness in attempting to articulate the relationship between their unique personal experience and that of the unknown reader.

But poets negotiate many forms of otherness. Patrick D. Murphy claims that for Snyder, “the poet acts as vehicle for a social mythology that seeks to reintegrate individual, society, and ecosystem.”\textsuperscript{47} In Snyder’s work we see the connection of Native American and Eastern cultures, old and new ways of living, and humans and nature.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 100.
\textsuperscript{45} Snyder, \textit{Place in Space}, p. 51.
Another dualism that Snyder attempts to negotiate is that between story and reality. The poems in his book *Myths & Texts* illustrate Snyder’s “strongly developed sense of the social role of myths, the responsibility of the poet, and the kind of consciousness that myths must help create, integrate, and maintain in the contemporary world.” Snyder himself asserts that the title refers to “the two sources of human knowledge—symbols and sense-impressions.” Bob Steuding maintains that to Snyder “myths are the constructs through which men perceive and understand the ‘texts,’ the physical world, or what they call reality. Thus, ‘myths’ relates to men’s conceptions; and ‘texts,’ to their physical environment.” Here again we see the epistemological dilemma language faces when describing the world that we encountered earlier in our discussion of Bickerton and Cheney.

For Murphy, Snyder writes about two kinds of texts and myths:

The “texts” consist of sensory experiences undergone by speakers in the poems as well as the previous experiences of historical figures who are either the speakers or subjects of little stories. Similarly one finds two kinds of “myths” in the poem: allusions to and brief stories about primitive and ancient myths of previous cultures; little stories and mythopoeic elements—figures, events, locales—that contribute to the formation of a new social mythology, a task explicitly laid out in the last lines of the poem *Hunting I*.

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I sit without thoughts by the log–road
Hatching a new myth
Watching the waterdogs
the last truck gone.
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In his dissertation on Snyder’s work, William J. Jungels argues, “it is probably generally true that myths serve as much to sustain and encourage a culture in its practices

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48 Ibid.
51 Murphy, *Understanding Gary Snyder*, p. 23.
and values as to simply reflect them.”  

Again, we see the double role of language present here as both descriptive and constitutive. By looking at this dualism as a wild form, we see the fluid and evolutionary relationship in the passage from text to myth, as Murphy asserts:

In addition, myths serve as a means for presenting a new spiritual perception of the contemporary world. In this context, then, what may have been or may be at the moment a “text,” an external sensory experience, may become through the work of mythopoeia part of a little “myth” that will “tell us how to be in some specific ecosystem of the far flung world.”

It is only by taking on a wild and fluid form that language is able to fulfill this requirement. By opening up the definitions of myths and texts we see that they are not mutually exclusive terms, but rather complementary. Each in part defines the other.

Snyder provides the following description for this interdependent relationship:

Myth is a “reality lived” because for every individual it contains, at the moment of telling, the projected content of both his unarticulated and conscious values: simultaneously ordering, organizing, and making comprehensible the world within which the values exist. One might even reformulate the statement to say “Reality is a myth lived”

Like with the other dualisms we have encountered, we see the wild relationship between myths and texts as one that often requires evolution and hybridization.

In Conclusion and a Practice Example

So let’s keep walking the hills and learning the trails, flowers, birds, old cemeteries, old mine shafts, forgotten canyons. Keep on holding potlucks, forest ecology classes for kids, sweat lodges, classes on bark beetles, high–country ski tours, poetry readings, and watershed meetings. We need to stay loose, smart, creative, and wild.

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54 Murphy, Understanding Gary Snyder, p. 23.
56 Snyder, Place in Space, p. 64.
By looking at language and what is required of it by the practices of ethics and poetry, I have tried to draw a connection between wildness and otherness. Through the wild and fluid form presented by language, ethics and poetry are able to negotiate the boundaries between dualisms such as universality and contingency or culture and nature, and give attention to otherness. This form allows for passage and mixture between both sides of the dualism and calls each into question. The tension and distinction is maintained in a way that is not mutually exclusive but complementary. The resulting definitions are not based on a notion of essence, but rather one of relation to otherness.

Over the past thirty years, the field of environmental ethics has been engaged with the difficult question of what ought to be the relationship of humans to the natural environment. This question has taken on many specific forms: Are human actions unnatural? Do we have obligations to nonhuman animals? Do we have obligations to ecosystems? Do nonhuman entities have legal rights? Should we protect biodiversity? Should we eradicate exotic species? Should we set aside wilderness preserves, etc.? As I experienced in my first college class with Dr. Marietta, philosophers have many different answers to these questions.

Because these are ethical questions, they involve a choice between different alternatives. In order to understand these alternatives, however, environmental ethics requires a richer and more sophisticated view of the relationship between nature and culture than the old modern dualist perspective provides. It requires a wildness and fluidity in its practice and use of language. Nature and culture cannot be mutually exclusive concepts in language because they are not mutually exclusive in the world. There is no place on Earth where they do not mix and hybridize. So in its definition of
nature and culture, environmental ethics could not simply define one in static opposition to the other since the culture/nature impasse is erroneous precisely because of this portrayal. Environmental ethics was forced to “wander in the hybridized middle ground” between the dualism. In other words, it had to adopt an adaptable and wild form of practice.

In an essay entitled “Born to Be Wild,” Irene Klaver, Josef Keulartz, et al. explore the environmental philosophy that considers explicitly these mixed situations. By examining a recent Dutch policy of introducing domesticated and semi–domesticated large herbivores in newly developed nature areas they present a deconstruction of the culture/nature impasse. The introduced animals and the land itself manifest the fluid form I have been discussing. Both are hybridized, mixed versions of natural and human processes. Because systems are mixed, managers cannot rely on one guiding principle or set of ethical rules to meet the needs of deciding what they ought to do in those systems. The guidelines set out by animal welfare ethicists seem to apply only to domesticated animals, while those posited by eco–ethicists pertain to wild ecosystems. Ought we simply allow nature to take its course and adopt a hands off management approach despite the fact that some of the animals and plants are semi–domesticated? Or ought we actively manage the reserves despite the fact that some of the plants and animals are semi–wild? To complicate the problem further, the designation of semi–wild and semi–domesticated are constantly evolving as the plants and animals adapt to their new environment and pass from one classification to another.

As we saw earlier, the universality of ethical principles must negotiate the specifics of particular contingent situations. In environmental ethics this tension is
especially evident in those situations that appear to be unique and highly dynamic, as the authors contend:

In such hybrid intermediary areas environmental ethics cannot simply be divided into separated domains for individualistic animal welfare ethicists and holistic ecoethics. Both play a role; depending upon the circumstances, care for individual animals will prevail, or concern for species, communities, or ecosystems. What will be morally the most relevant at a specific moment depends upon many factors. This complexity requires a further transition in environmental ethics.  

Thus far I have attempted to show that this transition involves adopting a wild fluid form that gives attention to otherness. Through this knowledge of and engagement with wild otherness, environmental ethics, like poetry, can construct new alternatives to static dualisms, which represent the true richness and complexity of our relationship with the natural world, and with each other.

In the next chapter, I compare this notion of wildness with another concept that has received much attention in the past few years, wilderness. Specifically I investigate the relationship between wilderness areas and the concept of wildness as a form, as I have described it. In the final chapter, I apply this analysis to contemporary environmental education in the National Park Service (NPS). I hold that by teaching people to value wildness, not just wilderness, education specialists working in NPS can facilitate a connection between the wildness in officially designated wilderness areas with the wildness students may experience elsewhere. Not only might this foster an appreciation and value of these “other” wildernesses, it will also reconnect the cultural with the natural.

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CHAPTER 2

WILDERNESS OUTSIDE OF WILDERNESS AREAS

Introduction

The grammar not only of language, but of culture and civilization itself, is of the same order as this mossy little forest creek, this desert cobble.\(^{58}\)

In an essay titled “In Wildness is the Preservation of the World,” Jack Turner uses this famous Thoreau quote as an occasion to discuss the distinction between wildness and wilderness. He points out that many have actually misquoted Thoreau, replacing “wildness” with “wilderness.” Turner provides an example, a plaque hanging at Point Reyes National Seashore, and asserts that this mistake is so common it has become a cliché. Rather than simple carelessness Turner argues that this error may have deeper significance: “I think this mistake is like a Freudian slip: it serves a repressive function, the avoidance of conflict, in this case the tension between wilderness as property and wildness as quality. I also think we are all confused about this tension.”\(^{59}\) While the Wilderness Act has provided some institutionalized guidelines for what wilderness might mean, there remains no definitive agreement with regard to wildness the quality, as Turner contends “we are confused about what Thoreau meant by wildness, we aren’t sure what we mean by wildness, and we aren’t clear how or what wildness preserves.”\(^{60}\)

Putting the question of Freudian repression aside for the moment, a brief survey of representations of wildness in popular culture suggests Turner may be correct in his concern about the confusion regarding this term. There are the expected associations with environmental groups such as Project Wild or the World Wildlife Fund. It is not

\(^{58}\) Snyder, Practice of the Wild, p. 76.
\(^{60}\) Ibid.
surprising to see an image of wildness used to promote guide services or ecotourism companies, as in Wild Expeditions. Most do not take notice when wildness is stretched even farther and used in conjunction with Wild Oats Natural Marketplace, a nationwide chain of organic grocery stores. But if you really pay attention you soon discover that, as a concept or quality, wildness has been incorporated in some astonishing ways. Marlin Brando starred in the 1954 outlaw biker movie titled “The Wild One.” There are several theme waterparks around the country called Wet ‘N’ Wild, each featuring plastic palm trees and concrete banked “lazy rivers.” Many of us have experienced Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride at Disney World. Some of us, possibly with intimations of regret, can recall encounters with Wild Turkey Bourbon.

Perhaps the strangest coupling in recent years has been that between wildness and professional ice hockey. The start of the 2000 NHL season included the debut of a new expansion team called the Minnesota Wild. When asked by reporters about the significance of the name and new team logo, CEO Jac K. Sperling said, “We think it best represents what Minnesota hockey fans hold most dear—our rugged natural wilderness, the premier brand of hockey that’s native to Minnesota and the great enthusiasm of all of our hockey fans.”

This franchised notion of “wildness as logo” is interesting because it seems to be at odds with most other non–domesticated definitions of the term. In addition, as Sperling points out, “Wild” here applies to three different categories: the

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61 Quote taken from an article announcing the new Minnesota Wild team logo appearing in the online magazine ESPN Sportszone, available at: http://www.alphabytes.com/wild/wildpress.htm. Most interestingly, the press release goes on to state: “The team will waste no time making its presence felt, announcing Thursday night that Wild merchandise will be available at local retail outlets Friday.” Here we have wildness as a concept completely enfranchised in the form of a team logo, in order to sell merchandise. As such, the term loses its connection to self-willed autonomy, relinquishes any means to articulate or give attention to alternatives to its appointed domesticated use, denies any authentic connection to physical reality, and exists solely in an abstract human environment.
natural areas of Minnesota, the way hockey is played in the state, and the emotional fervor of the fans.

Turner’s critique of the confusion surrounding wildness can be extended to academia. As noted in chapter one, countless articles and books have been written on the topic of wilderness, and some occasionally address the notion of wildness as a separate and distinct concept. Fewer address wildness specifically as a quality apart from its connection to a place or property. Perhaps most revealing is, despite all of this accumulated knowledge, new debates regarding the relationship between wildness and wilderness continue to emerge.62 This ambiguity seems surprising as most environmentalists, academic, and nonacademic alike, would probably agree that wildness is something that should be understood and preserved. It is especially discomfiting to discover confusion in the United States, where wildness and wilderness have long been identified with both the land itself and the national character of the people.63 Why have we been unable to come to terms with this seemingly critical topic? Is wildness something that is just simply unknowable? Or do we lack the complexity and terminology to articulate our knowledge of wildness?

Wildness and Wilderness

Knowing that nothing need be done, is where we begin to move from.64

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62 See, for example, Callicott and Nelson, The Great New Wilderness Debate.
64 Snyder, Turtle Island, p. 102.
Even in the works of Thoreau the terms *wild* and *wilderness* do not appear often and when they do, Thoreau does not give very precise, detailed, or consistent descriptions as to what he means by them. Turner provides what he considers to be an exceptional case: “After reading Richard C. Trench’s *On the Study of Words*, published in 1852, Thoreau made the following important note in his ‘Fact–Book’: ‘*Wild*—past participle of *to will*, self–willed.’”65 From this brief note Turner speculates that the wildness which Thoreau speaks about in “Walking” concerns free, self–willed, and self–determinate “things,” and through the preservation of these “things” we preserve the “harmonious order of the cosmos,” which Turner takes Thoreau to mean by the term *world* in his quote “In wildness is the preservation of the world.”66 For Turner, however, this description is still problematic: “It is not clear to any of us, I think, how the wildest acts of nature—earthquakes, wildfires, the plagues, people being killed and eaten by mountain lions and grizzly bears, our lust, the open sea in a storm—preserve a harmonious cosmic order.”67

Here Turner discloses a core challenge at the heart of wilderness preservation: wildness is “logically intractable to systemization,”68 and therefore we face a problem when we attempt to connect it to preservation. Wildness, the quality, does not appear to preserve anything, and likewise, it does not seem like something that can, or need, be preserved because it cannot really be destroyed. What results from this dilemma is a category mistake reducing wildness to wilderness, as Birch describes it:

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65 Turner, *Abstract Wild*, p. 82.
In the case of wildness itself, there is nothing there to aim at and shoot. As what we might call the “soul” of otherness, wildness is no usual sort of other. To take the manifestations of wildness for the thing itself is to commit a category mistake. Wildness is still very much there and will not go away.\textsuperscript{69}

Thus, for Birch, the concept of wilderness reserves, as they currently operate in the U.S., always involve “self–deception.” We reduce wildness to wilderness, and this “objectification” provides us with a false position of power over nature and allows us to bring its wild otherness into cultural (“imperial”) order; in essence, “putting wildness in its place” and “bringing law to the land.” Similarly, Oelschlaeger asserts that this attempt at systemization cast in human terms has consistently been part of Western history: “our prevailing definitions of ‘wildness’ and ‘wilderness’ preclude recognition of nature as a spontaneous and naturally organized system in which all parts are harmoniously interrelated; in consequence, humankind has believed itself compelled to impose order on nature.”\textsuperscript{70} In the next section I argue that this “self–deception” and “imposed order” involve the reduction of wildness on two levels, the natural/physical and the human/conceptual.

The categorical mistake of reduction to wilderness exemplifies Turner’s notion of cognitive repression regarding wildness. For Turner, our knowledge of wildness has become abstracted from experience, “objectified and filtered through concepts, theories, institutions, and technology.”\textsuperscript{71} We do not connect to wildness as a quality of self–willed autonomy, and therefore our wilderness preservation debates revolve around the preservation of wildness as manifest in things, such as endangered species, biodiversity reserves, and wilderness areas. Our confusion about wildness as quality is repressed, and

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., p. 449.
\textsuperscript{70} Oelschlaeger, The Idea of Wilderness, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{71} Turner, Abstract Wild, p. 121.
its contested meaning and connection to qualities like freedom, autonomy, and vitality seldom enters the “wilderness debates.”

Such repression is reflected in many recent essays that attempt to address the concept of wilderness preservation in environmental ethics. First, one discovers a continued reluctance to separate the terms wildness and wilderness even after the distinction is made, as if one cannot exist without the other. Second, the hesitation to talk about the quality of wildness as it exists in all human experience, not just wilderness experience.

To his credit Turner does take these issues seriously. He directly addresses the lack of attention to wild elements of human life: “We also presume that the experience of wildness and wilderness are related, and this is plausible (though it ignores elements of our personal lives that also might be thought of as wild: sex, dreams, rage, etc.).” However, Turner’s main focus rests with wilderness experiences, as he asks: “How wild is our wilderness? [and] How wild is our experience there?” to which he replies, “Not very.” This type of critical analysis of wilderness experience is indeed an important component of postmodern environmental ethics, and I do not advocate the abandonment of this issue, as some have proposed recently. By looking at wildness apart from wilderness however, we might free ourselves of certain conceptual and physical restraints, and gain some insight on what most of us feel is missing from our wilderness experience.

73 Ibid., p. 83.
74 Ibid., p. 84.
75 See, for example, Kidner, “Fabricating Nature,” and Andrew Light, “Urban Wilderness,” in Rothenburg, Wild Ideas.
Human and Natural Dimensions of Wildness

I would like to say
Coyote is forever
Inside you
But it’s not true. 76

The principle reasons Turner provides for his conclusion that our wilderness areas are not very wild are: (1) they are too small, (2) they lack large predators, (3) they have too many artificial controls, and (4) our experience of them is mostly through intensive recreation and tourism. The first two reasons here do not relate directly to the quality of wildness itself but are reductions to general physical characteristics of natural wilderness areas, and Turner is aware they cannot stand alone as sufficient arguments for wilderness preservation. However, the physical characteristics (or state) of nature do seem to play an essential role in our preservation arguments, as they relate our conceptions of wildness and wilderness with external reality. This connection is an interesting one, and it illuminates an important distinction between wildness in nature and wildness in human dimensions.

Both human and natural wildness involve autonomy, vitality, and creativity. But as members of the human species, we have special access to the source of human wildness, ourselves. This “self–reflexivity” is why many follow Thoreau in the belief that coming to know wildness involves coming to know your self. 77 Despite such

76 Snyder, Turtle Island, p. 23.
77 Turner describes this line of thought as “Thoreau’s project of understanding the wild within us and the wild within nature are fundamentally the same by their association, conceptually, with vitality and freedom.” Abstract Wild, p. 111. J. Claude Evans illuminates a tension in Thoreau’s work regarding the meaning and value of wildness: “Wildness in nature is the necessary correlate of wildness and vitality in human beings. On the other hand, in Walden [Thoreau] draws a sharp distinction between the “spiritual life” and the “rank and savage one.” While he claims to love both, he contrasts “sensuality” with “purity,” suggesting that we should outgrow the former as we pursue the latter. Purity requires that we remove ourselves from participation in the natural world.” Quote taken from the abstract for an essay titled, “Life
celebrations however, historically wildness in the form of human otherness has regularly been understood and portrayed as sociopathic, criminal, savage, irrational, and/or insane.  

Our access to the sources of natural wildness, on the other hand, is limited. Rather than pathological, natural wildness is considered part of the order of natural systems that is beyond our comprehension. Natural wildness is mysterious. Thus, when it comes to preservation, we are unclear as to what exactly needs to be preserved, and we settle on selectively preferred *products* of natural creativity, rather than the *source* itself. This is the reduction of natural wildness within the physical level, where only areas that meet certain physical qualifications count as wild. In the process we ignore the autonomy of nature and impose our own order on nature; wildness is further reduced to a human created conception. This is the reduction of natural wildness to the conceptual level. Reduction within the physical level involves the physical objectification of wildness in terms of pre–selected geographical, ecological, or some other set of quantifiable standards. These tidy sets of criteria of evaluation, as Birch points out, facilitate the physical demarcation of what is wild and what is not. Reduction of wildness to the conceptual level, on the other hand, involves a conceptual objectification in which the physical referent to wilderness disappears altogether, and what is left is just passive “space” to be assigned meaning and value by the human subject. Such an approach is prone to collapsing into relativism as there appears to be no critical standards whatsoever.

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78 In “The Incarceration of Wildness,” Birch compares the criminality of humans to the wildness of nature. Both serve as a threat to the imperium, and thus both must be systematized and controlled if the imperium is to maintain its power. Thus human prisoners are committed to penitentiaries or mental institutions, and natural wildness is incarcerated, or “locked up,” in wilderness reserves.

and any area can count as wild as long as a human subject experiences it as such. Reduction on both the natural and conceptual levels cuts us off from recognizing and articulating the autonomy of nature.

Turner’s fourth reason why our wilderness areas are not very wild details the most common types of human experiences in wilderness areas, “fun–hog” experiences. Here is an attempt to explore the quality of wildness in human experience, but it is limited to only one type, wilderness experience. This constraint seems to imply a necessary connection between wildness and wilderness areas, as if we could not experience one without the other. The relationship is more complex. Certainly the quality of wildness is necessary in order to have a wilderness experience, but a wilderness area is not a necessary condition for wildness. In fact, Turner questions whether or not such places are sufficient for the experience of wildness when it comes to most officially designated wilderness areas in the U.S. today.

If wilderness areas in contemporary society are unable to provide us with access to wildness, it seems clear that we must encounter it in other types of experiences. However, even when some mention is made of these “other” types of wild experiences, the discussion is usually restricted to a very small set such as sex, lust, rage, insanity, dreams, or criminal behavior. There are many experiences not on this list left unexamined. In addition, as noted earlier, the characterizations of wildness associated with the “other” human experiences (such as those mentioned above) frequently carry some negative connotation, such as pathology, abnormality, evil, disorder, or sickness.

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80 Turner, Abstract Wild, p. 87.
In an essay entitled “Urban Wilderness,” Andrew Light links this negative view of wild otherness to the “classical conception,” which portrays natural wilderness as “something to be feared, an area of waste and desolation inhabited by wild animals, savages, and perhaps even supernatural evil.”

Light distinguishes the classical from the “romantic conception,” which depicts natural wilderness as positive, a pristine “untouched space that human contact corrupts and degrades.”

Both views also carry with them “cognitive dimensions,” referring to “the wildness within the beings who are part of wild nature; it is not the mere physical surroundings but the claim of those surroundings on the mentalities of its inhabitants.”

These “cognitive dimensions” of classical and romantic conceptions of wilderness are characteristic examples of what I call reduction of wildness to the conceptual level.

Light thus points out four different conceptions of wildness, two existing in natural dimensions, and two in human dimensions. In the classical perspective, both the human and the natural dimensions are seen as negative: the human because it is pathological, the natural because it is threatening unknown space. In the romantic perspective, wildness, as a quality of self-willed autonomy, is portrayed very differently. Rather than a mysterious unknown, romantic versions of wildness are reduced to natural dimensions characterized by a lack of human imprint, and assume that the order of nature is superior because it is “pristine,” and “uncorrupted by human culture.” Romantic wildness reduced to the conceptual level is the cognitive dimensions of humans that connect with this higher, pristine natural order. The historical link between the romantic conception of wildness and American Transcendentalism reveals an interesting paradox.

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82 Ibid., pp. 195-196.
83 Ibid., p. 196.
in this position. The romantic version looks to wild nature for spiritual cleansing and
turns away from corrupted human culture. However, as the neo–Platonism of
Transcendentalism illustrates, the romantic perspective ultimately denies a physical
connection to nature as well. Authentic experience in wild nature is the path to “mental
clarity,” but upon arrival we exit the path and transcend both culture and nature, and
commune with a higher realm.\textsuperscript{84} If followed to its logical end under the romantic
perspective, experience in natural wildness does not develop a reverence for nature, nor
provide an antidote or guide to technological consciousness; rather it becomes the conduit
for a human spiritual quest. Such a quest does not celebrate the autonomy of nature; it
projects order onto nature in the form of a human psychological drama pitting the forces
of good against evil in a battle for the soul.

In fact, Light denies an authentic connection between both the romantic and
classical conceptions to the physical conditions of the land which they are supposed to
describe, thus reducing them to social constructions on the conceptual level, floating free
of the world. By privileging the cognitive capacity of the human subject, wildness is
removed from the natural dimension and relocated in human culture as a conceptual
construct; as there is no physical referent of the term wilderness, so “the cognitive
dimension is perhaps the only coherent dimension of the term.”\textsuperscript{85} Because wild nature
itself is fleeting, Light contends that the classic conception of wilderness has taken up
residence in descriptions of urban landscapes. Even in this new setting, however, Light
denies the existence of wilderness on a natural or physical level beyond its cognitive

\textsuperscript{84} The rejection of this subtle point of ultimate world denial is used by some to distinguish Thoreau from
other Transcendentalist writers, even Emerson. While Emerson’s writings focused more on the “higher,”
spiritual level, Thoreau seemed at times to be shedding his neoplatonism in preference of
phenomenological experience in nature.
dimensions. Wildness then “resides” in urban areas only insofar as it is tied up with the ordered picture we project onto such places.

In a recent article in *Environmental Ethics*, Eileen Crist critiques social constructivist views such as Light’s on intellectual and political grounds. Following the work of Paul Shepard, Crist flips social construction around to consider how people “receive meaning from” rather than “assign meaning to” the natural world. Ultimately, Crist’s argument is grounded in a view of language that we saw in the work of Searle, Cheney, and Snyder earlier, which posits an interdependent, dynamic relationship between our representations and the external reality that they are meant to describe. In contrast, social construction asserts that this is a one–way relationship, and external reality is valueless, unintelligible, or, in Light’s case with regard to wilderness, nonexistent, until humans create and assign meaning to it through language. Such a perspective denies nature’s autonomous participation and carries with it an air of human arrogance, as Crist explains: “Knowledge is a human franchise from which we naturally draw a sense of cognitive supremacy over the rest of creation and/or cognitive sovereignty over the world.”

fortifying its physical eradication by the very civilization that spawned constructivist thought.\footnote{Ibid., p. 21.}

The constructivist reduction is another attempt to systematize and gain control over wildness and wilderness through the denial of their autonomy. Instead of a reduction to a set of physical and geographical criteria of wilderness, Light reduces wildness to a human created conception that is then projected onto the land. Such a view does not present a new, alternative perspective on our relation to nature, it merely avoids this question altogether. The confusion surrounding the terms is purposefully repressed, as Light contends, “I do not see a need to further philosophically define wilderness, since the word may never have picked out something approximating wild nature at all. The expression ‘wild nature’ (or suitable variations to designate specifiable gradations in kinds of wild nature) ought to do the work without the genealogical baggage of ‘wilderness.’”\footnote{Light, “Urban Wilderness,” p. 209.} But it is precisely through this “genealogical baggage” that the rich and complex meanings of wildness and wilderness become articulated. Furthermore, these terms are primary examples of the dynamic, interdependent relationship between language and external reality, and highlight the complex roles both language and nature play in knowledge of environmental issues. Crist links this humanist perspective on wilderness to Vandana Shiva’s “politics of disappearance:” “The main tactic is obscuring from view that the meaning of a concept is not composed only of its sense but also of its reference. What wilderness refers to is systematically left out of the discussion as constructivist analysis remain at the level of people’s (culturally and historically
divergent) ideas, as though beliefs and sentiments about wilderness fully exhausted the meaning of the concept.\(^89\)

In simply replacing wilderness with wild nature, Light does not resolve any confusion; nor does he offer any alternatives to the “evil” or negative connotations of classical wilderness. He succeeds in perpetuating the alienation of humans from nature inherent in both the classical and romantic conceptions. By looking at other types of experiences, such as poetry, ethics, and art, we might be able to better negotiate the nature/culture dualism and avoid the reduction of wilderness on conceptual and physical levels. In doing so, we can begin to create more positive associations for our concept of wildness, such as creativity and vitality.

**Wildness and Aesthetic Experience**

It could be understood that a council of elders, the caretakers of the lore of the culture, would open themselves to representation from other life–forms. Historically this has been done through art. . . . That is about all we know so far concerning the possibilities of incorporating spokesmanship for the rest of life in our democratic society.\(^90\)

Eugene C. Hargrove has linked aesthetic experience in nature to the development of environmental values.\(^91\) Hargrove points out that beauty in nature is different from beauty in art because natural beauty is fundamentally contingent upon the existence of natural objects:

The beauty of the art object exists in imagination before the object itself comes to be. In contrast, a natural object is an entity whose existence precedes its essence. In this case, the beauty has no prior existence in imagination and in fact no prior existence of any kind. It emerges only when the natural object takes form.\(^92\)

\(^90\) Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p. 109.
\(^92\) Ibid., p. 193.
In aesthetic experiences in nature, the duality between the cognitive dimensions of the human psyche and physical dimensions of the environment collapses, as our aesthetic appreciation and conceptions of nature connect with nature’s own creative processes. Our value of beauty in nature is not simply a value of certain properties that natural objects exhibit, but is tied to those objects in a way that is fundamentally different than our connection with art objects. The properties of art works depend on the processes of human imagination, while creative processes of nature, far beyond human complexity, generate the properties of natural objects. Because of this difference, Hargrove argues, when we value nature, “existence and essence become inseparable, and concern for the continued existence of the objects is expressed in terms of those properties in the context of aesthetic, moral, and scientific valuational frameworks.”

This connection of the human and the natural is reflected in the contemporary valuational term viewscape. Aesthetic experience of nature provides two perspectives on creativity and imagination, one of connection and one of distinction. The first relates to aesthetic experience of art in its recognition and value of the beauty manifested in the properties of natural objects. Here we can draw connections between natural and human creativity. The second concerns the ontological difference in the processes that create natural beauty. Natural objects emerge from historical and continuing natural processes that are too complex for the human mind to grasp. Therefore, according to Hargrove, our concepts of natural objects are always incomplete, as, “A real existing tree is more than a

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93 Ibid., p. 198.
94 Viewscape has become a popular concept in management practice and has virtually replaced the old term landscape. This replacement may indicate the conversion of intrinsic to instrumental value characteristic of many management plans.
human’s concept of it.”

Because of this unique “ontological” connection between process and product in the creation of natural beauty, both our value and our preservation of natural beauty is similar to the value and preservation of artwork, but carries an extra obligational requirement, as Hargrove argues, “because the creation of natural beauty is fundamentally contingent upon physical existence, in a way that art is not—that is, because the existence of nature precedes its essence—the need to preserve natural objects and systems is greater than the need to preserve works of art.” I hold that this “extra commitment” to the preservation of nature based on the ontological argument that Hargrove employs fundamentally involves recognition of the limitations of human knowledge regarding natural processes. What results is a position of respect and humility towards nature that recognizes and attempts to articulate the value of its autonomy.

Hargrove’s analysis is useful to those dealing with the conceptual difficulties of wilderness preservation in that it provides a method for negotiating the uncertain (and perhaps unknowable) connections between wildness the quality and wilderness the thing, as well as providing a form which allows us to describe the dynamic relationship between humans and nature. In the same way that beauty is manifested in objects, wildness is also manifested in individuals, species, systems, processes and many other “things.” Because wildness is fundamentally connected to natural things, just as natural beauty is fundamentally connected to natural objects, there is a difference between the wildness of natural things and that of human things, just as there is a difference between natural and artistic beauty. In both cases, this difference seems to rest on a limitation of human

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95 Ibid. p. 194.
96 Ibid., p. 198.
knowledge regarding the creative processes of nature, and the ethical commitment to humility that is implied by this limitation.

Aesthetic experience thus offers us a wild form as was seen in the practice of poetry and ethics in chapter one. It provides a fluidity that can be used to negotiate conceptual dualisms such as human/nature, and offers a framework for articulating the richness and complexity of our concepts of beauty. However, there is a subtle difference that needs to be pointed out here that was not covered in chapter one. When all of these practices encounter nature, they give attention to a different type of other, that of natural wildness. Because natural wildness is beyond human knowledge, attention to this type of other requires a position grounded in humility. This “extra ethical step” provides the essential orientation of the wild forms I that have been describing, and relates directly to Turner’s third reason why our wilderness areas are not very wild: they have too many artificial controls. Rather than accept this approach of humility that recognizes the autonomy of nature, in contemporary wilderness areas we reduce wild otherness to human terms in an attempt to control the mysterious aspects of natural processes.

When we encounter wildness in human things, it is an other that is somewhat familiar to us. In giving attention to this other we are also looking within ourselves, employing imagination, extrapolation, and compassion. Even though we never fully understand nor predict its outcomes, we have special access to human wildness because at root it is part of what we know ourselves to be. Certainly we are natural creatures as well, and thus have in part some access to natural wildness. This is a limited access, however, and in contemporary society it is limited in two additional ways, each supporting the other. First, our knowledge of natural wildness seems to be more and
more abstracted, as Turner contends. We no longer feel a fundamental connection to things like predation, evolution, and even death. For most of us, these aspects of our lives have become so domesticated that it is hard to see they are even connected to wild natural sources.\textsuperscript{97} Second, the abstract theoretical conceptions and forms that we use to articulate the knowledge we do have of wild nature have historically been focused explicitly on control.

While language use in poetry, ethics, and aesthetics are required to provide access to otherness in their knowledge of the true, the good, and the beautiful, the language we most often rely on to describe the natural world, science, has historically not been checked by these same requirements. In the past, notions of universality in science have seldom met with the same deconstruction as universality in ethics. We do not give much attention to alternatives in scientific knowledge because, in providing facts, the objectivity of science is focused on systemization. However, some argue that the emergence of such questions is precisely what is occurring in the recent evolution called New Science.

Wildness and New Science

There are many things in Western culture that are admirable. But a culture that alienates itself from the very ground of its own being—from the wilderness outside (that is to say, wild nature, the wild, self–contained, self–informing ecosystems) and from that other wilderness, the wilderness within—is doomed to a very destructive behavior, ultimately perhaps self–destructive behavior.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{97} The disconnection between human personal life and the cycles and processes of nature deserves more attention. At its roots, our confusion regarding wildness seems to rest mostly with our disengagement from wild natural processes. Rather than natural events, birth and death for most of us are more like medical procedures. Likewise, human evolution has also been incorporated and enfranchised, removed from autonomous natural processes and relocated to the labs of genetic engineering companies. Consider the following sort of confusion regarding predation often exhibited today: “I’m a vegetarian. I only eat chicken and fish.”

\textsuperscript{98} Snyder, \textit{Turtle Island}, p. 106.
Thus far we have looked at wildness in terms of ethics, poetry, and aesthetics. I tried to describe wildness as a fluid, reflexive form that gives attention to otherness and presents new alternatives to static dualisms like culture/nature. I argued that such a form provides a better representation of the true richness and complexity of our relationships with each other and the natural world. In the sciences there has been a new development over the past few decades which also posits richer theories to describe the ever more complex world in which we live.

New Science, as it is often called, has impacted the physical, natural, social, and ecological sciences resulting in reassessment of truth and knowledge. Though they are often grouped together, New Science involves a variety of related yet distinct and sophisticated forms. For example, chaos theory, probably the most familiar of the new sciences, has much in common with another theory called self–organization. Both deal with change, adaptation, and evolution and can be applied to many different types of social and natural systems. Both pose problems for prediction in science because they involve epistemological challenges that have only recently been revealed as our culture and technology have become more sophisticated. Both also imply some notion of uncertainty, another recently rediscovered dilemma in science, and one that some argue may represent a paradigm shift within the discipline, or a manifestation of the transformation from modern to postmodern culture. Despite these similarities, however, there are also some important subtle differences between chaos and self–organization.

Chaos theory begins within a framework of uncertainty which concerns cause and effect relationships that can never be fully observed or understood. Whether there is a

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lack of sophistication in our abilities and technology or a lack of complexity in our theoretical conceptions, chaos theory suggests there are very fine-grained details that we cannot account for in our explanations of phenomena and systems. Chaos theory stresses a sensitive dependence on initial conditions that are often unknown and cannot be reproduced. These initial conditions may be tiny and appear insignificant, but matter crucially in the system wide results that come from them. When small initial differences are amplified and cause large-scale dynamic and unpredictable behavior, the system can be described as chaotic. This theory of indeterminate causes having cataclysmic effects is sometimes referred to as the “butterfly effect,” and is the hallmark of chaos. In chaotic systems, disequilibrium is the norm. New concepts such as “strange attractors” have been introduced in chaos theory in order to account for the nonlinear, unpredictable behavior being observed.100

In 1978, the physical chemist Ilya Prigogine received the Nobel Prize in recognition of his work on how apparently random, chaotic changes in systems, such as those described above, can lead to new patterns of order and stability. Like chaos, Prigogine’s theory involved systems that exhibited dynamic fluctuations in behavior. But rather than just disruptions to the order, Prigogine argued that these changes caused systems to readjust themselves to adapt to the new conditions; in essence, they become reordered. This alternation between chaos and order is the foundation of another brand of New Science called self-organization. In self-organizing systems, disequilibrium is only half the story. Fluctuation and dynamics eventually cause a system to reach what some call a bifurcation point, where the system is left with the choice of dissolving

completely or evolving to a newly ordered system. Self-organizing systems strive to take this second option, and with each reordering they become more complex.\footnote{101}

Both chaos theory and self-organization theory have been used to deconstruct our knowledge of many different types of cultural and biological systems. Because of the uncertainty and apparent unpredictability involved with these theories, they present major challenges to traditional, modernist scientific theories in the social and natural sciences. David Botkin shows how the revelations of New Science have revolutionized ecology through the deconstruction of classic concepts such as “the balance of nature,” “ecological climax,” and even “wilderness.” However, a close study of Botkin’s views reveals that the effects of chaos and stochastic change, the original causes of this deconstruction, are actually trivialized and repressed: “Once we accept the idea that we can deal with these complexities of nature, we begin to discover that the world of chance is not so bad, that it is interesting and even intriguing now that we understand that chance is not chaos.”\footnote{102} Botkin asserts time and again that computers are the solution to uncertainty because they provide new and better metaphors for nature. In the process, however, chaos and creativity in nature are reduced to chance and probability statistics. In the postscript to *Discordant Harmonies*, Botkin discloses his denial of the autonomy of nature: “Nature in the twenty-first century will be a nature that we make; the question is the degree to which this molding will be intentional or unintentional, desirable or undesirable.”\footnote{103}

\footnote{103} Ibid., p. 193.
The work of postmodern deconstruction has shown that the way we view the world is greatly influenced by the theories we hold. To put it bluntly, in many ways, *believing is seeing*, rather than the other way around. But, as we saw earlier in our discussion of Cheney’s work regarding the connection of language and the world, to reduce nature to socially constructed theories is to deny its connection to the physical world. In such a system, facts no longer describe an external reality, but are designed for human purposes floating free of that world. Botkin and others at times seem to be in danger of sliding down this slippery slope of post–structuralism. While social construction theories are useful in critiquing the ways in which our theories influence the facts we see, they perpetuate the modern dualism between the two. In New Science we can examine the coevolution of theory and fact, each contributing to the articulation and definition of the other. We can also see how theories adapt to incorporate the appearance of new and unpredictable challenges. The question becomes then, does New Science provide us with a form in which we can avoid the reduction of post–structuralism? The constructive, postmodern theories, like those being sought in New Science, that emerge from the process of deconstructive reevaluation will not simply be a rejection of modern theories of certainty. Rather their complexity will *increase*, as they attempt to reconcile modern certainty with postmodern uncertainty. This very notion of complexity itself has become a focus of New Science.104

Wildness and Complexity

Delight is the innocent joy arising with the perception and realization of

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the wonderful, replete, intricate, 
rich–reflecting, 
uniquely aloof, polychrome 
complex worlds beyond all indifference 
to nuances.\textsuperscript{105}

In his book \textit{Complexity: A Philosophical Overview}, Nicholas Rescher characterizes New Science as being concerned with complexity. The cause of our evolution into postmodernity is not chaos, but recognition that the world is much more complex than was once thought: “The world’s complexity is a fact of life that has profound and far–reaching implications for us.”\textsuperscript{106} Indeed, this recognition of complexity carries with it the disturbing conditions of uncertainty and unpredictability, which I argue involve additional ethical implications. We encounter these conditions both in our (f)actual experience of the world, and in our theoretical attempts to explain this experience. To borrow from Snyder, one might say that we encounter them in both in our texts and our myths.\textsuperscript{107} New Science attempts to differ from the science of modernity in its reaction to and incorporation of the conditions of uncertainty and unpredictability (though there can be some debate about the success of this distinction).\textsuperscript{108} Hence, reductionistic thinking is replaced with holistic theories, specialization is replaced with interdisciplinary study, and universality is replaced with pragmatic or predictive

\textsuperscript{105} Snyder, \textit{Turtle Island}, p. 113. 
\textsuperscript{107} For Rescher, the term \textit{complexity} can be equally applied to human artifacts, including those not directly attached to the real world such as fiction. For more on this topic, see in Rescher, \textit{Complexity}, especially chap. 1. 
\textsuperscript{108} Some have suggested that complexity theories of New Science are new and more sophisticated attempts to control the real world, and with it, nature. In the next section I look at the language of these theories, some of which involve direct reference to domestication. For an interesting discussion on the failure of modernity to meet the conditions of certainty and what that means for postmodernity see Bruno Latour, \textit{We Have Never Been Modern}, translated by Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).
completeness. In each case a richer, more sophisticated, and more complex theory is proposed to explain and “reorient” our experience of the world.

What exactly makes the supposedly more complex theories of New Science different from the traditional theories of modern science, and on a larger scale, postmodernity more complex than modernity? We can begin to answer this question by looking at what we mean by complexity. Rescher contends that complexity “is first and foremost a matter of the number and variety of an item’s constituent elements and of the elaborateness of their interrelational structure, be it organizational or operational. Any sort of system or process—anything that is a structured whole consisting of interrelated parts—will be to some extent complex.”109

For Rescher, complexity initially involves the number of different parts in a whole and the elaborateness of their interrelations. New Science is more complex than traditional science, and postmodernity is more complex than modernity because the former contain not only all of our knowledge built on certainty, but also new conditions of intelligibility based on uncertainty. Scientific knowledge of the whole world must now incorporate lots of new parts. In addition, New Science and postmodernity also require a much more sophisticated understanding of the way in which the different parts of our world interrelate to one another. As is evident even from our brief discussions here, complex theories such as these involve lots of different exchanges between human beings and their environment. These interconnections are often obscured and/or unpredictable, and so appear to be more elaborate than we once thought. In short, the

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complexity of postmodern life will require a new understanding of modernist dualistic relationships such as culture/nature, mind/body, fact/theory, and subjective/objective.

From this perspective, it appears as if one could make the claim that the complexity of New Science might qualify as a wild practice much like poetry and ethics. The fluid, wild forms found in all three disciplines provide access to otherness: alternative myths in poetry, alternative relationships in ethics, and alternative orderings in New Science. Each field requires a new look at traditional dualisms, most importantly for our purpose, nature/culture. But despite these similarities, a comparison with aesthetic experience in nature reveals that New Science remains distinct in its continued connection to systemization. This commitment prevents New Science from recognizing the extra valuational step we saw was required in aesthetic experiences of nature. Instead of humility, the ethical commitment of new science becomes manifest in the gathering of even more data and information. When such an approach is applied to natural sciences like ecology and biology, what results is a further control of wild otherness in the guise of preservation, as Turner argues:

Biologists control grizzlies, they trap and radio–collar cranes, they have cute little radio backpacks for frogs, they bolt brightly colored plastic buttons to the beaks of harlequin ducks, they even put radio transmitters on minnows. And always for the same reason: more information for a better, healthier ecosystem. Information and control are indivisible.\textsuperscript{110}

Control and Human Wildness

There is no single or set “nature” either as “the natural world” or “the nature of things.” The greatest respect we can pay to nature is not to trap it, but to acknowledge that it eludes us and that our own nature is also fluid, open, and conditional.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{110} Turner, \textit{Abstract Wild}, p. 119.
A simple comparison of the language used to describe reaction to uncertainty in New Science and the reaction to a loss of wildness in wilderness experience reveals some interesting relationships. In the former we have what can best be described as therapeutic advice. We are given various prescriptions meant to help us “cope with complexity” and “live with chaos.” At the same time we lament the loss of certainty and are confused about the implications of this loss. In the latter, we are distraught with grief. We mourn for the loss of wildness in wilderness experience, but are confused, or bewildered, as to exactly what is missing; and we cannot agree on what to do to get it back. We feel overwhelmed by domestication, and the idea of coping appears hopeless in facing “the death of nature.”

In both cases a theme of psychological dissonance is usually employed in very sophisticated ways to express a process of replacement: certainty replaced by uncertainty in the first, and wildness replaced by domestication in the second. Though both portrayals appear to be negative, they seem to move in opposite directions. In New Science we move from order towards disorder, but in wilderness experience we are moving from autonomy towards control. If both endeavors are committed to describing our changing relationship with the natural world, how can they vary so much in their outlook?

The reduction of wildness to the conceptual level rests on the assumption that the quality of wildness that is part of natural processes can be reflected in the wild complexity of human created conceptual systems. Whether we adhere to the correspondence, coherence, pragmatic, or predictive theory of truth in science, our

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112 See, for example, Rescher, *Complexity*, chap. 9, and Uri Merry, *Coping With Uncertainty: Insights From the New Sciences of Chaos, Self-Organization, and Complexity* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995).
theories are assumed to ultimately reflect the facts of the external world. Because our knowledge of these natural processes is incomplete, however, our ability to *model* these processes with conceptual wildness is limited. While New Science recognizes this restriction, it does not articulate the importance of this limitation in its models or its valuational frameworks.

Given its history of concern with prediction, and its still very active role in our every day lives, it comes as no surprise that the disciplines of science attempt pragmatic solutions to the challenges of uncertainty that attempt to minimize epistemological limitations uncovered by New Science (as illustrated by Botkin). While it is true that chaos and complexity present challenges to modern assumptions of certainty and order, they do not mean we will abandon these concepts as important concepts, frameworks, and criteria of evaluation. Just as we saw with the concept of universality in chapter one, the meanings of key terms such as these change over time. The reality revealed by New Science is one where order, predictability, and certainty are intertwined with randomness, irregularity, and unpredictability. “Coping” with this new reality requires some *reordering* of human conceptual systems, however, exactly what sort of new order remains an open question. This new, wild challenge for science means it will also have to play a double role. Science must go on predicting and doing all of the other things that societies rely on science to do, while admitting scientific models, explanations, and predictions are oversimplified representations of nature.

However, this admission is problematic for reasons that are much more complicated than historical devotion to prediction and systemization. Science cannot reflect unfolding complexity in nature through wilder, open–ended scientific theories.
because the very act of scientific modeling limits natural complexity. Every new “part”
that we decide to include in a model means that a whole series of other “parts” will be
excluded. For every “elaborate relationship” we attempt to express, many other
relationships will be ignored. The act of capturing natural complexity through models by
*necessity* involves a simplification of natural processes because we just cannot “capture it
all.” This simplified picture does not tell the whole story, but science is ill–equipped at
elaborating, much less assigning value to, anything that lies outside this picture. Since
wildness by its essence is elusive, the value of self–willed autonomy in nature is not
expressible in scientific terms. As Rescher asserts, we can only capture the complexity
of nature in our conceptual frameworks through reductive control processes: “We can
only achieve the cognitive domestication of nature by oversimplifying.”

Thus, part of the confusion and avoidance regarding wildness and wilderness
seems to lie in the historical relationship between wilderness preservation and the
ecological sciences. In framing discussions of wilderness value in terms of ecological
science, we cut ourselves off from the source of that value, as Turner argues:

> Faced with the accelerating destruction of ecosystems and the extinction of
> species, we believe our only option lies in increased prediction, efficiency, and
> control. So we fight to preserve ecosystems and species, and we accept their
diminished wildness. This wins the fight but loses the war, and in the process we
simply stop talking about wildness.\(^\text{114}\)

While radio telemetry equipment, GPS systems, tagging programs, artificial breeding
projects, not to mention maps and guide books, have provided us with tremendous
amounts of new data and knowledge regarding natural systems and populations, these are
all methods of human control. As such, these techniques taken alone, while allowing

\(^{113}\) Rescher, *Complexity*, p. 162.

access to *wilderness*, actually remove us further from natural *wildness*. Our confusion regarding wildness is exacerbated because the very tools we are employing as solution are only making the problem worse.

However, it is obvious that the knowledge and techniques of science and ecology are integral to wilderness preservation. What is required then is not an abandonment of this approach but a complementary perspective, which allows us to study nature while at the same time articulate the value of things that are not represented in our scientific models. Many ecologists working on preservation issues today understand this double role. Yet it is a sophisticated position, and in no way obvious to all of those employed in the professional arena, much less to students encountering ecology for the first time. Environmental education programs administered by the National Park Service could benefit from recognition of the limitations of science in articulating the value of wildness. Rather than teaching students to value wilderness through doing science, in the next chapter I explore the possibility of teaching the value of wildness. Such an approach could serve as a complement to scientific study, giving students the opportunity to connect with and celebrate the mysteries of nature not only in officially designated wilderness areas, but also in the wildness they encounter in their everyday lives.
CHAPTER 3

WILDNESS AND EDUCATION

Introduction

The language used by Rescher in describing the “cognitive domestication of nature” reveals much about the repression, confusion, and cognitive dissonance surrounding our concepts of, and our connections to, wildness and wilderness value in postmodern society. Furthermore, cognitive domestication appears to be exactly what Turner has in mind when he critiques the “abstract wild” that has replaced authentic wilderness experience. In both cases there are complex reductions of both geographical space (physical level) as well as reductions of this space to human created conceptions (conceptual level). Expressed as such, wilderness value loses its essential connection to wildness.

The description of wilderness value expressed through fact–driven language games, such as those employed in New Science, is not inaccurate; nor is it fundamentally exclusive of other ways of articulating wilderness value. However, this expression of value is bound by the requirements of language use that operate within fact–driven language games. I contend that these requirements inhibit the articulation of a specific component of wilderness value, the valuing of autonomy in nature, or what I refer to as wildness. The focus on wildness in wilderness value illuminates the intrinsic quality of this value. In contrast to the instrumental values that are communicable through participation in fact–driven language games, wildness as self–determined autonomy in nature is ultimately an intrinsic value that requires additional sorts of language games for
its expression. Understanding and articulating the intrinsic value of wilderness requires
the use of more fluid language that gives the proper attention to its wild otherness.

Though intrinsic value is implied in the wording of the Wilderness Act, most
often administrative or official expressions of wilderness value, especially those made by
governmental agencies, employ fact–driven language, and thus concern the instrumental
value of wilderness. Despite the fact that these instrumental values contain complex
ethical components, philosophers thus far have played only an “unauthorized” and lesser
role when it comes to decision making based on these values, as Donald A. Brown has
recently commented:

Policy makers are taught to use the scientific tools to determine the environmental
impacts of human activities, economic tools to determine and balance competing
values, and the law to look for relevant prescriptions where they exist to guide
decision making. Ethics simply never comes up in day–to–day environmental
decision making. The only priests allowed into the temple of environmental
decision making are scientists, engineers, economists, and lawyers.\textsuperscript{115}

While I am sympathetic with Brown’s anxiety regarding the apparently limited
role of environmental ethics in policy making, I am troubled by his conclusion that
environmental philosophers simply need to learn more about science, law, and economics
to be relevant, rather than teach policy makers about environmental ethics.\textsuperscript{116} Indeed,
communication within these discourses is crucial to expressing the instrumental values
embedded in public policy decisions. However, environmental ethics has another equally
important role regarding the expression of intrinsic value. This role will require
philosophers to educate not only policy makers, but the general public as well.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., p. 112.
Language and the Two Culture Split

The recognition of the way fact–driven language shapes our concept of wildness and wilderness value positions us in the midst of a dilemma: we want to develop a connection with wild nature, but our attempts to realize this endeavor at times appear self–defeating because they involve the capture and simplification of infinitely complex natural phenomenon. Through this process, the wild, autonomous aspects of nature are repressed and distorted, and likewise, the ability to articulate the value of these aspects is diminished. Ultimately, this dilemma rests on the tension between the articulation of intrinsic and instrumental value in nature.

I have attempted to frame this dilemma in terms of wildness by comparing the autonomy of natural systems with the fluidity required of human language in encountering otherness. I have linked this fluidity to ethics, poetry, and aesthetics, as examples of language use that maintain the ability to recognize and articulate the intrinsic value of the autonomy of otherness. In focusing on the distinctions between the requirements of language use, I have contrasted these three disciplines with New Science by asserting that, while New Science recognizes autonomy in nature, it is ill–equipped to articulate the value of this autonomy. It is important, however, not to overemphasize this distinction, less we fall down the slippery slope of the “two culture” split, which posits another dualism that draws a line between the humanities and the sciences.\(^\text{117}\)

While I assert that New Science, ethics, poetry, and aesthetics entail different requirements for language use, I do not support the conclusion that these disciplines “speak different languages.” Instead, in these disciplines we see different uses of the

\(^{117}\) See C. P. Snow, \textit{The Two Cultures} (London: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
same language. This subtle point is important for two reasons. First it signals the possibility of connection and translation between the disciplines. While language use may differ between the humanities and the sciences, both share common values, including shared instrumental and intrinsic values. The crucial difference is in the way each is set up to articulate those values, and, as a result, which values are emphasized and which are given less consideration. This difference does not negate the complex and complementary interrelationships between instrumental and intrinsic value that cross all disciplines.

Second, the notion that the humanities and the sciences speak different languages encourages a sort of apathy. In environmental ethics, this apathy has often taken the form of what I would describe as a “victim syndrome,” which portrays philosophy’s, and more generally all of the humanities’, relationship to the sciences as one of segregation and forced subordination. The victim position is often stated as such: the decision–making process with regard to environmental problems has become too politicized, and this process has led to an overreliance on scientific information, and a silencing of philosophical debate. While it is true that philosophy has a long history of connection to politics, one cannot reduce ethics to political laws. Ethics is supposed to extend outside of politics, beyond merely codifying moral beliefs, to shaping and sustaining the ethical debate itself. This requirement entails not a different language, but a different way of using language. Thus, the charge that the politicizing of environmental debate has

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118 Both Turner and Brown appear to come dangerously close to this “victim profile.” While it may be argued that philosophers currently hold few positions in the trenches of public policy making, such criticisms underestimate the role that traditional ethics and environmental ethics have played, and the contributions they continue to make, in providing the fundamental theoretical frameworks for conducting public policy.
silenced philosophy is vacuous because the role of philosophy is not limited, but strengthened by the politicizing of environmental issues.

Despite Brown’s comments, it is clear that philosophy is intimately linked with the sciences in the endeavor to express fact-driven, anthropocentric, instrumental values such as recreation, sustainability, and health; and, though they may not receive much recognition, there are some professional philosophers actively linking these values to specific public policy decisions. Thus, the “victim syndrome” apparently concerns only one specific aspect of environmental philosophy, which attempts to express intrinsic value. While it is true that philosophy and science have not teamed in the same way to express intrinsic value as they have with regard to instrumental value, they have not done so because of the different requirements in the articulation of intrinsic value, and not because philosophy has been intentionally silenced within the political debate. The most creative and ground-breaking ethical debates, of which intrinsic value in nature must surely qualify, have always developed and emerged from a perspective outside of mainstream politics and policy making. To recognize that instrumental values are playing a larger role in the politics of environmental issues does not express a conspiracy on the part of the sciences, or a weakness within environmental philosophy. Instead, this recognition illustrates the differences in the values themselves. Anthropocentric, instrumental values are more amenable to contemporary political policy, and scientists and philosophers have thus far experienced greater success dealing with these issues because these values can be connected to and expressed through fact-driven language games. Beginning early in its history with new consideration of Hume’s is/ought
dichotomy, environmental ethics has been intimately tied with articulating the complex relationships between facts and values.119

Conversely, the more radical, intrinsic–value–based views offered by environmental philosophy, such as biocentrism and ecocentrism, do not mesh well with the current mainstream political landscape in the United States. Furthermore, a focus on language use illustrates that the articulation of the intrinsic value at the core of such positions may require a type of language game different from that which is seen in the sciences in order to make it accessible to public debate. It requires a freedom and fluidity more akin to art and poetry, and it may be to these disciplines that environmental ethics must turn in order to further articulate intrinsic value and preserve this concept within larger ethical and political discourse.

Articulating Intrinsic Value

As discussed in chapter one, the practice of ethics requires a fluid, dynamic language. The fluidity of the language used in environmental ethics has enabled the notion of intrinsic value in nature to emerge as a serious ethical concept. However, as the first few decades of the field revealed, many philosophers did not welcome this new concept, and even today much debate exists about its validity and practical usefulness. Despite the difficulties, there remains something about intrinsic value that is fundamentally recognizable and familiar that cannot be ignored. In part, as Christopher

Stone and others argued early on, we can relate the intrinsic value of nature to the rights of human persons, such as the right to existence. Such early comparisons to human ethics did not so much define and codify intrinsic value, but rather revealed a deeper level of complexity in the relationship between humans and nature, as well as a need for richer philosophical theories to express this complexity. Other attempts were made to connect intrinsic value to sacredness and spirituality, beauty and integrity, and health and well-being. While none of these perspectives are the last word on intrinsic value, they have played the important role of maintaining its place in our conversations surrounding value in nature.

The role of sustaining a broad and lively discourse on ethical value in nature should take precedence for environmental ethicists, above their obligation to become politically active. In terms of instrumental value, part of this challenge is framed by participation in a fact-driven language game with economists, scientists, and politicians. As such, the fluid aspects of ethical language are given less attention. Like facts, nonanthropocentric instrumental values in nature, such as the value of clean water to an ecosystem, are often treated as ecological discoveries instead of value judgments. It is important to point out here, however, that, like intrinsic value, our concepts of instrumental values are dynamic and continually unfolding. Though nonanthropocentric instrumental values may appear more like “discoverable facts” than anthropocentric instrumental value such as recreation value, the former still evolve. For example, our value of the balance and climax stages in natural systems changed when New Science revealed “different facts” about these concepts. Philosophy and science have not

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120 See, for example, Christopher D. Stone, Should Trees Have Standing? Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects (Los Altos, Calif.: W. Kaufmann, 1974) and “Legal Rights and Moral Pluralism,” Environmental Ethics 9 (1987): 281-84.
provided the last word on instrumental value either; yet it seems to be a more justifiable and powerful concept within both political and policy discussions, and interdisciplinary study.

Why is instrumental value seen as more legitimate than intrinsic value? In part, the notion of instrumental value receives some of its legitimacy from its association with the familiar humanist ethics. In terms of policy making and interdisciplinary study however, instrumental value gains a great deal of its legitimacy through correlation with the sciences. In addition to the value/fact hybridation surrounding nonanthropocentric instrumental value discussed above, there have been many recent attempts to ground anthropocentric instrumental value in “discoverable facts” as well. Rather than a value judgment, recreation value is measured in the amount people are willing to pay to enter a protected area, and economic value becomes the value of trees on the timber market. By making instrumental values “discoverable” or “measurable,” the value judgments, though in some cases these may be small, are covered up. Thus, even though it is sometimes no more grounded in fact than intrinsic value, instrumental value is given “objectivity credentials” because it is amenable to fact–driven language use. Hargrove illuminates the danger of extending scientific objectivity to value, characteristic of many policy decisions:

An unstated value preference for one element of a system over another . . . triggers a search for a scientific rationale in the form of a hypothesis or some quantifiable test results that can then be substituted as the reason for the decision, avoiding any charge of subjectivity or bias. . . . This substitution of ‘facts’ for the values that actually determine a decision or policy, however, is not without its costs and perils. In order to appear ‘value–free,’ decision makers distort the decision–making process and in doing so make meaningful debate about the
decision impossible by hiding the key value considerations behind irrelevant facts and hypotheses. 121

On the other hand, because it is more difficult to quantify intrinsic value and replace it with facts, this type of value continues to be viewed as far too subjective to be relevant to policy or interdisciplinary study. Indeed, intrinsic value does not lend itself well to current cost–benefit analyses, or willingness–to–pay surveys. Furthermore, the descriptions of intrinsic value that have been advanced by environmental ethicists have overwhelmingly involved a highly abstract and specialized language use. Consider Callicott’s latest formulation of intrinsic value as “a potentiality to be actualized by a situated observer/valuer.”122 Although this type of analysis has been vital to laying the groundwork for a rigorous philosophical position on intrinsic value, such a treatment has not made the concept of intrinsic value any more accessible to the general public. While ordinary people may experience both instrumental and intrinsic value in nature equally, and both types of value may affect their views of nature and wilderness, most simply lack the proper language to describe and discuss intrinsic value in sophisticated ways.123 Hargrove provides this description of the connection between language and the apparent illegitimacy of intrinsic value: “Both environmental professionals and ordinary citizens seem to want to value nature intrinsically, but are no longer willing to say so, since the

123 In “Toward Teaching Environmental Ethics,” Hargrove compares the loss of value language to the “linguistic dysfunction” of Newspeak in George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four.
traditional vocabulary for expressing this type of valuing is now considered quaint and old–fashioned and is on the verge of disappearing from ordinary language.” ¹²⁴

I do not advocate that professional philosophers such as Callicott should abandon all rigorous attempts to rationally and systematically ground intrinsic value. If, however, these analyses are the only serious philosophical theories we have of intrinsic value, and they are inaccessible to the general public, how can we hope to effectively bring the concept of intrinsic value into public debate about wilderness? I suggest that we need a complementary approach to discussing intrinsic value that is more accessible to the public and gives the proper attention to the autonomy of nature. I contend that environmental ethics will also have much to offer to this complementary approach.

In many ways, our experience of intrinsic value is no more subjective than our experience of instrumental value; however, the articulation of this value does require a different sort of language use than that found in fact–driven language games. This requirement has caused much confusion regarding intrinsic value, especially in terms of wilderness. It may be argued that some environmental ethicists do not ground their intrinsic value theories in facts; however, as mentioned, most involve high levels of systemization, a characteristic that is shared with fact–driven language games, and which undermines and stifles the fluidity of ethical language. Thus, when it comes to expressing the wild aspects of wilderness value, these reason–based language games become susceptible to the same charges of “cognitive domestication” as fact–driven language games. The repression and avoidance of wilderness discussed throughout this paper results from the attempt to articulate wilderness value only through these types of

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 119.
language games. Because we are unable to say much about the intrinsic value of wilderness, we instead focus on its instrumental utility. In attempting to hold intrinsic value up to the criteria of a fact–driven and reason–based language games, we have prevented the clear expression of its meaning. By further limiting its role in articulating intrinsic value in the name of political relevancy, environmental philosophy would cut itself off from one of its most important future challenges, and a rich part of its historical evolution as an academic field.

Bill Hook recently provided a concise synopsis of some of the historical positions on intrinsic value, and a suggestion for a new formulation. In Hook’s essay there are some interesting correlations with the language we saw earlier in our discussion of New Science and complexity. Taking the position that the character of intrinsic value “will remain nebulous until its ontology is clear,”125 Hook begins with an appeal to Albert Borgmann’s information theory. The title of the only Borgmann book cited by Hook, *Holding on to Reality*126 is strikingly similar to Merry’s *Coping with Complexity*, and both suggest an uneasiness or repression of the mystery, uncertainty, and autonomy of their subjects in light of the discoveries of New Science. Hook attempts to again ground his ontology for intrinsic value in terms of rational, systematized language, specifically Borgmann’s work on information technology and Daniel Dennett’s work on evolutionary theory.127 Although such approaches are essential, they usually lack critical self–reflexive examination when it comes to the wildness, where any foundational

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ontology appears counterintuitive to the expression of intrinsic value. It is precisely the infinite creative possibility and open-ended vitality of wilderness that makes it intrinsically valuable, and this autonomy is irreducible to rational systemization.

While Hook attempts to break from the old locus/valuer approach to intrinsic value, his reduction of value to “meaning that derives from realization in coherent space”\(^\text{128}\) is vague and does not provide a clear alternative perspective. The fact that, for Hook, intrinsic value is essentially characterized by the presence of a “realizer” again confounds and diminishes the autonomy and participation of nature in value. Even though Hook’s argument is more subtle than the one-way, anthropogenic meaning assignment of social construction, he gives very little attention to describing what would make nature valuable if humans were not around to appreciate it. This position implies a sort of humanist arrogance, as Hook himself divulges in the section on moral work: “‘[V]alue permeates the biosphere, from the smallest single cell organism to humans, who, through the gift of accumulated design, are uniquely situated to make it decisively meaningful.’”\(^\text{129}\)

The problems surrounding the limitations of certain language games to express intrinsic value, and the ethical implications of these limitations, have received precious little attention in the theoretical analysis of academic environmental philosophers. As mentioned, much of the literature on the subject of intrinsic value explores the phenomenological and epistemological difficulties of locating value in a thing, apart from the valuer of that thing.\(^\text{130}\) Despite these difficulties, few philosophers directly address

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\(^{128}\) Ibid., p. 373.

\(^{129}\) Ibid., p. 372.

\(^{130}\) See, for example, J. Baird Callicott, “Intrinsic Value, Quantum Theory, and Environmental Ethics,” *Environmental Ethics* 7 (1985): 257-75; J. Baird Callicott and Barry Smith, eds., “The Intrinsic Value of
the position of humility that seems to be implied by such limitations. Unfortunately these discussions have somewhat abated recently and, as Hargrove notes, even professional philosophers appear curiously reluctant to continue to use the term *intrinsic value*. Critical examinations of epistemology and information theory, along with rigorous rational systemization are indeed important to our understanding of intrinsic value and these discussions should continue. But we also need to step beyond formulating a systematized ontology for intrinsic value to creating a discourse in which that value can be articulated not only by philosophers, but by ordinary people as well. In terms of the intrinsic value of wilderness, public access to the ethical debate has thus far not been granted. While there has been much written lately regarding the communication of instrumental value, few authors have examined the issue of communicating intrinsic value to broader audiences.

One exception is Sara Ebenreck’s essay on the role of imagination in environmental ethics. Drawing from the work of Mark Johnson on “imaginative rationality,” Ebenreck asserts that the symbolic meaning underlying ethical concepts requires us to complement our rational understanding of these terms with an imaginative understanding: “. . . moral concepts are pervasively rooted in image and metaphor (for example, the image of a physical balance may underlie ideas of justice; the metaphor of moral laws being like natural laws underlies Kantian ethics). As a result, understanding

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morality requires understanding those imaginative, metaphorical structures of meaning. Moreover, becoming morally insightful requires development of emphatic imagination, the capacity to sensitively “take up the part of other,” and the ability to envision constructive action.” 133 Since nature is “other” to humans, taking up the part of this other implies that environmental ethics will also require the use of imaginative understanding. As Ebenreck notes, “In this sense, the very conversation about environmental ethics that has arisen in the last twenty years involves the imaginative work of reinvisioning who belongs in the community about which ethics speaks.” 134

Ebenreck asserts that literature provides one framework for imaginative understanding that might be helpful to environmental ethicists. Likewise, I have argued that aesthetics also offers an alternative, creative framework and language that could complement the rational understanding and language that dominates ethical discourse. Ebenreck presents the mixture of poetry and science in Leopold’s Sand County Almanac as an example of how such a complementary relationship might function, as “each provided discipline and impetus for the other.” 135 Such an approach prevents imaginative understanding from simply collapsing into “subjective fantasy,” while at the same time provides creative ways to deal with the challenges to rational “objectivity” that the open–ended imaginative language game presents:

A major issue is the uncertainty that is introduced with recognition of the ways in which metaphorical concepts of nature lie, often hidden, within any environmental ethics. If we think of nature as a “resource base,” then data compiled about its availability, use rates, and renewability allows making a decision about sustainable use. However, if we add to this idea of nature an

135 Ibid., p. 17.
Teaching the Value of Wild Nature

The struggle to bring “objectivity” to value considerations is not confined to science and philosophy, but has also become a huge issue in environmental education programs. The criteria of evaluation used to determine financial funding and compliance with school curriculum requirements is usually framed through science–based education. Just as we saw with regard to policy decisions earlier, the topic of “values” in environmental education programs is systematically avoided through the employment of science–based frameworks, as Hargrove notes: “Science students are routinely taught that values are personal biases and that they should proceed scientifically in a value–free manner. In the social sciences, students are taught that values become objective by being converted into quantifiable economic values. These values so converted are said to be facts (how people collectively feel) that are free from the taint of normative ethics.”

When it comes to discussing even officially recognized environmental values, such as those listed in the Wilderness Act and the Endangered Species Act, it is most often just assumed that the students both hold all of these values and understand their conceptual complexity.

Hargrove directly links the lack of attention to ethics in education and the negative position of the sciences on values to our current difficulties in bringing real

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136 Ibid., p. 16-7.
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values (other than economic conversions) into public policy and management: “The combination of the neglect in primary and secondary schools and the anti–ethics training in the natural and social sciences has made it virtually impossible to carry out the moral dimensions of our environmental laws.”

He goes on to delineate the contributions that modern economics, pragmatism, and logical positivism have made to our current position of value repression.

It is interesting to note the shifts in meaning with regard to which definition of the term value applies to the concept of economic value provided by modern economics. This equivocation is representative of two types of value reduction in both policy making and environmental education. The first relates to value in the ethical sense, in that all other sorts of values, such as aesthetic, spiritual, wilderness, etc., are systematically converted into economic value. What we really see here is the reduction of intrinsic value to instrumental value that I addressed in chapter two. Hargrove asserts that this reduction is part of the legacy of pragmatism, and has manifested itself throughout our environmental history in the United States. Indeed, the Forest Service’s slogan “Land of Many Uses” seems to be a typical example of this privileging of instrumental value. But instrumental value is also privileged in social science environmental education programs that focus on the economic value of a natural area to a community.

The second equivocation of value in economic value is the numeric sense of the term value. This concerns the translation of economic value into “hypotheses and quantifiable test results.”

Rather than a social ideal, value in this sense is expressed as

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138 Ibid.
139 Hargrove refers to this reduction as the conversion of economic value. See “Toward Teaching Environmental Ethics,” and “The Role of Socially Evolved Ideals in Environmental Ethics Education in
data. As Hargrove asserts, our concept of value here becomes distorted. This distortion is the result of a category mistake regarding value, because we are attempting to use the numeric sense of the term to express its ethical components. The false “objectivity” that comes with quantification disguises the fact that a category mistake is being committed. Both policy makers and environmental educators employ this second type of value reduction in their use of cost–benefit analysis and willingness–to–pay surveys.

What we see in the conversion to economic value is not really a “loss” of value, because most people still feel that it is value, especially intrinsic value, that shapes their decisions about the environment, but rather a loss of the language that was once used to express those values in their ethical sense. The result of this loss is an inability to articulate the value of nature in anything but distorted economic terms. Because people are losing their ability to “think morally,” discuss and consider other types of real ethical values, the loss of ethical language works to further legitimate this reduction of value to distorted economic terms: “If ultimately they are unable to articulate these values, they will continue to rely on economic value translation in policy as we do today.”

In terms of education, the role of value training has become the domain of parents and religious organizations, not schools. Hargrove links the current lack of attention to value education in part to the failed attempts of “concept clarification,” which resulted in

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141 Hargrove, “Toward Teaching Environmental Ethics,” p. 130.
a depiction of value as something that is completely relative, “merely a matter of individual choice, independent of any generally accepted social and moral standard.”

In response, he suggests a historical approach for the reintroduction of value training. By focusing on the history of ideas behind our evolved cultural values, this type of value education can avoid the charges of indoctrination, relativism, and subjectivity. Grounding values within their larger historical and social perspectives provides students with a comprehensible insight on the complex nature of ethics, and emphasizes the relationships between ethics and other cultural institutions. This grounding reconnects ethics with its own rich history, which contains the forgotten standards, techniques, and most importantly, language, that we as a culture have traditionally used to articulate our concepts of value. In terms of environmental education, Hargrove offers an additional foundation in contemporary environmental legislation: “Controversy can also be minimized by overtly tying the value training to the values that are supposed to be promoted in environmental and other laws.” In the next section I examine the possibility of applying the historical and legislative foundations for value training in environmental education programs within the National Park Service.

Practice Example: Teaching Value in National Parks

Over the last three years, the National Park Service in the United States has experienced a renaissance in interpretation and education. This revitalization was first inspired by the 2001 NPS Advisory Board Report titled “Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century,” which recommended that NPS “embrace its mission, as educator,

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to become a more significant part of America's educational system by providing formal and informal programs for students and learners of all ages inside and outside park boundaries."

In 2003, NPS proposed the establishment of the National Park Service education council, as directed by a year long study on visitor needs conducted by the National Leadership Council. Acting Associate Director O’Neill stated that the Education Council will “serve as an interdisciplinary advisory forum, advocating the renewal of the Service’s education mission nationally and in the field, and coordinate with national education partners within the Service to build capacity, create additional opportunities for learning and to expand partnerships.” Later that same year, O’Neill’s proclamation became the charter statement for the Education Council. Although the NPS educational renaissance might still be in its early stages, it is useful to look at how the education mission of NPS has historically been enacted in order to guide future development.

Although many see it as a recent trend, education has actually been a major aspect of NPS management from its inception. In 1917 under the first Director, Stephen T. Mather, the “education division” was one of the earliest departments to be established within NPS. Robert Sterling Yard, who set up the National Parks Educational Committee in 1918, created the first official objectives for education programs in the National Parks. In 1935, the Historical Sites, Buildings and Antiquities Act explicitly declared the need for NPS to develop educational services, and the subsequent additions to the Antiquities Act, as well as countless directives from within NPS, have continued to reinforce this

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144 This report is available at: http://www.nps.gov/policy/report.htm.
mission. Though other important legislation did not specifically address educational components, laws such as the Wilderness Act and the Endangered Species Act provided enormous contributions to the further development of education programs for visitors to our national parks.

Despite this rich history, education within NPS has been fraught with practical and conceptual difficulties. As park management strategies have evolved, education has also had to reflect these diverse changes in practices and values. It is in the treatment of ethical value that NPS has historically met its biggest challenge. Though countless lists of “important values” appear in administrative documents, there is rarely any meaningful explanation or critical analysis of these values. In addition, the desire to transmit these important values to the public has been hindered by the fear of appearing to promote an “advocacy position.” From a purely political perspective, the fear of advocacy appears logical, since the parks are set up to promote and accommodate a wide variety of different interest groups, and to favor one position over another might be considered unfair. Upon closer examination, however, the fear of advocacy actually works to repress value, both in management decisions and in education programs. As with policy making and education outside NPS, this repression has led to a privileging of “scientific objectivity” and fact–driven language games, and the conversion of all ethical value into quantifiable, distorted economic value. Especially in terms of wilderness value, this perspective has made discussions of intrinsic value seem quaint and irrelevant. What results is confusion, in the minds of both rangers and visitors. Because they no

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147 See the National Leadership Council’s report, “National Park Service Interpretation and Education Renaissance,” July 2002.
longer have “permission” to talk about ethical values, rangers are not equipped, and therefore fail to provide visitors (and more importantly students), with the language needed to articulate the importance of ethical values to park management. Although a ranger might him or herself think the Black Canyon of the Gunnison is beautiful and ought to be preserved for that reason, such a view is considered “subjective,” and needs to “backed up” with facts in order to become relevant to management decisions and education programs.

I contend that by adopting a historical approach, such as that suggested by Hargrove, NPS can clear up some of its own confusion about values, as well as begin to include value training in its education programs. Despite the appearance of “value speech” in administrative documents, the fear of promoting an advocacy position is directly linked to the continued belief that park management is a value free endeavor. If we adopt a historical perspective, however, we can see that park management has always been driven by fundamental values. Indeed, those responsible for establishing the national parks in the early twentieth century were themselves advocates of particular positions, namely preservation and conservation. Although both preservation and conservation relied heavily on the sciences, both also included specific ethical platforms as well. In fact, in the early days of management it seems as if the ethical components (although in many cases somewhat misguided) played a much larger role in management than the still evolving natural sciences.149 For example, predators were often removed from parks and wildfires suppressed because they were considered “bad” elements. As the sciences became more sophisticated, their role in management increased, and this

provided clarification for how various ethical positions could be realized in terms of which practices to adopt, etc. Concisely stated, science and ethics have been complementary in park management throughout the history of NPS.

Even though the natural sciences, especially ecology, have continued to provide us with better models of natural processes, the ethical components of park management have not disappeared, as Bratton notes: “Implementing ecosystem–oriented park management provides much better understanding of how the natural elements of a park function, but it does not set standards for how much a manager should interfere with ecosystem processes; nor does it determine if anthropogenic or natural changes in park ecosystems should be inhibited or encouraged.”

“Ought” questions such as these simply cannot be answered by science alone or understood completely through fact–driven language games. As the “ought” implies, such decisions require us to make a choice between different alternatives. Though science informs this ethical debate, ultimately such decisions are based on values and not scientific facts. By repressing value in policy making and education programs, however, NPS makes “meaningful debate about values impossible, ” and ignores the historical ethical component of park management.

The legislative foundation for value training also appears ideally suited for use within NPS as a means to return ethics to its complementary position with the sciences in park management and education. Although the establishment of the parks preceded much of the environmental legislation enacted in the U.S., it is obvious that the values that are now codified in these laws played a huge role in the creation of NPS. Though

150 Ibid., p. 131.
this historical connection between values and the NPS mission may currently be distorted or forgotten, environmental legislation offers a way to reconnect with those values and presents a solution to charges of subjectivity and the fear of promoting an advocacy position in education and interpretation. Hargrove provides this description of legislative grounding for value training: “The conspicuous presence of environmental values in the purpose statements of environmental laws in the United States . . . provides an ideal basis for educational [environmental education]. . . . the values, if and when they are taught, are nonarbitrary. No one can complain about these particular values being taught, for they are specified explicitly in law.”

In addition to the important foundations provided by such legislation, the values in these laws appear vital to carrying out the mission of the NPS, so misunderstanding or repression of these values would be devastating to both visitors and rangers. For example, the Wilderness Act includes in its definition of wilderness an area that may contain, “ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.” Likewise, the Endangered Species Act includes the following clause: “. . . these species of fish, wildlife, and plants are of esthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, and scientific value to the Nation and its people.” A lack of understanding of what these values actually mean weakens NPS’s ability to comply with the specific requirements of these laws. Hargrove sees compliance with this legislation as further incentive to include value training in environmental education programs:

. . . [T]here is an important need to teach these values. Environmental values are routinely translated into weak economic values because environmental professionals and concerned citizens have not been taught what these values mean.

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within their proper historical context. Teaching the true meanings of these values will eliminate the need to convert (and the excuse for converting) these values into an aberrant, ahistorical form and permit these laws finally to be carried out as they were intended by the legislative bodies that enacted them.\textsuperscript{154}

In addition, the inclusion of value training grounded in legislation in education programs also helps visitors understand why the values in these laws are important to them as individuals: “... it bridges the gap between the ethical and the political. It provides instruction useful not only at the policy level but also at the level of the individual moral agent.”\textsuperscript{155} Finally, Hargrove notes that a legislative grounding for value training provides access for educators to the complexity of ethical debates surrounding environmental values: “... it provides primary and secondary teachers with a way to approach environmental ethics without having to rely on the (still confusing) theoretical literature.”\textsuperscript{156}

Conclusion: Putting Wildness Back into Wilderness

Fear of appearing to promote an advocacy position within NPS stems in part from a lack of knowledge regarding the complex historical roles of conservation and preservation within park management. Evidence of this deficiency can be found in the many official NPS publications that continue to conflate preservation and conservation, as if they were synonyms. Because preservation and conservation are portrayed today as non–advocacy, scientific management practices lacking ethical components, it is difficult for those working inside NPS to understand the subtle differences contained in their distinct ethical positions. A more rigorous treatment of the values associated with these two movements reveals that they are not only non–synonymous, but also carry the

\textsuperscript{154} Hargrove, “The Role of Socially Evolved Ideals in Environmental Ethics Education,” p. 23.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
possibility of contradiction and mutual exclusivity, thus illuminating the complex relationship between intrinsic and instrumental value.

While both preservation and conservation principles contributed to the establishment of the National Parks System, right from the start conservation, with its associated instrumental values, was privileged over the intrinsic values implied by preservation. Bratton provides one example of this privileging in promoting tourism:

Early park advocates had to prove that the ‘national park idea’ was not just an impractical notion that would unnecessarily withdraw lands from agricultural and industrial use. This led to a trend, which was to last for decades, of developing facilities to encourage tourist use, and therefore proving by means of increased visitation that the establishment of parks was in the best long–term interests of the American public. 157

Despite the fact that over one hundred thirty years have passed since the first parks were established, this “visitation justification” remains the predominant form of expressing the relevant importance (and “success”) of the national park idea. Indeed, the instrumental value of the parks for people has been the driving force behind many contestable projects now included within the National Park System, such as the creation of Lake Mead and Lake Powell. But intrinsic value also gets overridden in more subtle ways through the promotion of the recreation value of parks to visitors. Hargrove provides an interesting account of this privileging of instrumental over intrinsic value in a comparison to aesthetic consumption in art:

In art museums, where this instrumental conception of value has never taken hold, and art objects are still considered to be intrinsically valuable, objects that are being damaged are simply taken off display and replaced by copies. This option, unfortunately, is usually not available to park managers, who hold that all value is instrumental. As a result, they end up trying to find a way to muddle through by limiting visitation so as to permit as much instrumental value extraction as possible over the longest period of time. This instrumental value approach

permits them to slow the consumption of the natural features of their parks, but does not stop it.158

For most properties within the National Park System, this utilitarian approach of promoting the greatest good for the greatest number of people is the real driving force behind management decisions, and takes precedence over any independent value attached to nature. While this perspective might appear useful with regard to instrumental values such as recreational value, it actually works to disguise these “unstated value preferences,” in addition to completely cutting off any consideration or articulation of intrinsic value. Taken to the extreme under this perspective, national parks become more like amusement parks. The idea of preserving the wild autonomy of nature is forgotten on the way through the turnstile.

One way that NPS might be able to reconnect with intrinsic value is through a reexamination of the concept of wilderness value. The emergence of the official conception of wilderness value in NPS was closely tied to the Wilderness Act and the creation of a national system of Wilderness Areas. Although the original intent of preserving wilderness was linked to the intrinsic values implied by the historical preservation movement, this connection has been lost. Wilderness value has shifted to the domain of utilitarian conservation and evolved to become yet another distorted expression of the instrumental value of nature. The general statement regarding wilderness that appears in the most recent draft of NPS management policies clearly illustrates that, for NPS, the value of wilderness lies in what it can provide for people:

The National Park Service will manage wilderness areas for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such a manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness. Management will include the protection of these areas, the preservation of their wilderness character, and the gathering and dissemination of information regarding their use and enjoyment as wilderness. The public purpose of wilderness in the national parks includes the preservation of wilderness character and wilderness resources in an unimpaired condition, as well as for the purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, education, conservation, and historical use.¹⁵⁹

It is interesting to note that the last line of this statement is similar to the last line of the definition of wilderness contained in the Wilderness Act, with the exception that here recreation and conservation are added and “scenic, scientific, educational, and historical value” are transformed to “uses.” These changes are not accidental; they present clear examples of the confusion and repression on the part of NPS regarding values.

Wilderness value articulated as such is thus set up for conversion into distorted, quantifiable economic terms, stripped of any connection to real ethical value.

In addition to the conceptual reduction of wilderness value to non-ethical economic value, through its association with “official wilderness areas,” wilderness has also been reduced on the physical level. “Wilderness suitability” is currently expressed as follows:

National Park Service lands will be considered suitable for wilderness if they are at least 5000 acres or of sufficient size to make practicable their preservation and use in an unimpaired condition, and if they possess the following characteristics (as identified in the Wilderness Act): The earth and its community of life are untrammeled by humans, where humans are visitors and do not remain; The area is undeveloped and retains its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation; The area generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of humans’ work substantially unnoticeable; The area is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions; and The area offers outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.
Here again, wilderness value is framed in terms of recreational opportunity and little consideration is given to the meaning and value of wildness and autonomy in nature. By reducing wilderness to a set of physical criteria, this standard denies its presence elsewhere, and thus wildness is “incarcerated” within wilderness areas.  

Because wilderness value only applies to wilderness areas, we are unable to articulate the value of autonomy in nature if we happen to encounter this autonomy someplace else.

Teaching children this version of wilderness value is dangerous because it gives them the impression that the only valuable places are those areas within parks that meet these criteria. Thus, other “pocket–wildernesses,” such as empty lots and even overgrown backyards are therefore devoid of value, wastelands awaiting human development. We are not wrong to value wilderness reserves, but it is wrong to portray them as the only valuable versions of wilderness. Birch offers a helpful alternative:

"Wilderness reserves should be understood as simply the largest and most pure entities in a continuum of sacred space that should also include, for example, wilderness restoration of all sizes, mini–wildernesses, pocket–wildernesses in every schoolyard, old roadbeds, wild plots in suburban yards, flower boxes in urban window, cracks in the pavement, field, farm, home, and workplace, all the ubiquitous margins."  

Since most children encounter wilderness in these spaces more often than in official wilderness reserves, we should be equipping them with a concept of wilderness that celebrates rather than prohibits their value.

By reconnecting with the intrinsic values that are part of its preservationist history and implied by contemporary environmental legislature, NPS can reassess the

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161 See Birch, “The Incarceration of Wildness.”
instrumental, utilitarian conception of wilderness value that it currently holds to include some reference to the real defining characteristic of wilderness: wildness and autonomy in nature, not some human–centered recreational experience or set of geographic or physical criteria. Though these types of instrumental considerations are related to wilderness value, its essential value lies in intrinsic wildness. As language is a dynamic enterprise, there is little doubt that notions of wilderness value will continue to evolve. If we want this evolution to move towards an inclusion of intrinsic value, we need to equip future generations with the tools and language to continue to recognize and talk about this type of value.

Because it is in the midst of an educational renaissance, NPS is poised to become one of the major contributors to the concepts of environmental value that are held by future generations. If confusion regarding these values persists, they will continue to be suppressed in future policy making. For this reason, educators have an obligation to clear up the misconceptions regarding value within NPS, and construct programs that teach values in ethical rather than distorted economic terms. I believe that environmental ethics can assist in meeting this challenge, and suggest that NPS may want to consider including ethicists on the NPS Education Council.

The attention to wild otherness that is required by an intrinsic version of wilderness value demands that educators complement their current programs with more creative and imaginative approaches. Because intrinsic wilderness value requires a different sort of language game for its expression, NPS must attempt to step outside of its heavily science–based education programs to include other educational disciplines such as poetry and prose, art, and ethics. Doing so will allow educators to teach children other
ways of understanding and talking about ethical values that do not reduce them to distorted economic terms. Such an endeavor is not unprecedented in NPS. There is a long history of expressing the value of the natural areas that are now included within our national parks through art and literature, and this history continues to unfold today in projects such as *Artists in Residence* and *Humanities in the Parks*.

Wilderness value also offers many possibilities for environmental ethics to recover its essential connection to intrinsic value. I assert that both intrinsic value in nature and wilderness value are “wild values,” in that even though we can talk about them in very meaningful ways, their essence is ultimately “intractable to definition.” Coming to understand these values will require philosophers to augment rational systemization with participation in the more fluid, imaginative, and open–ended aspects of the ethical language game. In plain talk, it is just difficult to say anything about wilderness and intrinsic value with certainty. However, as was discussed with the notion of universality in chapter one, recognition of this uncertainty should not prevent us from making claims about these values; rather this recognition indicates that these values are much more complex and require richer theories for their expression.

Given its lack of political viability, why should environmental ethics be concerned with intrinsic value? It seems to me that intrinsic value is the real ground–breaking development for environmental ethics, and without this focus the field simply becomes an “imperial” extensionist project, and runs the risk of collapsing.

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164 Although his approach to intrinsic value is different that the one I have offered here, Callicott likewise states, “. . . how to discover intrinsic value is the defining problem for environmental ethics.” See “Intrinsic Value in Nature: A Metaethical Analysis.”
into a sort of applied utilitarianism defined only by instrumental values. Instead of repressing the confusion surrounding wildness, wilderness, and intrinsic value, I suggest that environmental philosophers embrace the creative possibilities that they offer and the space that they afford for “wandering and wondering” in their own wild practice.
REFERENCES


Cavell, Stanley. *Must We Mean What We Say.* New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969.


