

THE SOCIAL BENEFITS OF WILDERNESS

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The Social Benefits of Wilderness

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Modern culture has not yet learned to live in harmony with the rest of the natural world. This is largely because we are afflicted with inadequate institutions and personal habits. These habits and institutions are also responsible for many social ills – sexism, homophobia, etc. In particular, “the imperium” is a way of thinking and acting which encourages us to practice a heavy-handed form of standardization; it encourages us to ignore particularity. These habits and institutions – the imperium – are a result of, and reinforced by, our interpersonal interactions. The standardization of these interactions drains the wildness out of them. But to relate to an other in an ethical manner, I must assume that the other is wild, with its own integrity, will, and path. Because our experiences in wilderness are radically different than our experiences outside wilderness, the wilderness can instill in us different, better habits and understanding of relationships. In particular, the wildness of wilderness shows us the falseness of the standardized ideas and beliefs. This wildness also causes us to forge new habits of relating to others, and new beliefs about relationships and others. These new habits are social benefits, especially once we allow them to reform our identity.

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CHAPTER ONE: WILDERNESS AND SOCIETY

Introduction

For around twenty years now, the environmental movement has been actively criticizing, defending, and rethinking one of its foundational concepts: “wilderness.” This reconsideration of the wilderness idea has come about for several reasons, two of which stand out to me personally as worthy of continued study. First, voices from the global South – Ramachandra Guha, Arturo Gómez-Pompa, and Andrea Kaus, for example – have criticized the effects of Australian-American style wilderness preservation practices on indigenous modes of inhabiting the land. Second, a handful of prominent writers in the global North – North American writers in particular – have claimed that having the uninhabited wilderness area as an ideal impedes our ability to scrutinize the social basis of the environmental crisis. This first, “Southern,” claim needs to be taken seriously, and I believe several Northern environmentalists have already begun to do so. But the second, “Northern,” claim has been poorly argued, and seems incorrect¹. In this essay I will offer an argument that wilderness actually helps alleviate the social problems at the basis of the environmental crisis. Our experiences in wilderness teach us to relate better to others. As my title claims, wilderness is *socially* important.

I begin this argument with a reading of Thomas Birch’s “The Incarceration of Wildness.” Birch’s analysis exposes industrialized society’s relationship to nature for the atrocity it is. What he calls “the imperium” desires and attempts to control and subdue nature, entirely denying it the autonomy we environmentalists so cherish in wilderness. The imperium is also responsible for many problems which we would call more strictly social – it is related to racism, sexism, etc – and so Birch shows sensitivity to the Southern arguments. Birch does not ignore the arguments of the Northern authors – quite the contrary. His imperium is the social problem for which the benefits of wilderness are a social solution. But, unlike most of the Northern articles, Birch’s essay also shows, to the close reader, what is liberating and of social importance about the traditional idea of wilderness as a place of wildness.

¹ The sense that these authors give, that we ought to pay as much attention to urban and agricultural landscapes as we do to wild ones, is laudable. But it is absurd to claim that focusing on preserving wilderness stops us from farming sustainably as it would be to claim that trying to end racism stops us from trying to end sexism.

I have no intention of offering *the* definitive reading of this essay, and certainly not of the concepts – wildness, imperium – or problems it deals with. I merely believe that my interpretation of Birch shows a clear social problem which meshes with the intuitions of the environmental movement. Hopefully, my account will also help us move towards a harmonious ecological society. But before I explain the imperium, I believe I ought to clarify how I am using the word ‘social’ in the phrases ‘social benefit,’ ‘social importance,’ and similar expressions.

Social Benefits

Given the history of defenses of wilderness, my reader may very easily assume that a “social benefit” is the type of thing that is equally beneficial for each of the individual members of a society — clean air, clean water, wildlife, etc. I would call these *societal* benefits of wilderness. We ordinarily contrast them with the individualistic benefits we can get from wilderness, such as solitude, recreation, scenic views, and a chance to get away from the city. And I am not denying that wilderness offers us both individualistic and societal benefits. But many arguments have already been mustered in defense of wilderness on the basis of these benefits, and few, if any, have been offered to point out the social benefits.

I am using the word “social” in the phrase “social benefits” in the manner it is used when we say we are going out to socialize on a Friday night, or when a mother tells her child, perhaps at a formal gathering, to be more sociable and less gloomy. Obviously whether any one person is more or less sociable, in this sense, depends to a large degree on the person’s individual character traits. But these character traits didn’t fall out of the sky into this person’s lap, and it’s extremely unlikely that she was born possessing all of them in abundance. Rather, these character traits are largely a result of our upbringings, our friendships, our personal cultivation or neglect, and, especially, our cultural milieu. So my basic claim is that wilderness encourages us to interact with other people, animals, etc. in desirable ways, largely by cultivating certain social personal habits, but also by helping us to think about relationships differently. These new habits of thinking and acting produce social benefits.

Wilderness is surely not the only socially beneficial entity in the universe, but I do want to make two main claims for it: (1) In a society such as ours, there are very few

unwild places to learn the lessons wilderness has to teach. (2) Once we learn these lessons from wilderness, we are less likely to settle for a society that discourages their teaching, and more likely to build a society that encourages their teaching. This second point is of crucial importance because – as Birch argues – the problems facing the areas we call ‘wilderness’ are systemic problems in Euro-American society and, accordingly, need a social solution². Our experiences in wilderness can, I believe, help lead us to a social solution in both these ways; we learn the importance of the lessons of wilderness right alongside the lessons themselves, and so we do not rest long on our laurels.

Although I think that wilderness encourages innumerable positive character traits, later chapters will focus on an interconnected pair that seems most relevant to those who are concerned with the Northern argument. I will argue that wilderness experiences encourage us to be calmer, more careful, and – therefore – more accurate observers of the natural and social world. We thereby learn to recognize and appreciate the genuine differences among, autonomy of, and important interrelations among Earth’s individuals, species, and societies. The wildness inherent in wilderness encourages the cultivation of the first character trait because we must pay close attention to that which we do not control, cannot predict, and can be eaten by. Wilderness encourages cultivation of the second because our heightened wilderness perception of, and attention to, difference and relationships makes us more aware of the importance of relationships to identity and to ethics. Thus our interactions with others become more careful and ethical. These claims probably seem intuitive to the wilderness lover, but I will nonetheless argue them in detail later.

Wildness, Society, and Imperialism

Why, exactly, does American society need the social benefits that wilderness can offer? Currently, Birch claims, we do a very poor job of fulfilling our ethical obligations to other persons, other cultures, and to nature. Indeed, we cannot act as we know we ought; sometimes we cannot even know how we ought to act. In the industrialized North of the world, we are afflicted with certain patterns of acting and thinking – habits – and certain economic and political institutions that make it highly difficult, if not impossible,

² Obviously, colonialism and globalization has spread these problems at least as far as it has spread other aspects of Euro-American culture. But we must be wary of concluding that the solution must also be globalized.

to consistently act as we know we ought. We ought to only eat locally grown organic food; we ought never to buy anything from a sweatshop – but our world and our lifestyles conspire against our morality.

These habits and institutions are not disconnected from each other. Rather, they nearly all share the same “faulty presuppositions about otherness, about others of all sorts” (Birch 446). In this quote, Birch uses the word “other” in its broadest possible meaning; he is talking about other persons, other animals, other species, other cultures, other genders – and the list could go on. Among these misunderstanding of otherness, Birch lists the habit of thinking and acting like others are “the enemy” (447). Obviously, this assumption has little to do with what we believe about the *character* of the other. It is an assumption about how we ought to *relate* to this other.

We assume that our identities and personalities are formed by people or things that are ‘like us’, and that those who are different ought to be avoided. Birch tells us that the “central presupposition is thus Hobbesian . . . in practice, others are to be suppressed or, when need be, eradicated” (447)³. Because others are wild and dangerous, even if only to themselves, we ought to do all we can to bring them into our system of law and make sure they stay safe and under control. We regard others with what Marilyn Frye calls “the arrogant eye,” or at least something very like it (66-72). Frye discovered the arrogant eye as one of the “mechanisms of the exploitation and enslavement of women by men in phallographic culture” (52). She tells us that in a patriarchal culture, “men see with arrogant eyes which organize everything seen with reference to themselves and their own interest. . . . This is the kind of vision that interprets the rock one trips on as ‘hostile’ . . . The arrogant perceiver does not countenance the possibility that the Other is independent, indifferent” (Frye 67).⁴ We will later see how excursions in wilderness force us to relate to others differently and, therefore, change our notions of identity and of how one ought

³ Thomas Hobbes was the philosopher who said that “during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war as is of every man against every man. For such a war consisteth not in battle only . . . For as the nature of foul weather lieth not in a shower or two of rain, but in an inclination thereto of many days together; so the nature of war consisteth not in actual fighting, but in the known disposition thereto” (161).

⁴ Frye contrasts the arrogant eye with the loving eye, and, as I shall later argue, many of the characteristics of the loving eye can arise from our wilderness experiences. I hesitate to claim, however, that wilderness can move us from seeing with the arrogant eye to seeing with the loving eye, if only because “love” is not always the most appropriate way to describe the emotion. “Awe-filled eye” or some such thing might be more appropriate occasionally.

to relate to others.

The institutions, habits, and practices informed by this Hobbesian notion of relationships (including seeing the world through arrogant eyes) work together towards “the establishment of an *imperium* over nature” (Birch 448). In a footnote, Birch tells us, “I am using the term *imperium* in the sense given by the *Oxford English Dictionary*: ‘command; absolute power; supreme or imperial power: Empire’” (468). This clarification is a bit misleading; Birch also uses the word “imperium” to designate something that is striving to establish this complete control. On my reading, the imperium is most accurately understood as a pattern of thinking and acting – a structure, a lens, a framework, a paradigm – which is adopted by the individuals and institutions of our culture in our most characteristic actions. It is not a concrete entity, but rather a bundle of habits which silently structure our personal and political lives.

The imperium is not merely an idea, nor even merely a system of interconnected ideas, although it does contain several systemically linked ideas. It is the meaning and understanding that leads to and flows out of our concrete actions and practices. It links distinct, individual acts, cultural practices, and institutions together in our minds, laws, habits, and writings. It ‘lives’ within the bodies and institutions of our culture; Birch speaks of it as an agent because of this ‘life.’ It neither wholly constitutes our bodies and our institutions, nor is it entirely contained by them. It is neither all-powerful nor unavoidable. But, under nearly any ethical system, the imperium is undesirable. It encourages us to act in socially un-virtuous ways – to treat others as commodities or enemies, for example. For this reason, it is a social problem for which we need a solution.

The imperium runs up against a problem when it tries to control wildness. Birch tells us, “All the usual attempts to subdue wildness by destroying its manifestations fail In the case of wildness itself, there is nothing to aim at and shoot” (449). Wildness, by definition, cannot be controlled or destroyed. No possible disciplinary habit can ever eliminate surprise and change. But natural wildness, at least, can be *confined*. There can be “a place for wildness within the imperial order” as long as wildness stays in its place (Birch 449). This place, of course, is the designated Wilderness.

Wilderness areas are the only areas in which nature is legally allowed to be wild. If we believe that wild nature has been granted autonomy, we are ignoring the ecological

context of wilderness areas as well as the spontaneous disposition of wildness.

Wildernesses are designated within specific and narrow boundaries. On their immediate edge we often see million-dollar subdivisions, interstates, or timber clear-cuts. Just as ‘wild’ humans are confined to prisons, sanitariums, or Reservations, wild nature is confined to wilderness. We tolerate no wildness in our residential or agricultural areas.⁵

It is important to note that Birch does not stray from the traditional conception of wilderness – a place of wild nature – in his analysis. Wilderness areas function as prisons even though no one thinks of them as such. In fact, they function as prisons much better because the defenders of wild nature are oblivious to this fact, just as our ignorance of the entire social problem Birch calls “the imperium” makes it much harder to solve. This social problem, the imperium, is one of the main reasons we can use the benefits of wilderness. Perhaps we can even repay wilderness by ceasing to treat it as a prison. I have spent this time analyzing Birch to raise awareness of this problem, the imperium, thereby making it a little easier to move beyond it.

If wildness is imprisoned in wilderness, how, some may ask, can wilderness be socially beneficial? As I claimed towards the end of my “Social Benefits” section above, the wildness of wilderness is the source of social benefits. The fact that wildness is imprisoned in wilderness areas doesn’t alter its wildness. In fact, wildness is imprisoned in the first place because it cannot be eradicated. The potential remains for wilderness to be socially beneficial, and this is my second reason for attending to Birch. I argue that the wildness of wilderness areas produces socially beneficial changes in habits of perception and relation.⁶ Indeed,

if:

- 1.) wilderness is the only place, according to the imperium, to find wild otherness
- 2.) the imperium conditions our perceptions and actions, even if only partially,
- and 3.) ethically, we need to relate differently to wildness and otherness,

then:

⁵ Birch’s claim that Wilderness is a prison seems, no doubt, absurd to many of my readers. Please do not dismiss it out of hand; consult his essay, and perhaps he can convince you. If not, I have done a fair amount of work towards explaining and interpreting his essay elsewhere.

⁶ It may be that other aspects of wilderness – its naturalness, its beauty or sublimity – are also socially beneficial. And I also am sure that wildness produces more social benefits than those I discuss here. But, for the purposes of this essay, I will only focus on wildness, and only on the benefits of our changes in relationships and in ideas of others and relating.

We need wilderness areas to show us wildness so that we can learn how to relate to it and in it.

Cronon's Objection

Birch's theory could easily be understood as a version of what I earlier called the "Northern" critique of wilderness preservation. One might believe he argues that either the idea "wilderness" is outdated or that it is a dangerous standard to hold. But I believe this to be a misreading of his essay, a misreading which obscures some of his points and, by extension, some of my own argument. Nowhere does he claim that the idea of "wilderness" is harmful. In fact, part of his social prescription relies on the traditional notion of wilderness as a place of wildness. Rather, Birch critiques our understanding of wilderness preservation *practices*, as well as of other practices.

But because of the ease with which this misreading of Birch can happen, I ought to take care to distance myself from the parts of the Northern argument I disagree with. As a representative of the Northern argument, I'll pick the account William Cronon offers in his "The Trouble With Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" because it is well-known, accessible, and influential. Like Birch, Cronon tries to understand wilderness by taking account of its social and historical context⁷. Cronon's essay addresses the concerns of the Southern argument, and his is the paradigmatic formulation of the Northern argument. But, for a number of reasons, I've found many of his assumptions and conclusions unhelpful and incorrect.

The strengths of Cronon's argument are an interconnected pair of points: 1) "wilderness," as an idea, has a history, 2) this history is tied to a very particular society – ours – and, therefore, this idea makes little sense to other cultures. After making the second point, with specific reference to Native American culture, Cronon proceeds to offer a criticism of the idea of "wilderness." His main assumption is that there is "dualism at the heart of wilderness [which] encourages its advocates to conceive of its protection as a crude conflict between the 'human' and the 'nonhuman'" (Cronon 489). This dualism, he argues, infects the environmental movement and our culture at large, "leav[ing] ourselves little hope of discovering what an ethical, sustainable, *honorable*

⁷ The substantial difference, however, is that Cronon is concerned foremost with the idea of "wilderness" while Birch is concerned with the practice of wilderness preservation.

human place in nature might actually look like” (Cronon 484). His conclusion is that we need to reject the idea of “wilderness” before we can properly address the environmental crisis.

Cronon is right to point out that the history of wilderness – both the idea and the places – influences the way we think about, and act within, these places. But his version of the idea of “wilderness” is incomplete; it neglects several important features of the idea as conceived of by conservationists and preservationists. In particular, I find it hard to believe that the idea of “wilderness” is unavoidably and dualistically opposed to the idea “culture.” Several wilderness writers – Fredrick Jackson Turner, Aldo Leopold, Teddy Roosevelt – make clear their beliefs that wilderness can contribute to and form culture. Even more prevalent is the belief that Native American culture in particular is a *wilderness culture*, and a full culture, espoused by Rousseau, George Catlin, and Audubon.⁸ Furthermore, almost all early, and many contemporary, defenses of wilderness (including mine) speak of the good that wilderness does for human individuals and cultures. Cronon offers us a selective reading of the history.

But an extended critique of Cronon’s article is unnecessary for my argument.⁹ The main reason I don’t adopt his perspective for my essay is that I believe he is incorrect in his analysis of the value of the wilderness idea. Cronon argues that the wilderness idea is socially harmful. Although I do not argue it here, I believe wilderness areas could not begin to have the beneficial effect they do were it not for the traditional idea of wilderness as a place of wildness. He argues that the wilderness idea causes us to think less about how we ought to relate to nature, both socially and individually. I argue that wilderness experience causes us to think more critically and concretely about our relationships and about our attitude towards difference.

And although I believe Cronon’s desire for a wholistic, nondualistic approach to

⁸ Rousseau spoke of “those happy nations who did not even know the name of the vices we struggle to suppress, about the primitive people of America, whose simple and natural mode of government Montaigne instinctively preferred not only to the laws of Plato, but even to the most idealistic visions of government that philosophy can conjure” (52). For more on Catlin, Audubon, and Antebellum America’s attitude towards wilderness and Native America, read Mark Spence’s *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, especially Chapter I, “Looking Backwards and Looking Westward.”

⁹ Those interested in an extended critique of Cronon’s article and ideas ought to consult Donald Waller’s “Getting Back to the Right Nature: A Reply to Cronon’s ‘The Trouble With Wilderness’” (Callicott and Nelson 540-567) and Val Plumwood’s rebuttal of “wilderness skepticism” in her “Wilderness Skepticism and Wilderness Dualism” (Callicott and Nelson 672-674).

sustainability is laudable, his focus on eliminating our current concept of “wilderness” leads to a misunderstanding of the roots of the environmental crisis. For this reason alone, I take the time to distance myself from the excesses of the Northern argument. The environmental crisis is much more than a crisis in our ideas. As Birch argues, our mistreatment of nature is intimately interconnected to our mistreatment of other cultures and minorities within our own culture. We need to worry about more than one isolated concept: wilderness. We need to worry about a whole slew of interconnected concepts, habits, and institutions: the imperium.

Conclusion

Birch’s essay is controversial and is not easy to read. I have begun my essay by analyzing it because I believe he is correct in pointing out that our poor relations with nature are systemically related to our poor social relations. Birch calls this system the imperium. Before we can relate to wild nature (including wild human nature) ethically, we must move towards a new sociability, a new manner of relating in general. The rest of my chapters will show how our experiences in wilderness areas can make this possible.

In the next chapter, we will see how wilderness areas, as traditionally conceived, can help us begin to make this move; we will begin to see how wilderness is socially beneficial. As I have hinted, it is because in wilderness, we encounter a wildness which does not allow us to perceive and act in manners compatible with the beliefs and habits that make up the imperium. The wild creatures we encounter in wilderness, and wilderness itself, are always changing and surprising us. So we must continue to pay close attention to the subtle interactions of nature to maintain ourselves in wilderness. We become more careful observers of relationships among wild creatures and between themselves and ourselves.

CHAPTER TWO: THE SOCIAL BENEFITS OF WILDNESS

Introduction

I begin this chapter by picking up the thread of Birch's argument from the last chapter. Birch seems to have left us in a grave state; our society is riddled with habits and institutions which encourage, and sometimes force, us to be unjust to others. Things are so bad that even wilderness, the "other" of the imperium, has been imprisoned. This chapter begins by seeing what Birch can do to get us out of this mess. We will see how wilderness can help us move to "an entirely different story about wildness and otherness," one which discourages the bad habits and social practices that make up the imperium (Birch 457).

Birch's answer to the imperium, however, is merely a sketch towards a solution. He claims that wilderness can help us relate to otherness better, but he gives us neither an argument nor examples to show how wilderness helps us. To fill out his argument, I'll conclude this chapter with readings of John Muir and Aldo Leopold. I believe that Muir and Leopold have a social analysis floating in the background of their thought which is very similar to Birch's, but the present essay is not the place to argue this point. Rather, I will show that Muir and Leopold described and conceived of wilderness experience as socially beneficial. They offer examples of wilderness changing our habits and character traits into forms less compatible with the imperium. Specifically, they claim, as Birch does and I do, that wilderness's wildness causes these changes. Addressing Muir and Leopold after Birch will give concrete content to the theoretical framework I offer in the next two chapters.

The Voice of the Wild and the Answer to Imprisonment

Birch's main goal is to show us how bad our relationships have become, and thereby push us towards a world in which wilderness areas are not prisons of wildness. He assumes that we cannot heal our relationship with wilderness if we do not know how this relationship is flawed. I agree, and I have presented his analysis of the imperium for this reason. We relate unethically with wild nature because we relate unethically in general – we are antagonistic to many sorts of others and unthinking about relationships. For various reasons, our world is full of institutions and personal habits which encourage us to think about and relate to others in a less than admirable manner. And this mis-

relating is, in large part, a result of the imperium's "faulty presuppositions about otherness" (Birch 446). One particular faulty belief is the belief that some others – those who are not dangerous, whom we ought to "tolerate"¹⁰ – are not wild.

Birch opposes this faulty imperialistic understanding of otherness to what he calls "the realities of otherness." He notices that:

the essence of otherness is wildness ... 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 unconditional freedom that permits sheer spontaneity and continuous participation in the emergence of novelty. (Birch 450-51)

Although Birch's terminology may be a little hard to follow, I believe the ideas are rather intuitive. You are different than me – you're an other – because you can choose, without consulting me, to make drastic changes in your lifestyle; you can surprise me. All stereotypes and beliefs I have about you are "faulty presuppositions" because you always are becoming something different.

This ability to surprise *is* wildness, and so wildness is the essence of otherness. To relate ethically in general we must assume we are relating to something wild, something or some one with integrity and a good and a path of its own. This is why Birch tells us that "the real issue" is "the preservation of wildness and of knowing human participation in wildness" (463). Notice that Birch here writes 'wildness' and not 'wilderness.' The imperium holds wildness to be the supreme danger; it tries to set up a world in which humans never participate in wildness. Human interaction with other humans, with nature, and with everything else is bled of all traces of wildness and refashioned in highly ordered patterns. He makes this comment while speaking of natural wildness, but, given his earlier comments, we can clearly extend their implications to the wildness of human others. "Knowing human participation in wildness," then, would require us to recognize that *we* are wild, and that, therefore, all of our social and interpersonal interactions will be wild, to differing degrees. This participation will also require, at the very least, new habits of interacting and of perceiving difference and relation.

Unfortunately, the imperium – which conditions many of our habits and

¹⁰ Birch has the following to say of the imperium's version of tolerance: "At best, others are to be 'tolerated,' which is close to pitying them for their unfortunate inferiority" (447).

perceptions – says that there is only true wildness in the wilderness. Wildness has been locked up. We don't experience the wildness of the soil or of the sun often anymore, and very seldom even see other humans as wild. And, of course, if we can't experience or perceive wildness, we cannot relate to others in their wildness.

Perhaps for this reason, Birch feels compelled to argue that wilderness itself – although a victim of the imperium – can help us move beyond it. This argument is less pronounced in his essay, but he is clear that wilderness will show us the wild other, and allow us to see that it is different than the imperium defines it. As we will later see, this challenge to our preconceptions has powerful effects on our habits of relating.

Because wilderness is still wild, as even the imperium admits, it is different from the imperium's – or any – preconception of it. Even those of us who have never thought outside of the imperium know that wilderness is wild, and so we know that we cannot predict what to find there. It would be foolish to believe that wilderness can no longer oppose the imperium simply because it is imprisoned. So even though Wilderness reservations are indeed – according to the logic of the imperium – prisons, they “are best viewed as holes and cracks, as ‘free spaces’ or ‘liberated zones,’ in the fabric of [the imperium]” (Birch 466)¹¹. Birch here uses “best” normatively; we *ought* to view wilderness areas as “holes and cracks” rather than as prisons. In other words, it is bad faith to believe that wilderness must only be what the imperium claims it is: a prison for all the wildness in nature. We must be careful not to slip into thinking of wilderness's wildness as lawlessness, destructiveness, or enmity. It is, rather, the wildness common to any other's attempt at self-definition, to any form of autonomy; it is that which Birch calls, in the above quote, “radical openness” and “unconditional freedom” (451).

When we enter wilderness areas, we are often surprised. We encounter wild nature and we notice that it doesn't stay in its place. As Birch writes, “When wildness speaks, it always says more than what the imperium would train it to say or train us to hear because wildness stays adamant in its own integrity” (462). Because the imperium is

¹¹ As this quote, and the next few, show, Callicott and Nelson are incorrect when they claim that the “practical implication of [Birch's] argument” would call “for a repeal of the Wilderness Act” (11). Repealing the Act would do nothing but worsen our culture's relation to wildness, unless the repeal was preceded by a radical restructuring and reimagining of this relation. Birch acknowledges that “the establishment of wilderness reservations may well be the best gesture of respect towards nature that Western culture can offer at its present stage of ethical development,” even though he's not happy about it (446).

essentially wrong in its understanding of relationships, one of the first things we notice in wilderness is this wrongness. We might not yet see wild nature on its own terms, but we can no longer see it on the imperium's terms; we can no longer see autonomous bears as our deadly enemies¹². When we go into wilderness, differences seem less divisive and scary – less Hobbesian. As we will soon see in the section on Leopold and Muir, the unique qualities of individual of plants, animals, and landscapes emerge.

These changes in our perceptions – and, consequently, our relations – lead Birch to say that “making a place for wildness within the imperium creates, institutionalizes, and even legalizes, a basis, literally a ground, for the subversion of the imperial system” (462). We are legally allowed to seek out the wildness which is denied to us in our daily lives. We are allowed to engage with what we are otherwise told is the supreme danger. And we *do* see wildness in wilderness, not only because we seek it out – although this seeking is important. Wildernesses are so large, unplanned, and foreign to city or suburb dwellers that we cannot help but be shocked by wild otherness. For this reason, wilderness is useful for transforming society. There alone, we are told and believe, can we find wild others, and so there alone can we relate to these others in new ways. John Muir and Aldo Leopold will now show us what this wildness looks like, and will begin to show us how it transforms us.

Wildness and Standardization

Wildness is and can be many things; it is the “fierce green fire dying” in the eyes of the wolf Leopold shoots in “Thinking Like a Mountain” (*Almanac* 138). It is the “pilgrim circumambulating Jokhang Monastery” Jack Turner shows us (26).¹³ So for clarity's sake, I will begin investigating the natural wildness that interests us in relief. I will see what is not wild, and we will try to understand why. I also borrow this tactic

¹² Bears are scary. They do not cease to be scary simply because we no longer see on the imperium's terms. But a relationship of enmity – which the imperium falsely claims we have with bears – is very different than a relationship of fear, or even the conflict-based relationship of predator to prey. An enemy *knows* s/he is an enemy; my enemy treats me as an enemy. Even when a bear treats me as food, it does not treat me as an enemy. To believe that all conflictive differences are differences of enmity is to think and act with an inflated ego, and to see with the arrogant eye.

¹³ “He was wearing only yak-skin boots and woolen breeches; in the middle of his back, a gilded prayer box the size of a gallon of milk hung from a thick leather strap slung over one shoulder. He chanted continuously in a strong voice, first holding his hands in prayer high over his head, then bowing hard to the ground in the middle of the bazaar --- first knees, then chest, then elbows, his hands still held in prayer over his head. Then he would rise, take one step to the left, and repeat his prayer ... He is the only wild human being I have seen during fifteen years of travel in Asia” (*AW*, 26).

from Marilyn Frye; “One can guess something of the magnitude and direction of the tendencies the thing would exhibit when free by attending to the magnitude and directions of the forces required to confine and shape it” (77-78). Afterwards, we will be better equipped to investigate a particular type of natural wildness: predation.

At one point in “Our National Parks,” John Muir welcomes the “good men of every nation ... to the woods as well as to the prairies and the plains” of America, allowing them to “be as free to pick gold and gems from the hills, to cut and hew, dig and plant, for homes and bread, as the birds are to pick berries from the wild bushes” (“Parks” 60-61). We ought, now, to focus on the idea that they are “as free as” the birds. He makes clear that when some individuals — “the plunderers, who are as unconscionable and enterprising as Satan” — are allowed more freedom than are the birds, the rest of us are worse off than we would be otherwise; perhaps the rest of us even have less freedom than the birds. Even though good men are allowed to take what they individually need, Muir does not allow “lumber and mining corporations ... sheepmen and prospectors,” the same privileges (“Parks” 60-61). I believe his intuition is that the woods cease to be wild when they can be the source of a regular profit for a business. The point he is making is about control and wildness, not about home and market economics. Making a profit from something requires a fairly high level of control, and, to a great degree, the elimination of wildness. It requires seeing the woods through the arrogant eye of the imperium.

Leopold and Muir both emphasize that roads and cars make wilderness less wild as easily as can a business. Leopold thinks auto travel is so unwild that he defines wilderness as “a wild, *roadless* area where those who are so inclined may enjoy primitive modes of travel and subsistence” (“Form of Land Use” 76; *emph. added*). Muir satirizes: “Most travelers are content with what they can see from car windows or the verandas of hotels, and in going from place to place cling to their precious trains and stages like wrecked sailors to rafts” (“Parks” 57). Though we might look at, and perhaps even smell, wild areas from within a car or train, we certainly can’t experience them in Muir’s sense. What we experience in a car is a car.

This is, of course, to be expected. One of the main reasons our culture has invented motorboats, snowmobiles, cars, and trains is to pass great distances safely, consistently, easily and quickly. Motorized travel is supposed to remove all the surprise

and wildness out of transportation; we don't want wildness on our commutes. We want our routes to be predictable just as "lumber and mining corporations" want consistent sources of lumber and minerals.

Accordingly, the lack of corporations and motorized recreation are not the only things that make wilderness wild. All types of mechanization, standardization, and uniform ordering make wilderness seem less wild. Leopold specifically claims that the "wilderness arts" are valuable as ways to "counteract mass-production," which is, arguably, the precise opposite of wildness (*Almanac* 272). We ought to take the term "mass-production" in its widest sense: the production not only of consumable goods, but also of characters, habits, entertainment, ideas, and morals. This mass-production requires the naming and numbering – the standardization, institutionalization and de-wilding – which make the imperium function. Wilderness is unpaved, unwired and wild; this is what allows it to break up our habits.

Wildness and Character

Although Leopold does not outright say that wilderness is socially beneficial, he comes close to saying so at several points. In an early essay, "Wilderness as a Form of Land Use," he offers a long list of character traits which, he claims, "are the impress of the wilderness and the life that accompanied it" (79). Some of the attributes he lists are, "a certain vigorous individualism combined with an ability to organize, a certain intellectual curiosity bent to practical ends, a lack of subservience to stiff social forms, and an intolerance of drones" ("Form of Land Use" 79). Possession of these character traits seems an obvious social benefit. "Stiff social forms" are surely necessary for the imperium, and "intellectual curiosity" usually leads to habits of careful attentiveness to the nature of others.

And Leopold seems right to claim traits like these can stem from wilderness experience. Let's examine the first quality he lists: "vigorous individualism combined with an ability to organize." In wilderness, my individuality is inseparable from my sociality. When I go backpacking for a few days with some friends, I need to carry my own pack. Doing so requires careful and thoughtful attention to my needs, my capabilities, and at least a little knowledge of the land (in Leopold's sense of the word) I'll be backpacking through. I am required to be aware of my personal limits, my

abilities, the abilities of my companions, and I cannot shirk those tasks at which I am most adept without also letting down my friends. To know these limits and abilities, I must pay a certain kind of careful attention to my surroundings and my friends' characters, to the differences among others both human and nonhuman. Our cooperation will be focused on discovering, discussing, and addressing the concrete differences we encounter in the woods, and we will, almost unavoidably, become acutely aware of the different ways we perceive. I will need to be similarly self sufficient and cooperative during most wilderness experiences because I have given up the permanent assurance of safety — and the standardization of interactions — offered by the imperium. I argue that it is the wildness of wilderness which forces me to pay attention to difference in this manner.

When we read Muir's description of the "good men", we ought to realize that Muir is referring to people with characters like those Leopold described above. Muir allows these folks to "cut and hew" because they see and understand the wildness in the woods. They see the trees, plants, soil, and badgers with a keener eye and with more care than do the sheepmen and prospectors. "Nor will the woods be the worse for this use," Muir tells us; humans, culture, people making a living are not, Muir claims, what brings an end to wildness ("Parks" 61). The good people who live these lives are actively participating in wildness, particularly in natural wildness. They see the world differently, and this makes them act differently.

Wildness and Perception

How, exactly, might wilderness change characters in these ways? Let us go deeper than Muir or Leopold tried explicitly. There are probably multiple ways the wilderness can affect our actions, and perhaps multiple ways in which wilderness can change our characters. But, at least, we see, we encounter, different entities in wilderness than elsewhere, and we have different interactions with them. These new interactions require us to learn to perceive the world in a different way, and this new perception can change our characters.

In *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold defines wilderness as "the raw material out of which man has hammered the artifact called civilization." He continues:

To the laborer in the sweat of his labor, the raw stuff on his anvil is an adversary to be conquered. ... But to the laborer in repose, able for the moment to cast a philosophical

eye on his world, that same raw stuff is something to be loved and cherished, because it gives definition and meaning to his life. *Almanac* 264-65.

He even claims that the fact that we must preserve the “primitive arts” as sports rather than as economic reality is a blessing rather than a curse; “In these cases the surviving sport is actually an improvement on the receding economic fact” (“Form of Land Use” 79). This is because their voluntary nature encourages us to be more thoughtful about these arts. When we convert the wilderness arts into sports we become conscious of our careful attention to, and our appreciation of, environmental differences.

Muir’s “good men” are precisely those people who have had a chance to “cast a philosophical eye” on the world. As we have already noticed, Muir’s good men want not to make a profit on the land; they want only to make a living. But to do so, a good person must be, as Muir puts it, “calm enough for discriminating observation,” and we will only be calmed by “the best care killing scenery on the continent,” that of the “Flathead Reserve” (“Parks” 57). Muir claims that our experiences in wild areas can provide us with a type of calm, careful perception that we wouldn’t have otherwise. He describes this shift in perception in an essay called “Peaks and Glaciers of the High Sierra”:

Perhaps some one of the multitude excites special attention, some gigantic castle with turret and battlement, or gothic cathedral more lavishly spired than any ever chiseled by art. But generally, when looking for the first time from an all-embracing stand-point like this, the inexperienced observer is oppressed by the incomprehensible grandeur of the peaks crowded about him, and it is only after they have been studied long and lovingly that their far-reaching harmonies begin to appear. Then penetrate the wilderness where you may, the main telling features to which all the topography is subordinate are quickly perceived (“Peaks” 20).

Muir himself comes close to claiming here that spending time in the wilderness will help us cultivate what Marilyn Frye calls “the loving eye,” which is the antipode of the arrogant eye of the imperium. Frye claims that “the loving perceiver can see without the presupposition that the other poses a constant threat,” and that seeing with the loving eye reveals much that cannot be seen otherwise (74-76).

This type of perception seems a social benefit; if we can see each other, and scrutinize the claims of the imperium, with even slightly more discriminating taste, much stands to be gained. The good people who Muir allows to “cut and hew” are precisely those people who would not do so unless it was vitally necessary. Their heightened

perception has led them to cease to see the world in the way that the imperium does, and they have, instead, cultivated an attention to and care for the woods they live in and on.

Furthermore, this perception comes about largely because, while in wilderness, we allow “the big days [to] go by uncounted” and the “mossy, ferny waterfalls in their hollows” to remain “nameless and numberless” (“Parks” 56-57). The imperium always knows what day it is; it always knows the names and numbers of the waterfalls. But because wilderness lacks the labels that we encounter so often outside it we are required to think on our feet and cultivate careful perception. This heightened perception is socially beneficial as long as it lasts because it encourages us to see others as they are and not as the imperium would like them to be.

In other words, wilderness is most beneficial when we are aware of what it is and what it does to us. When we are aware that wilderness is full of wild creatures and is uncontrolled we act differently in it. Fortunately, the wildness of wilderness encourages us to become more aware of our surroundings. We see plants and animals differently, and so we act differently towards them, if only because their actions are not predictable. We are encouraged to think outside the imperium. Ironically, the imperium itself has made this ‘thinking outside’ possible through its confining of wildness in wilderness. It treats wilderness as dangerously wild, and so we take caution and act perceptively there. The *wildness* we expect and encounter in wilderness changes our perception in such a way as to re-form our characters. We ought now investigate an aspect of this wildness in its own right. Let’s begin with Leopold’s comments on wildness and predation.

The Wild Other

The unwildness common to high-tech transportation and to industrialization are not always limited to unnatural environments. Leopold begins a 1935 essay called “Wilderness” by commenting on the obvious “lack of wildness in the German landscape (“Wilderness” 517).” He then goes on to offer several reasons for this lack. He refers to wildness as “a certain quality” that is absent from the German farms and forests, present in some American landscapes, and “which we I think tacitly assume will be enhanced by rather than lost in the hoped-for practice of conservation” (“Wilderness” 518). This German landscape suffers from “the near-extirpation of birds and animals of prey,” and, as Leopold makes clear, these species of prey are “victim[s] to the misguided zeal of the

gamekeeper and the herdsman” (“Wilderness” 519). The hunting and farming industries eradicated wild predators because predation made business less controllable and, therefore, less profitable. The presence of wild predators has a profound effect on our experience of a place – we actively engage in wildness – and I will discuss this effect in more detail my next chapter.

Leopold begins this essay by discussing the “former [German] passion for unnecessary outdoor geometry” (“Wilderness” 518). Apparently, German forests of the early 20th century consisted of grid-like rows of trees organized as parallelograms, while most of their rivers were straightened and canalized. Birch scolds contemporary America for confining wildness to wilderness areas, but Leopold is noticing that, in the Germany of the mid-1930’s, wildness has been refused entry even to the forest or the river. Even the inherent fuzziness and ambiguity associated with wildness was absent; “The boundary between wood and field tends to be sharp, straight, and absolute” (“Wilderness” 519).

The German landscape Leopold describes certainly seems eerie, but what Leopold’s account can tell us about our American wilderness seems less than obvious. So I will now like to draw out some of the implications of his description. Motorized recreation – which, surely, is unwild – is standardized, ordered, and straightened out much like the German rivers and forests. Imagine the lines on the highway, the rails of the train; those who travel by motor know beforehand where they’re going, how to get there, and that very little will surprise them along the way. If the waterfalls they pass are nameless and numberless, it is only because they remain unseen. These travelers are actually *discouraged* from engaging in the type of awareness required of the backpackers we discussed earlier. This lack of wildness does not allow us to form habits any different than those we could form in the factory or on the interstate. It does not allow us to be surprised by wild others; it does not allow us to actively participate in wildness. Accordingly, we can be safe in assuming that wildness is at least an essential factor in wilderness’s social beneficence.

This type of standardization of the transportation experience is obviously a product of “the geometrical mind” (“Wilderness” 519). Allowing that mindset and those practices to enter wilderness areas – whether they accompany motor vehicles or not –

deprives these areas of their wildness. The German landscape Leopold describes is standardized and predictable in the same way that the highway is, although probably not to the same degree. When wildness is removed from this landscape, there is no longer any distinction between walking through the woods and driving through them; there is no difference – save noise – between driving a motorboat down a straightened river and paddling a canoe. When wildness is removed, we are not encouraged to pay attention to the uniqueness of the trees or the riverbed as we would be if they were wild, but we are encouraged to take them as standardized, mass-produced objects worthy of no reflection.

On the other hand, if rivers and trees grow of their own volition, we can have the careful, attentive type of interaction I described earlier with the backpacking example. And if the creatures of prey are not eradicated, we can gain a sense of ourselves as in the midst of a wealth of living beings, all of them trying to do what we're trying to do: get through the day. We see, as Muir puts it, “a multitude of animal people, intimately related to us” (“Parks” 56). When we see ourselves in the midst of these fellow beings, we cannot help but cease to see ourselves above them. And, of course, our experience of being in the midst rather than above carries with it a loss of total control. Not finding ourselves in complete control of our situation, and liking it, certainly encourages us to begin conceiving of difference in a different way than we usually do. This is precisely how wildness encourages Birch’s “entirely different story about wildness and otherness, a story that does not produce ... ‘criminal’ otherness” (Birch 457).

Conclusion

Because wilderness is home to wildness – the other of the imperium – it makes sense that it usually lacks the standardization and mass-production which make the imperium’s project so successful. The wildness of wilderness requires that we pay attention to our environment and, especially, to how and what we relate within this environment. The imperium is first and foremost a way of thinking about and practicing interactions with others; this way requires heavy-handed standardization. In the next chapter, we will see how the way of thinking about and acting towards others encouraged by wilderness experiences, especially our interactions with predators, counteracts the way of thinking and acting encouraged by the imperium.

CHAPTER THREE: WILD ANIMALS AND ETHICS

Introduction

I ended the last chapter with Leopold showing us that the presence of birds and mammals of prey is required for an area to be considered “wild.” Because I have claimed that the wildness of wilderness is socially beneficial, I will now attempt to show how a particular aspect of wilderness’s wildness – the presence of predators – has a particular type of effect. I will argue that our awareness of the existence of wild animals in wilderness¹⁴ makes us more perceptive of environmental differences and relationships. I will also argue that this perceptivity often leads to a self-consciousness in which we no longer place humanity above and apart from the majority of natural life. We become humbler persons, and we become more skeptical of the imperium’s audacious attempts at “total finalization” – the complete elimination of wildness.

Following this description of wildness acting upon us, I will attempt to explain why wilderness, and its predators, can have such an effect upon us. My main claim is that our wilderness experiences force us to use our minds, bodies, and imagination in concert. I will use Cora Diamond’s thought to try to understand this change; she argues that we are often moved to change our actions by having our emotions and imagination engaged. We see predators differently than we have, and so we begin to relate to them differently. We also see ourselves differently – we recognize the inescapable animal core of our humanity – and so we also see our relationships differently. This re-seeing is a social benefit in itself; we become more humble and more aware of the moral importance of our relationships to animals and other persons. In the next chapter, I will argue that these new habits of relating become most socially beneficial when they become ingrained in our identities, causing us to make our different perceptions and actions tie together in habits and character traits.

Predation and Belonging

How might wilderness excursions uniquely excite our imaginations, particularly, our moral imaginations? Let us take a moment and examine some typical responses to

¹⁴ Wild animals are, of course, everywhere. Deer eat our gardens, bears eat our garbage. At night bats fill the sky of the American southeast, coyotes sneak into L.A., and wild boars wander the streets of Germany. But the common perception – created and fostered by the logic of the imperium – is that wildness and, especially, wild animals are absent from our well-ordered cities and suburbs. We think we can only find wild animals in wilderness. Indeed, some animals are, ecologically, wilderness dependent.

our relations to predators in wilderness. When we enter wilderness we know, at least, that we are entering a wild place. We know that the relations we have with members of other species can be radically different, because the imperium's list of appropriate actions is not enforced here. We are allowed, and allow ourselves, to participate in wildness.

Of course, if there were no wildness in wilderness, the imperium's claim that wildness is locked up in this wilderness could hardly fool us for long. But even strictly on the imperium's terms, we know that in the wilderness we can be eaten. No new conception of wilderness will change this fact, even though mismanagement or deliberate extermination might. We can be eaten in wilderness in spite of the imperium's attempt to "make over the space in which we live *as if* humans had become inedible and everything else is revealed to be more or less available for ingestion" (Hatley 15).

This last quote comes from James Hatley's "The Uncanny Goodness of Being Edible to Bears." In this article, Hatley deals with the "slippery" boundary and connection of the human and the natural spheres. The imperium denies that this boundary is slippery; it imagines a rigid wall which imprisons wildness in wilderness areas, and nature outside of these prisons is purely for consumption. As we have seen, the imperium is incorrect in its presuppositions about wildness and otherness. Nonetheless the imperium is correct in noticing that natural wildness does not always conform to our human desires. Its *response* to this nonconformity – elimination and appropriation – is, however, incorrect. Hatley frames the problem differently: "human beings come to insight concerning the very condition of our humanity through an intimate involvement in the natural order, even as this involvement inevitably leads to moments of troubling and even catastrophic incongruence between that order and ourselves" (14).

Hatley claims we are most starkly aware of this difference at moments of "catastrophic incongruence," particularly when we are aware of the possibility of being eaten. This leads him to pose the question, "How, then, are we to respond in a praiseworthy manner to such discomforts, difficulties, or dangers?" (Hatley 14). The imperium's answer to this problem – total finalization, a strict human-nature dichotomy, and the eradication of wildness – only makes finding a solution harder. Hatley mocks the imperium's answer, that "every roadside in America [be] regularly mowed," and then he proceeds to offer wilderness experiences as the beginning of an alternative. Hatley is

right to realize that “finding ourselves in the position of being prey to an animal predator is a telling case of the natural world’s provoking discomfort” (14). He is also correct to notice that when we enter wilderness, we “willingly become edible” (15). To an extent, then, we are attempting to answer this difficult question when we knowingly enter wilderness.

Hatley distinguishes three different meanings of the word “inhumane,” and claims that the act of a bear eating a person fits only two of these. First, the act is inhumane because “we feel viscerally that human beings simply should not die in this manner, no matter who is perpetrating the event” (Hatley 16). As Val Plumwood writes in a reflection on her infamous encounter with a crocodile, “The thought, 'This can't be happening to me, I'm a human being, I am more than just food!' was one component of my terminal incredulity” (par. 16). Food largely remains a debased commodity in our culture, and we conceive of food as the polar opposite of a fellow creature, a person with projects. We shall explore this contradiction later.

Second, if we are eaten by a bear, it “occurs in a context in which morality, or at least humane morality, is simply not relevant” (Hatley 16). This meaning of “inhumane” shows most clearly the incongruence, the lack of fit, between the human world and the rest of the natural world. The world that allows bears to eat humans – which is clearly an inhumane act – must be inhumane itself. Nonetheless, we can claim that “the bear acts inhumanely but commendably.” This is because the bear is not inhumane in the third sense, “in the manner that murderers and torturers are” (Hatley 17). The bear is not willfully disregarding the moral context that it has been accustomed to; bears are incapable of disregarding human morality. What wilderness lovers recognize – that there is a difference between the second and third meanings of “inhumane” – is precisely what the imperium misses.

Hatley then attempts to show how the first two meanings of ‘inhumane’ are related, telling us that he “must be careful” while doing so (17). This is because we cannot posit the humane and inhumane – the human and the natural, the civil and the wild – as two mutually exclusive categories, especially not as two categories opposed to each other. Hatley writes, “I must be wary of simply excusing myself from the order in which the bear lives, *as if* the entire issue of my own eating and being eaten, of flesh ingesting

flesh, were wholly irrelevant to the significance of my being human” (18). We must eat to be human, to avoid becoming a corpse, and reflection on this fact reminds us that our humanity is embedded in our animality. We also become aware that *wild* animals must eat to survive as well, and reflection upon the ethics of eating becomes much more important.

We know wilderness is a place of wild beasts. When we enter it, we know that, however rare, there is the possibility that we might be eaten. We also know for a fact that predation surrounds us and, if we reflect a little, we realize that the trees and dirt surrounding us are also a result of life feeding upon itself. To willingly enter this arena, we must conceive of wild animals – predators and prey – as fellow creatures. As Plumwood tells us, “Reflection has persuaded me that not just humans but any creature can make the same claim to be more than just food. We are edible, but we are also much more than edible. Respectful, ecological eating must recognize both of these things” (par. 16). If we assumed, as the imperium does, that the mere presence of wild predation endangered our lives, we would certainly refrain from entering wilderness. But we know it to be a possibility, and, as a possibility, we embrace it. Contrary to the imperium’s insistence, we must know that wild animals are not our enemy; otherwise, they would purposely seek us out. They, like us, merely hope to get through the day by discovering some food.

Hatley presents an argument that bears are not inhumane in the manner of torturers; our experiences in wilderness teach us this lesson not by argument, but by changing the way in which we experience the world. Wilderness can change our ideas about, emotions towards, and relationships with others in this manner. Perhaps most importantly, it can thereby change our habits of relating in general. This is socially beneficial.

Imagination and Argument

This type of change in our attitude towards specific animals, Cora Diamond argues, is not likely to be brought about by arguments about our similarities to wild predators. In her essay “Anything But Argument?” Diamond tries to remind us moral thinking, moral learning, and moral discussion need not always rely solely on arguments. Diamond does not deny that moral thinking can proceed by argument, nor does she deny

that moral arguments often change our actions and attitudes. She does, however, wish to remind us that “argument is simply one way people approach moral questions, and there are other ways of trying to convince,” and that, quite often, argumentation is far from being the most effective way to convince (Diamond 292). Diamond seems to ally herself with a class of philosophers who “take as the root of morality in human nature a capacity for attention to things imagined or perceived: what I think it would be fair to call a loving and respectful attention” (306). The structure and content of arguments are merely a few of the many things upon which we can exercise our careful moral attentions. We can also pay loving attention to the differences between and relationships among humans and other creatures in wilderness and in society.

In our daily lives, we are more often brought to attend to something morally by a situation which “enlarge[s] the moral imagination” than by arguments (Diamond 294). Diamond includes several poems in her essay because she believes they stimulate us to imagine in certain ways, and, thereby, to attend more closely to the behaviors these poems describe. These poems can have such an effect because they stimulate our imagination and emotions in addition to our reason. When we are engaged holistically we attend holistically, and because we are engaged more deeply we are effected more deeply.

Works of literature, of course, are not the only entities which can engage these faculties. Our experiences in wilderness, I believe, can exercise even more of our faculties – our hearing, sense of time, and of space – as we shall see Greta Gaard argue in the next chapter. The effect wilderness has on our imagination is due at least in part to our traditional understanding of wilderness as a place of wild nature. We know that we are walking through and camping in the same spaces that grizzlies and wolves do. We imagine how they perceive the world, how we might interact with them, and how our own lives are made different in different environments. Our imagination is augmented, of course, by our very real proximity to wild others, and so we begin to experience ourselves and our place in nature differently.

Diamond’s essay “Eating Meat and Eating People” begins by criticizing philosophical arguments which rely solely, or mainly, on the concept “speciesism.” Speciesism – like racism, sexism, etc. – is the indefensible discrimination against an

individual animal based solely on its membership of one species rather than another; it is clearly a piece of the imperium. The standard anti-speciesist argument claims that because there are no ethically relevant differences between infants, the mentally disabled, etc. and nonhuman animals we are acting on an uninformed and dangerous prejudice when we treat nonhuman animals in ways we are not willing to treat infant humans. We ought not, then, raise and slaughter cows unless we are willing to do the same to the senile. Diamond does not object that the arguments based on criticism of speciesism are invalid; she claims that they “are beside the point” (321).

The anti-speciesist line of reasoning is beside the point because dead humans – who surely do not possess any morally relevant capacities on the anti-speciesist theory – are neither perceived nor treated as possible food items. Humans are simply not something we consider fit to be eaten. On the other hand, “there is nothing in the discussion [of speciesism by Regan and Singer] which suggests that a cow is not something to eat; it is only that one must not help the process along” (Diamond 322). In other words, the speciesist is wrong when she argues that we choose not to eat humans because of a mental or physical capacity they have. Something else is going on; there is another reason for our abstaining from human flesh, and the argument against speciesism misses it. Because it fails to engage us holistically, it will be less successful at effecting changes in our attitudes and lifestyles.

Part of the reason for the overwhelming lack of ethical thought about our relationship with animals is the way in which we conceptualize “human being.” This concept is formed by many things, including the giving of names, respect for dead humans, duty towards other humans, and “sitting at a table where *we* [humans] eat *them* [animals]” (Diamond 324). In fact, Diamond claims that one of the central features of our idea of humanity is our idea of “the difference” between animals and humans. This “difference” lies not in any capacity; rather, “we form the idea of this difference, create the concept of the difference knowing perfectly well the overwhelmingly obvious similarities” (Diamond 324). The idea of human life we form through these practices and concepts is prior to, and the source of, morality (Diamond 324-25).

To a large extent, this idea of “the difference” is informed by the logic of the imperium, especially what I have been calling the imperium’s Hobbesianism. Animals in

general are either wild or domesticated. If the former, they are, to the imperium, dangerous enemies; if the latter they are confined to the world of the farmer, to do with what she or he will¹⁵. For this reason, our idea of “the difference” between humans and animals can be deadly and debilitating for other animals. It is also part of a complex of ideas and practices, the imperium, which are far from socially beneficial – animals are one of the first and most common dangerous others for the imperium. It is nearly impossible to continue to think of animals in this fashion when we encounter them in the manner that Hatley and Plumwood described above; they describe animals which, even when obviously in conflict with us, are not clearly enemies.

Diamond wants to encourage an understanding of animals in which they are not defined as radically “different” from humans. Part of her method is to focus on the concept “fellow creature.” Like the idea “human” or “masculine,” fellow creature is a normative, creative concept which will be revealed through habits and mindsets. A fellow creature is the type of being we can speak of in terms of “justice, charity, and friendship-or-companionship-or-cordiality,” as well as in terms of independence and respect (Diamond 329). Other humans are, generally, fellow creatures. Thinking of wild (or, perhaps, domestic) animals as fellow creatures makes us lose the stark sense of enmity which lies at the root of the imperium.

A fellow creature has a life. But, Diamond wants to claim, “it is not *a fact* that a titmouse has a life It is no more biological than it would be a biological point should you call another person a ‘traveler between life and death’” (330; *emph. added*). The anti-speciesist argument for respect depends upon the animal’s physiology and psychology; if they are similar enough to human physiology and psychology, we ought to treat these other animals with relevant respect. Whether or not an animal is a fellow creature, however, depends upon our relationship to it, our conceptualization of this relationship, and our ideas and practices of relating in general. It depends on how we encounter this creature, how we imagine it, and how we feel we ought to treat it. Learning to relate to wild animals as fellow creatures is socially beneficial because, ceasing to think of them as enemies, we are beginning to relate outside of the imperium.

¹⁵ Pets are slippery for the imperium. In a sense, they are always fellow creatures – witness the recent rise of the term “companion animal.” But, in another sense, the imperium has standardized human-pet relations in such a way that “the difference” remains in focus, and humans are seldom reminded of our animality.

Diamond claims that this notion of a fellow creature is “an extension of a nonbiological notion of what human life is,” an ethical, or at least protoethical, notion (329). This means that even though much of our current mistreatment of animals stems from our concept of humanity, we must not abandon this concept even when we change it. This concept is precisely what will enable us to conceive of nonhuman animals as fellow creatures:

If we appeal to people to prevent suffering, and we, in our appeal, try to obliterate the distinction between human beings and animals and just get people to speak of ‘different species of animals,’ there is no footing left from which to tell us what we ought to do, because it is not members of one among species of animals that have moral obligations to anything. The moral expectations of other human beings demand something of me as other than an animal our hearing the moral appeal of an animal is our hearing it speak – as it were – the language of our fellow human beings. (Diamond 333)

The analysis of our ethical obligations towards animals in terms of speciesism encourages us to erase the uniqueness of the concept “human” and focus instead on the characteristics of individual beings as the appropriate criterion for ethical considerability. But Diamond argues that this approach makes any meaningful consideration of our obligations towards animals, even human animals, impossible.¹⁶

Before we will be receptive to ethical arguments, we must first be led to see the world in a certain way. Poems, Diamond claims, can lead us to see the world in different ways because they engage not only our reason, but also our emotions and imagination. I argue that wilderness – as we encounter it in the culture of the imperium – affects these faculties similarly. We learn to see predators, and prey, as fellow creatures which inhabit our world and share our desires. This change in understanding leads to a change in relating and a change in habits; we no longer see wild others as enemies, and so the imperium’s Hobbesianism loses its grip on us. For this reason, wilderness is socially beneficial.

Predators are Fellow Creatures

Thinking of natural predators as fellow creatures is encouraged in wilderness. This is partly because the imperium tells us that wilderness is a place of wild beasts. Even if we don’t encounter a predator we will think of one, we will look and listen for one; we

¹⁶ There is an important theoretical distinction to be made between moral agents and moral patients, but, as Diamond will later argue, we must be of a certain mindset before this distinction begets changes in action. In our lives, moral theory begins after we have already found a certain thing to be morally considerable.

will act differently, more carefully and perceptively. But this new perception of a relationship with predators also requires a reconnection with our own bodies, and the use of our moral imagination (people who are eaten by bears anywhere but in their imagination usually do not feel a stronger sense of kinship with the predator¹⁷).

But how, exactly, is this socially beneficial? Obviously, our reconception of wild animals as fellow creatures furthers our social interaction with these animals. We can also hope that, if we think enough about the relation of predation to wildness and to food, we will see how, socially, our current production of food is unethical. Especially the production of meat; reflecting on our edibility ought to make us feel more kinship with prey than with predators – especially if we are vegetarians. And I think that our interactions with animals of other species are social issues that need to be improved. This is important because I claim that the problems facing the natural world are social, and that the solution must also be. But wilderness has social benefits beyond our relationships with wild, or even domestic, nonhuman animals. Wilderness helps human persons interact with one another in non-Hobbesian manners. Thinking of predators as fellow creatures can be, as Birch says, “conceived and practiced as part of a larger strategy ... to move humanity into a conscious reinhabitation of wildness” (464). I would now like to explain how our new relationships with predators can have this larger effect.

I think this effect works in at least two ways. First, when we think of the bear or the mountain lion as a fellow creature for wanting to eat us, we are placing ourselves back into the Earth’s complex web of nourishment (conceptually, because we never left biologically). We have a new recognition of humanity, of naturalness, and of how humans and nonhuman animals can interact. As we will see in the next chapter, this recognition of non-Hobbesian possibilities of relationship shifts our identity. Plumwood writes of our previous identity:

It seems to me that in the human supremacist culture of the West there is a strong effort to deny that we humans are also animals positioned in the food chain. This denial that we ourselves are food for others is reflected in many aspects of our death and burial practices. The strong coffin, conventionally buried well below the level of soil fauna activity, and the slab over the grave to prevent any other thing from digging us up, keeps the Western human body from becoming food for other species. ... This concept of human identity positions humans outside and above the food chain, not as part of the feast in a chain of reciprocity but as external manipulators and masters of it: Animals can be our food, but we can never be their food. (par. 14-15)

¹⁷ Although, clearly, Plumwood’s experience is the exception.

Hatley criticizes the futility of this concept of human identity, pointing out that even our burial practices cannot stop us from reentering the food chain; it just takes longer (26).

When we realize that our fellow creatures still think of us as food, even after all the attempts we have taken to make this an impossibility, we find ourselves in a system not only larger than our personal identity, but larger than any system, any imperium, we could create.¹⁸ Because the imperium nourishes itself on the belief that we can create an unwild world – and the accompanying belief that wildness can be confined to wilderness lockups – it is a great social benefit to have persons who believe that the imperium is wrong in this regard. We see ourselves as wild, and we see that relationships with wild others are not essentially damaging.

Second, by putting ourselves back in the food chain, we place our culture back in nature (again, symbolically, for it never actually left). Being eaten by a bear does not cease to be inhumane in the first two senses merely because it is not inhumane in the third. Morality exists as surely as nature exists, as Kant notices. But, Hatley claims, when we see that the bear is not inhumane in the third sense, we can no longer follow Kant in keeping morality and nature opposed to each other, as two separate but equal realms in which we live.

We live in nature first, and only because of this can there be morality. Or, in Birch's terms, order can only exist on the basis of wildness. The imperium is utterly dependant on humans, who are, in turn, utterly dependant on the wildness of predation (and not only of predation, but of reproduction, decay, photosynthesis, etc.). To know this is to "actively participate in wildness"; we realize that human culture takes place *within* wildness rather than, as the imperium believes, *against* wildness. When we realize this we find wildness everywhere, even in the heart of the very system which attempts to eliminate it. And we not only find it, but we find it good.

Conclusion

So wilderness, then, encourages us to perceive the world differently. Our new perceptions teach us that we are embodied beings, that our culture is embedded in nature,

¹⁸ Some wilderness lovers openly embrace their edibility after this realization. Hatley cites the case of a hiker Douglas Peacock who "carries around in his wallet a card with instructions for his burial" they read: "I _____, being of sound mind but dead body, do hereby bequeath my mortal remains to feed the Grizzly Bears of North America" (RN, 25).

and that wildness is ubiquitous. We relate to wild animals as our fellow creatures. Ethical reflection upon these facts will show us that a society which desires the eradication of wildness, like the imperium, can result in nothing less than mass confusion about the good life. If successful, the attempt of a society to eradicate wildness can be nothing less than self-destructive. After some thought, we will engage more heartily in wildness, and we will be encouraged to be more humble and grateful, because our own lives are seldom in our hands. In the next chapter, we will investigate how these changes in our worldview become changes in identity which, in turn, result in a multiplicity of socially beneficial habits and associated character traits.

CHAPTER FOUR: PERCEPTION, IDENTITY, AND WILDERNESS

Introduction

I hope to have now established that the wildness of wilderness can make us see, think, and act differently. The lack of standardization and the presence of wild life essential to wilderness encourage us to perceive and act in ways that are neither predictable to, nor approved by, the imperium. Specifically, treating our interactions with wild animals as social – thinking of them as our fellow creatures – alters our understanding and manner of relating socially. Hatley and Plumwood tell us explicitly that they gained new understandings of human society and its place in wildness from their interactions with creatures of wilderness. These new understandings are some of the social benefits of wilderness.

But isolated changes in individual actions in the wilderness will not benefit society. Our actions in wilderness can be socially beneficial only if they engender character traits – and, thus, habits and eventually institutions – that persist when we leave wilderness. Because I am arguing that wilderness can and does engender socially beneficial habits, I will have to show how our wilderness perceptions and actions gain staying power. So in this chapter, I argue that wilderness perception and action alters our personal identities, as well as our notions of identity and of relationship in general, thereby leading us to cultivate different habits of interacting with others. I hope many of my examples have already shown something very like this change in identity. In her essay “Ecofeminism and Wilderness,” Greta Gaard makes this same argument about identity formation.

The imperium’s Hobbesianism encourages us to relate to others as enemies. It thereby denies us certain types of relations and, accordingly, certain identities. When we go into wilderness, knowing it’s wild, our new enhanced perceptions¹⁹ encourage us to relate to others differently. These new relational experiences in wilderness shake up our previous habits of relation and, thereby, the imperium’s Hobbesianism. Once the imperium’s manner of relating can no longer be taken for granted, the sense of self it creates for us begins to fracture. This allows for a different sense of identity to begin growing. The new sense of identity is the true source of the social benefits of wilderness.

¹⁹ And, undoubtedly, our loaded expectations.

The Imperium on Identity and Agency

What I have been calling “the imperium’s Hobbesianism” is a belief about how we ought to relate to those we consider others in any sense. Particularly, it is the belief that we ought to treat others as enemies, or at least potential enemies, and the accompanying habit of viewing the world with the arrogant eye. This belief – and especially the actions and institutions informed by it – is socially harmful. Because of this belief, we need the social benefits of wilderness. Like all beliefs, this Hobbesianism requires a few assumptions, and at least two of these assumptions deserve scrutiny here. I shall call them the ‘conflictive’ assumption and the ‘finalization’ assumption. Birch explores both of these assumptions.

The first assumption is that “opposition is fundamentally conflictive, rather than complementary, or communal, or Taoist, or ecosystemic” (Birch 447). Republicans and Democrats, Communists and Capitalists, and Christians and Muslims *must* be hostile to each other; they have no other choice.²⁰ This first assumption is false; opposition is complementary at least as often as it is conflictive. As Hatley showed us, the bear is not hostile even when it attempts to eat us; wilderness offers us numerous examples of opposition not being conflictive. The conflictive assumption is nothing more than propaganda aimed at controlling and obliterating wildness and otherness.

We have already encountered the second assumption; all identities, or at least the identities of all others, are finished and static – finalized. This second assumption informs the “faulty presuppositions about others” that we discussed in chapter two. As we saw in that chapter, the second assumption is also false; agency requires a capacity for change, a wildness, which is incompatible with finalized identities. Birch claims that this second assumption – that all identities are finalized – is also rooted in a desire for control: “imperial power seeks to define and fix identities in order to internalize others into its own system of domination” (451). Both these assumptions clearly inform the imperium’s belief in Hobbesianism, which seems to be in a precarious position at this point in our argument.

But behind the above two assumptions, there is a third. To assume that all

²⁰ Not everyone is in conflict. Most of those considered ‘the same’ on whatever level – civilized, Christian, male, white – are not thought as having identities importantly different than each other.

identities are finalized and that all opposition is conflictive, the imperium must first assume that our identities are not formed, shaped, or even altered by our relationships with others. If my identity could be formed by others, my identity would not be finalized. If my identity was formed by others, I would at least have a few non-conflictive relationships with others. Neither of the above assumptions would be able to stand without the root assumption that our relationships with others have no effect on our identities.

This root assumption is also incorrect, as Gaard argues. In her essay, she consistently argues for “a sense of self formed through relationship, connected to yet distinct from Others” (Gaard 15). Human identity, Gaard claims, is *always* formed in relationships, even though we are often unaware of it. Certainly, this claim seems intuitively closer to the truth than Hobbesianism. Let us now examine her claims.

Identity, Relationship, and Nature

Gaard has a wealth of literature to draw on to make the argument that identity is formed through relationships. For example, Chris Cuomo argues that “Moral agents – selves – ... are necessarily relational, on the most fundamental physical and existential levels, and in many directions” (200). In this regard, Cuomo is making an ontological claim; she writes that “without certain social realities there would be no context for the development of individuals” (199). Cuomo also offers an ethical argument; any philosophy which attempts to understand identity without paying attention to relationships will offer an epistemologically and morally skewed picture. And, of course, Cuomo’s argument is only one of many which claim that identity is formed through relationships.

The ecofeminist claim about the importance of social relationships to identity formation is very important to my argument. The character traits that I’ve called socially beneficial are closely tied to our identity. In everyday English, ‘character’ and ‘identity’ are even used as synonyms. A new identity, or even a slightly modified one, comes with a whole slew of new character traits and habits. New relationships – for example, with predators in wilderness – can, therefore, result in great changes to our habits. My identity encourages me to cultivate a whole bundle of interconnected habits, and these habits

reinforce my identity.²¹

Gaard's account – based in the work of other feminists and ecofeminists – emphasizes this rooting of character traits in our identities. Her “ecofeminist ecological self” is a notion of a self which is formed in relationships with others of all sorts without attempting to blend into or become part of any one other (Gaard 15). As we enter the wilderness and our relationships change, so does our identity, and, therefore, so do many of our character traits and habits. Relationships with fellow creatures in the wild encourage us, at least, to become more careful and more aware of how we relate.

Many feminists and ecofeminists have argued for something like Gaard's “ecofeminist ecological” theory of identity formation. What is unique, new, and interesting about her account is her insistence that human identities are formed “not only in relationship with other humans, but also in relationship with other animals and with nature” (Gaard 14):

While it is an accepted fact that humans shape the identity of nature (through building cities, dams, roads, tunnels, and through logging, mining, pollution, etc.), Western culture has failed to acknowledge that nature shapes human identity beyond the mere process of physical evolution. This denial is notable particularly compared to the accepted fact that nature shapes the identity of plants and [other] animals (Gaard 15).

This failure to notice how our relations with nature form our identity seems related to the imperium's conflictive assumption about relationships. If I have no other way of relating to wild nature than as an adversary, then I have strong existential reasons to deny its influence on the formation of my identity.

In fact, merely realizing the truth of Gaard's theory is socially beneficial. Hobbesianism requires that we believe identities are not formed by others. Gaard's theory teaches otherwise; we cannot believe in something like the ecofeminist ecological self and still support the imperium. Believing in Gaard's “ecofeminist ecological self” encourages us to become more self-conscious about how we relate to others – even nonhuman or nonindividual others – because we know that these relations will make us – and the others – who we are, or who we want to be. This consciousness in relationships is a far reaching social benefit. Its effect is a polar opposite of the effect of the imperium's Hobbesianism.

²¹ The habits associated with a given identity – and, quite often, the identity itself – are, of course, determined by larger social relationships and cultural institutions.

Furthermore, our experiences in wilderness teach us to intuitively believe in something very like Gaard's ecofeminist ecological self. When Plumwood tells us that her encounter with the crocodile has changed her opinion of what it means to be food, we have a clear example of a relationship with a wild other effecting a change in identity. Leopold's claim that wilderness is responsible for many uniquely valuable character traits is a version of Gaard's argument for the ecofeminist ecological self ("Form of Land Use" 79). One of the social benefits of wilderness I've been arguing for is that our wilderness experiences make us more aware of the importance of relationships to identity and to ethics. Another way to state this same claim is to say that our wilderness experiences show us the truth of Gaard's ecofeminist ecologist self. Knowing this truth makes us more likely to take care in our relationships with all kinds of others.

Perceptual Orienteering

Most of Gaard's essay focuses on wilderness's ability to offer "a different kind of perceptual orienteering, a different way of locating oneself in relation to one's environment." She points out that our senses of "space, energy, sight, smell, and even our sense of time" are all shaped by the things, events, and processes we encounter in our daily lives (Gaard 17). Our environment is the source of our daily encounters, and, of course, our daily encounters and experiences go a long way towards constructing our identities, our habits, and our character traits. As we saw in our last two chapters, in wilderness we often perceive other creatures in a new way, and so relate to them in a less Hobbesian manner. We see a cougar as a fellow creature, and not as an enemy, even though we know it might eat us. Eventually, if we spend enough time in the wilderness, this new style of relating becomes ingrained in our identities as socially beneficial habits.

Gaard claims that wilderness lets us "radically realign" our senses of time, smell, etc. When Muir tells us that he has become "calm enough for discriminating observation" we can say that he has radically realigned his senses ("Parks" 57). "From this altered [wilderness] perspective," Gaard reasons, "humans may be better able to envision the kind of relationships that they would like to have with other humans, animals, and the Earth itself" (17). She then offers a phenomenology of the operation of each of these senses (sight, time, etc.) in our civilization, and contrasts these descriptions with descriptions of the experiences we often can have in wilderness settings (Gaard 17-23).

She comes to the same conclusion that Muir and Leopold do; in wilderness we experience the world differently, perceive the world differently, and change our opinions of the way the world can and ought to function. Once these perceptions and opinions become integral parts of our identities, they result in a multiplicity of socially beneficial habits.

I heartily encourage anyone interested in perception or wilderness to read Gaard's phenomenology, but I have neither the skill nor the desire to mimic it here. Instead, I will shortly offer a similar analysis of wilderness altering our sense of relationship; my previous two chapters consisted of little else but examples of this alteration. Most important to the present discussion is the conclusion she reaches through her phenomenology:

For humans in relationship with wilderness, there is an emphasis on heightened awareness of the experiential data perceived through human bodies; it becomes evident that, as a consequence of our embodiment, humans are animals. Thus, a human-wilderness relationship offers a context which redefines 'human' identity as 'human animal,' a concept which articulates an ecofeminist ecological self: it names our participation both in culture and in nature, thereby diminishing the nature/culture dualism... The radical potential for initiating a transformation of Western culture's relationship with wilderness lies in the master identity embracing its animal nature ... for if wilderness orientation alters human *perceptions* of nature and culture, it may also alter human *conceptions* of appropriate ways of structuring the relationship between culture and nature, and through these conceptions, it may alter *behaviors* as well. (Gaard 24)

If, as I said earlier, the imperium is both a pattern of thinking and of acting, a system of practices and institutions united by common beliefs and habits, then we need, in Birch's words, "an entirely different story about wildness and otherness" (457). Like all stories, even the imperium's, this story must be grounded in concrete practices if it is to make any sense. Gaard here suggests that a new story, one in which humans are seen as a part of culture *and* of nature, can arise through our concrete practices in wilderness.²² The core of the imperium's story is a belief and a habit of relating to all others as enemies. The core of this new story is an understanding that we are who we are because of our interactions with others, and an accompanying habit of relating more ethically.

²² This is in direct contrast to Cronon's claim that "wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural," and especially his claim that "to the extent we celebrate wilderness as the measure with which we judge civilization, we reproduce the dualism that sets humanity and nature at opposite poles" (484). Cronon can only make this claim because he believes that the word "wilderness" refers only, or mostly, to an idea, and, in particular, because he ignores the positive connotations of this idea – wilderness as a place of wildness.

Here, then, is at least one way wilderness produces social benefits. In our wilderness experiences, we notice the world around us in a different way – we hear “the voice of the other,” in Birch’s words – and this noticing changes the way we react to our world (452). We thus establish new patterns of perceiving and of acting which, once embedded in our identities, will remain helpful even when we reenter civilization. Our new perceptions and conceptions lead us to think differently of who we are, and of how humans ought to relate to the natural world and to each other.

Furthermore, we become acutely aware of how differences in our environment shape our perception. We know that we see things differently in wilderness than in civilization. We begin to learn a few of the myriad of ways we can relate to others outside of the imperium, and we may even realize the damage caused by relating to others as the imperium recommends. We thereby can gain a desire to end the imperium by restructuring society so that the sociality of identity and the ethical importance of relationships are not obscured. This is at least part of what Leopold means when he claims that wilderness experience instills us with an “intolerance of drones” (“Form of Land Use 79). We become less tolerant of attempts to conform irregular ethical situations to a code prefigured by the imperium, especially when this code pays little or no attention to the moral importance of relationships or to those involved.

Conceptions of Relationships

In the above extended quote, with which Gaard ends her essay, she claims that “if wilderness orientation alters human *perceptions* of nature and culture, it may also alter human *conceptions* of appropriate ways of structuring the relationship between culture and nature, and through these conceptions, it may alter *behaviors* as well” (24). Although she has offered us a wonderful account of the changes wilderness brings about in perception, her claims about conceptions and behaviors remain, at the end of her essay, ‘ifs’. She offers us neither an argument about wilderness changing conception or behavior nor examples; she merely leaves us with the sense that it seems likely.

In my previous two chapters, I have offered examples of changes in conception and behavior. Many readers, I imagine, will find themselves convinced by the power of those examples alone; even if you have not yet been convinced, please keep them in mind. In this final section of my essay, I hope to offer the argument Gaard leaves undone.

All my final argument intends to show is that the examples I've been offering are not isolated, unconnected events; they are connected by the same underlying causal pattern.

Let us begin by specifically examining the type of interactions we can have with predators in the wilderness, those we described in the last chapter. In the wilderness, we relate with those predators with more than our minds and imaginations; these act in concert with our bodies and our five senses. Even if we never encounter a bear or a wildcat in person, we know they live in wilderness, and we eventually encounter their scat or sign. We smell their presence; we look around and viscerally feel that this world is better suited to wolves, snakes, and deer than to humans. We often meditate on the predator's embodiment, as well as our own.

As Hatley showed, our wilderness experiences teach us that bears are not inhumane in the manner of torturers. Their inhumanity is not a failure; rather, it's commendable. We learn this partly because we reflect on our own embodiment, on the bear's body, and on the relation of bodies to food. It is hard *not* to think of such things when we see crunched bones in scat. Reflection on the specific type of inhumaneness of predators causes us to change our opinion of them. We see their desire to eat us not as enmity but as part of their laudable nature.²³ As Plumwood showed, we also learn to recognize that all animals are made of food but deserve to be thought of and treated as more than mere food.

In short, we begin to think of wild animals as fellow creatures rather than as enemies or commodities. When we think of wild animals as fellow creatures, we extend to them our evaluations about the ethical importance of life. This shift in attitude is very significant. As Diamond showed, the imperium helps us construct much of our identity based on a belief in a simplistic "difference" between humans and other animals. When this belief begins to appear false, or at least complicated, we are encouraged to become more cautious in our judgments and keener in our perceptions. We cultivate what Marilyn Frye calls "the loving eye" – or at least something very like it:

The loving eye knows the independence of the other. It is the eye of the seer who knows that nature is indifferent. It is the eye of one who knows that to know the seen, one must consult something other than one's own will and interests and fears and imagination. One must look at the thing. One must look and listen and check and question. The loving eye

²³ Hatley cites a handful of sources who report that resentment toward bears by victims and family members of victims of bear attacks is rare (*RN*, 15-16, 27-29).

is one that pays a certain sort of attention. (Frye 75)
Muir's "good men" have cultivated this loving eye; for this reason Muir allows them to "dig and plant," knowing they will not take too much ("Parks" 60-61). Plumwood sees the world with this eye when she realizes that all food deserves to be treated as more than a commodity – as a fellow creature. And we see this way when we realize we are, as Gaard says, a "human animal."

Wilderness brings about this change in our understanding of our selves – our identities – and in our understanding of relationships. It does so for at least two reasons. First, wilderness is wild. The wildness of wilderness surprises us, catches us off guard, and makes it harder for us to fall back on the unwild habits of the imperium. Wolves do not follow the rules of the imperium, and so we have a hard time sticking to them when we relate to wolves.

Second, we are in wilderness as fully embodied beings. We act with our senses, imagination, and mind in harmony. We sense a world that is physically very different than the world of cities and cars. The air is different, the ground is harder to move across. We hear different sounds and orient ourselves according to mountains and creeks rather than buildings and street signs. This makes it easier to imagine the life of a bear and, therefore, to imagine the bear as a fellow creature. But we are equally aware of the radical difference of the bear; we recognize limits to our imagination and understanding as well as the physical limits of our bodies and those of our minds. Recognition of these limits means we have already left the imperium, in part. Recognition of these limits is also what causes us to look at the world with a loving eye.

In learning to look at the world with a loving eye, we learn to know ourselves better (Frye 75). We become more humble and less arrogant; we recognize better the ethical importance of our relationships with others. We recognize, also, the importance of the wildness of the other. As Birch taught us, no agent can be other without being wild, unpredictable – other. When wilderness teaches us to look with a loving eye, we become the type of person who can recognize and respect this inherent wildness in others and, especially, in our relationships with others. This is a new identity.

Conclusion

We gain a new identity in wilderness, and this new identity cannot mesh easily with the imperium. Accordingly, we cultivate habits of care and respect based on our

keener perception of desires, relationships, and habits, and our attention to and acceptance of wildness both natural and cultural. These new habits and identities inform and encourage each other, and both are socially beneficial. And this is bad news for the imperium because it is composed and supported, largely, by our personal beliefs and interpersonal interactions. When our identities change, our habits change, our perceptions change, and so the imperium begins to crumble.

We see the other as s/he is – including her/his wildness, the part we can neither quite see nor comprehend. We no longer can interact with persons as if they must either share our identity or desire our demise. We actively participate in wildness; we no longer act as if others lack, or at least ought to lack, wildness. We are prepared to encounter that for which we cannot prepare, and we are happy about it. Our new habits will no doubt influence those we interact with to think differently of difference, others, and relationships. We question what we have not, we welcome what we have not, and our peers will wonder why.

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