

Wilderness: *Nature Out of Control*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to answer the question, “what is wilderness?” It argues that throughout history, wilderness and human habitation and modifications of it have coexisted, and wilderness has been thought of as both a place of danger and one of refuge, transformation and empowerment. This contradicts both the American so-called “Received Wilderness Idea” of wilderness as necessarily uninhabited and significantly unmodified by human beings, and critiques of the entire idea of wilderness as a mere cultural construct that does not reflect physical reality. The “Received Wilderness Idea” has been extremely influential for policy, and its application to wilderness preservation across the globe has caused the sometimes violent displacement of human populations with sometimes tragic consequence. Its implementation has also even in some cases damaged the biodiversity it sought to protect. Yet many contemporary definitions of wilderness in theory and practice acknowledge its histories of indigenous occupation. It is found that many of these definitions remain, however, arbitrary and equivocal. It is proposed that wilderness be defined as the kind of environment where nature is out of human control as the dominant shaping factor. In order to overcome the problem of confusion with and attachment to the Received Wilderness Idea, an enquiry is made into what we mean by “nature”, and the ways in which nature is out of our control. This enquiry reveals the wildness not only of wilderness, but of the human world and human existence, a discovery that allows us to transform ourselves and our environments by letting go of the illusions of control that are destroying wilderness, biodiversity, and human potential.

Declaration of Originality

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For Katriona, for everything, and everything we are yet to discover.

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Introduction.

In Tasmania, the idea of wilderness is of supreme political and cultural importance. For forty years it has divided the population—loggers, industrialists and populist politicians and their supporters versus environmentalists who rapidly found their own way into the centre of political life, now for the second time sharing power with a Labor Party minority government. A “Forest Peace Deal” is tenaciously being held from falling apart, as players on all sides pull against it. Logging contractors are forced to leave the state for business in Western Australia, as business crumbles, investors pull out, and a pulp mill, finally, is not built. Meanwhile, the government and miners try to press on into the state’s northwest Tarkine wilderness, where the pollution from current mines is all too obvious to see. In the southwest of the state, a girl remains up a tree, trying to protect a forest from being logged, for a record time. State forestry scientists mutter about responsible management, data, and world’s best practice. Environmental spokespeople and Logging communities say from opposite sides, “It’s not enough”. There is a long, long way to go on all sides.

Meanwhile, elsewhere, the world’s environments that have the highest levels of biodiversity are disappearing at a far, far greater rate than Tasmania’s forests. Under some definitions, these areas might be included as wilderness, under others not. Looking at all the paper that still surrounds technologically enhanced lives, it is hard not to wonder: where does it all come from? Of course, the picture I have painted makes a basic assumption: that there actually *is* such a thing as wilderness. But many, including some well respected scientists and philosophers, are not so sure.

Even if there were no such thing as wilderness, the question would still be well worth asking: what is it, exactly, about the environments people *call* wilderness, that inspires such passions

in its believers, who are prepared to sacrifice their wellbeing and personal safety to save it? Even if we were to be cynical and say, “there’s nothing special about these environments, it’s all *them*—it’s all in their *minds*”, it would still be worth asking, “yes, but why *these* environments?” “Why do *they* and not other environments trigger these tendencies within wilderness defenders, and what is it, really, that is being triggered?” “What are they *hungering* for, what is it that they *see*?” Again, the cynic might reply “nothing but fantasies, delusions”, and add slyly, “idle hands make mischief”. Pressed further, the cynic might look at some forest blockaders and say, “look at them, it’s so schizophrenic: one minute they’re getting all dewy-eyed and spiritual about soft, gentle mother nature and how we should all live in love and peace like faeries, protecting the possums and quolls and all the other vermin, and the next these feral punks are flashing their arses and sticking their fingers up at the loggers and police! Juveniles! They think they’re new-age-hippy-punk-rock-star super heroes saving the planet and everyone else is an asshole”.

The environmental philosophers and scientists are, of course, for the most part, far more sober in their assessments. “There is no such thing as wilderness”, they will say, “because wilderness means land unmodified by human beings, and yet the Great American West and all the other famous wildernesses of the world became what they are through thousands and thousands of years of radical human modification, through burning and the extermination of the megafauna, to name just a couple of examples. Then they will talk about the people who have been displaced from their lands, and perhaps even biodiversity loss, and how when we leave nature to its own devices, things often don’t go the way we want them to. If asked why they think wilderness is so important to so many people, they will say something like, “misunderstanding about the actual facts, nationalistic mythology and nostalgia, and a taste for the sense of transcendence in religious worship and its charismatic zeal”. All in all, the signs are not encouraging. But should we really be so quick to dismiss wilderness and the people who so passionately seek to defend it?

What exactly is wilderness, if there indeed is such a thing? This thesis begins, in chapter One, by enquiring into the history of our understanding of wilderness as a potential reality, and as

a term. The first section examines the speculations of a number of recent thinkers about what they call the Palaeolithic experience of wilderness, and how they think this could have an unrecognized existential import for contemporary experiences, where it is defined in opposition to modern industrial societies. The second part looks at the etymology and history of the term in the English language, and finds that certain assumptions critics of the idea of wilderness make about this history are false. Ideas of wilderness from their earliest beginnings have viewed wilderness as dangerous *and* a place of refuge, as including forest, deserts, and all kinds of terrain, even the sea. Most importantly, they contradict those who believe wilderness must be land uninhabited and unmodified by human beings. From the beginning wilderness has been a place where people have dwelled and that they have transformed, and has even been instrumental in the forming of nations and the seizing and maintaining of power and sovereignty. The purpose of this chapter is to establish how ideas of wilderness have been with us for as long as written language, and how simplistic and inaccurate some ideas about this history have been—for example, the common notion that until the nineteenth century, wilderness simply meant “wasteland”, and was viewed as a place to be avoided. It shows the importance and richness of wilderness experience throughout history, and tries to understand how we might relate the deep past to our contemporary experiences of wilderness and society.

In chapter Two, contemporary legal and scientific definitions of wilderness are examined, and some essential differences and ambiguities are exposed. The American 1964 Wilderness Act defines wilderness as a place “untrammelled by man, where man is a visitor who does not remain”, but at the same time allows all kinds of exceptions to this such as mining and forestry. Contemporary Australian and international definitions stress that wilderness can allow some degree of human habitation and modification, explicitly recognizing the continuing presence and history of indigenous peoples within some of them. In general, wilderness is defined as land relatively unaffected by the impact of modern industrial societies. Ways of accurately measuring this, however, can be difficult to determine. Furthermore, some definitions move between defining some kind of wilderness “quality” that is a real, empirically measurable property of environments, and saying that wilderness

“areas” are cultural constructs that do not reflect these realities. This kind of ambiguity risks blurring the distinction between what is at stake in physical, ecological terms with cultural values and aesthetics in a way that would allow for all kinds of legal and policy decisions to be made on the basis of interpretations biased in favour of different stakeholders, and leaves us with no clear factual basis on which to make decisions. Some alternatives are suggested, and a definition that already contains the key concept of this thesis—the idea that wilderness environments are environments where nature is free from human control as their dominant shaping feature. A strong reason given for preferring such a definition is that it gives us a clear, empirically measurable way of identifying and differentiating wilderness from non-wilderness. This allows its ecological values to be recognized and protected, where necessary, and means that ideas about its cultural and aesthetic significance need not obscure or be alienated from the physical reality they seek to describe. At the same time it is recognized that wilderness is a relative concept—but not relative in the sense of *relativism*, but objectively relative to various degrees of human activity and how they can be perceived to dominate or not dominate environments.

In chapter three, reasons for protecting wilderness are examined. Firstly, is the idea that protecting wilderness is important for protecting biodiversity. It is found that when wilderness is defined by certain parameters of scale, the world’s regions with the highest degree of biodiversity which, at the same time, are most endangered from human activity, cannot be included, whilst a large proportion of the Earth’s land is recognized as wilderness. A reason is given as to why, in fact, these areas should be thought of as wilderness after all. This is that so far, what remains of them has not been (but is being) so impacted upon by modern industrial societies as to lose this diversity. Ought we not use such diversity as a way of measuring wilderness quality, rather than assuming that all wilderness has either high or low biodiversity? One of the most crucial problems with current global methods of identifying wilderness is the false belief that only areas of a certain size are “significant” enough to count as wilderness. The idea of lots of tiny patches of wilderness also existing that contain the highest biodiversity and are critically endangered could then be urgently addressed. Another reason for preserving wilderness and diversity is the value of these environments for scientific research and development, and it is argued that a human presence

and interaction with these environments has the greatest potential for developing technologies and ways of life more in harmony with the planet's ecological systems and our material needs in relation to them. And finally, a reason for protecting wilderness is that it is a profound source of an experience of the sublime, and something that can even inform our ethical consciousness, and gives us an authentic experience of the truth and place of our own existence, of what the wild other might mean for us, and of what we might mean to each other. It is argued that without realizing this, other reasons for protecting wilderness cannot find their true significance in our lives, and we will never find the inner resources to act on them. Within wilderness we experience the possibility of human freedom itself.

Chapter Four addresses some of the most significant criticisms of the very idea of wilderness. It begins with addressing the claim that wilderness as understood today is nothing but a confused, escapist, elastic American cultural construction originating in European romanticism, and in the role of the vanishing Frontier in the white, male oriented individualistic creation Myth of the United States. This argument is assessed in terms of the historical evidence gathered in chapter One, and the contemporary definitions of wilderness *outside* and within the United States that differ from the so-called Received Wilderness Idea, and found to be seriously wanting, even though it is a very accurate critique of the latter. These thinkers correctly diagnose this idea of wilderness as pristine, uninhabited and unmodified, as an idealized projection onto the landscape of the desire to escape the ills of modern industrial societies which fails to deal with the human-nature relationship they actually entail, and thus the problems of our age. Another criticism of the idea of wilderness is that it is unscientific. The "Received Idea" is unscientific, especially when it conceives of an idealized "balance of nature" rather than the "order at the edge of chaos" that emerges from natural systems; however, the idea that the ecosystems in question do not have human activity as their dominant shaping feature is no surprise, and in this sense they are certainly wild. But more serious criticisms are that the idea of wilderness has caused the displacement, sometimes violently, of indigenous people's from their lands, and the kinds of social disasters that can result from this—and there is real evidence for this. Furthermore, wilderness protection has, in a number of cases, actually *caused* biodiversity loss by removing humans

and their animals from the system, an essential link in the chain. However, it is shown, once again, that the problem here is this Received Wilderness Idea—not the idea of wilderness with nature out of human control as its dominant shaping feature.

Chapter Five begins to spell out the real difference between wilderness conceived as environments where nature is out of human control as their dominant shaping feature, and wilderness conceived as pristine, untouched and unmodified. This concept is articulated in terms of how it manages to avoid all of the major criticisms levelled against the idea of wilderness in general in the previous chapter, and in terms of the reasons given in Chapter Three for why wilderness ought to be protected. It is found that the conceptual clarification involved allows for both greater possibilities for biodiversity conservation and human interaction with wilderness, as well having a much greater congruence with the experiential content of wilderness and its capacity to generate experiences described as “sublime”. Congruence with environments where nature is out of our control means a greater congruence with our own existence and being in nature. However, at the close of the chapter, it is argued that more needs to be done to distinguish this concept from the “Received Wilderness Idea”, in the sense that what needs to be investigated is how this idea managed to become so passionately ingrained in the hearts and minds of its adherents, and how this relates to the sublime aspects of the wilderness experience in terms of the possibilities for human control. At the heart of the Received Wilderness Idea is a misconception about nature as such, and what needs to be explored is how such misconceptions arise. Unless the Received Wilderness Idea can be thoroughly understood and dispelled, replaced with something better, it is bound to remain a potent force for confusion, wasted energy, and potentially disastrous decisions.

In Chapter Six, the focus falls on the concept of nature itself, and the kinds of confusions that can arise within it. What is it about nature that is so fundamentally questionable? The starting point is an examination of the etymology of the term, and its roots in the Greek *phusis*. An enquiry is made into the meaning of *phusis* in its earliest philosophical form in the work of Heraclitus, and it is found to mean, essentially, the fundamentally *elusive* nature of each things as it appears to us, in its effects on and hidden unity with everything else, even that

which appears fundamentally in contradiction with it. From this exploration of origins, contemporary conceptions of nature are compared, and found to differ in some important ways. A critique of the very idea of nature as something independent of human conceptual and social constructions is presented that reveals how two fundamentally different senses of nature tend to be confused in ideas like the Received Wilderness Idea. These are nature as the non-human that must be protected from the human, and the nature that includes all things, that we ourselves are a part of. The incoherence of this position is exposed by this critique, as well as some of the reasons for its hold over many environmental thinkers and activists.

In particular, the experience of wilderness as sublime in contrast to the experience of modern industrial societies is found to be the root of the problem of the Received Wilderness Idea. What is not realized, due in part to insufficiencies within our current conceptions of nature (insufficiencies themselves due to the very productive modes of these societies) is that existence itself, nature inside and outside of wilderness and cities, is sublime; that is, wild in a way that defines *our* existence. This is how Martin Heidegger conceives of being, and in his interpretation of Heraclitus, *phusis* means nature *qua* being. It is *this* meaning of nature we have lost sight of, he argues, due to the tendency of technology to reveal nature *qua* being in ways that expose, enframe, and place it under a false sense of control in “standing-reserve”. Here it is something merely to be drawn upon instrumentally at will, at any time. It engenders a *false* sense of control, argues Heidegger, because in enframing, we too are enframed, we too become standing reserve, such is the challenge that technology presents us. For Heidegger, the only way out is to remain within these technological modes of being and observe the way it obscures truth from us, possibly allowing us to find ways to bring nature *qua* being to light that do not seek to dominate it but establish the elusive nature of truth for us—that is, in essentially poetic ways.

Another essential element in the problem of the Received Wilderness Idea identified is the tendency to projectively idealize wilderness environments in direct reaction to the more unpleasant and intolerable realities of modern industrial societies. A point of departure for

understanding this is presented in the work of Karl Marx, who conceived of idealization in these terms in particular relation to the lack of authentic relations between people and between people and nature that constitutes capitalist alienation. This ties in with Vogel's critique of ideas of nature failing to address the possibilities of the productive, world-making actions and relationships between human beings and environments. Alienating social and economic relations are shown as major obstacles that stand in the way of realizing the nature of wilderness and the wild nature of human beings and human works. However, when combined with Heidegger's critique, it is also shown that by focusing on both the relationships that make societies and environments what they are for us, *and* the quality of being in the appearance of things for us itself—beyond attempts at control, the sublime wildness of our existence, possible in our works and relationships, and in wilderness environments might reveal itself to us. The question is one of grasping what it means for nature to be out of our control—nature *qua* being. Within the wildness of this, it is argued, are the greatest possibilities for human freedom.

The meaning and limits of the concept of control, and what it means for nature to be out of our control, is the subject of the final chapter. From one perspective, the world affords us the degrees of freedom that allow us to take control of our lives and nature. From another, our freedom and capacity for control are merely illusions, as what we think is our freedom is just the way we are that we can do nothing whatever about, and is ultimately not caused by us. The Kantian response to this—that we need to posit ethical universals, ideals beyond our powers to prove the existence of, asserting their good as the ultimate cause in order to realize it and release ourselves from the arbitrary causal determinism of the preferences of sensibility—is compared to the Heideggerian, where human freedom is seen as the very thing that allows the nature of being to reveal itself to us. In both, freedom is realized by relinquishing attempts at controlling nature for something more than ourselves, but in Heidegger, that something is sublime nature *qua* being itself, as it appears to us—the elusive wildness of existence. In recognizing the ways nature is physically, temporally, mortally, cognitive, and relationally out of our control, we can recognize this wildness, a recognition which enacts out freedom. When these recognitions then encounter the sublime in wilderness, the wildness of the whole can be realized in its different aspects, such that we might learn to

work with, rather than against, the wildness in ourselves, our works and societies, and nature itself.

1.

THE HISTORY AND
ORIGINS
OF THE TERM “WILDERNESS”

In this chapter and the next, I ask the basic question of this thesis: what *is* wilderness?—and try to come up with some preliminary answers. I will begin by examining some speculations regarding the prehistory of the concept of wilderness made by some contemporary environmental thinkers, and then examine the etymology of the word “wilderness” and some examples of its historical usage. The purpose of this phase of the enquiry will be to bring to light the possibility of a continuity and relevance of the past with the present and future within these contexts, as well as to subject some received wisdom and popular assumptions about this history to critical scrutiny. The importance of different kinds of experiences and conceptions of time, place, language and self for understanding different experiences and concepts of wilderness will be addressed, as will some of the dialectical complexities of the interdependent relationship between wilderness, civilization and human existence that will be a major theme of this thesis.

Wilderness as Speculative Prehistory: The Enacted Mythic of the Magna Mater and the Great Hunt

There is a difference between a term and that to which it refers. As David Graham Henderson states in his 2008 dissertation on the topic, “Wilderness has its being in history. It has a history as a word, as a concept and as an entity” (p.6). A difficulty that immediately presents itself here, however, is that if there is such a thing as wilderness—in the loose terms of a kind of environment relatively free from human control, industry, or domination—it must predate its concept and as a spoken word, predate the written word.

In *The Idea of Wilderness*, Max Oelschlaeger enquires into what he calls the “*Paleolithic idea of wilderness*” (1991, p.7), whilst qualifying this by saying that “the Paleolithic mind surely lacked any notion of wilderness akin to that which dominates the modern mind; for the Paleolithic mind was a mythic mode of consciousness, whereas the modern mind is historically conscious” (ibid, p.11), citing Paul Shepard’s *Nature and Madness* (1982). Oelschlaeger recognizes the difficulties in determining what Paleolithic cultures were really like. However, he offers several hypotheses about prehistoric ideas of wilderness which he admits are conjectural, but claims “are supported by an array of anthropological and mythographical studies” (1991, p.11). According to Oelschlaeger,

PALEOLITHIC HUNTER-FORAGERS likely

- believed that irrespective of place, nature was home
- regarded nature as intrinsically feminine
- thought of nature as alive
- assumed that the entire world of plants and animals, even the land itself, was sacred
- surmised that divinity could take many natural forms and that metaphor was the mode of divine access
- believed that time was synchronous, folded into an eternal mythic present
- supposed that ritual was essential to maintaining the natural and cyclical order of life and

death. (ibid, p.12)

Following Claude Levi-Strauss, Oelschlaeger argues that Paleolithic hunter-gatherers were not necessarily any less intelligent than modern individuals, but were simply interested in different things, such as kinship in totem relations to the natural world and each other. “The Paleolithic mind likely envisaged nature as alive and responsive, nurturing humankind much as a mother nourishes her baby at her breast” (ibid, p.16), he argues, because “*Harmony with* rather than *exploitation of* the natural world was a guiding principle for the Paleolithic mind and remains a cardinal commitment among modern aborigines” (ibid, p.17). Oelschlaeger argues that “This idea coalesces around the Magna Mater metaphor”—the myth of the Great Mother, which he claims “metaphorically represents an intuition, stabilized into a hunter mythology, that all life is mysteriously bound together in a benevolent and harmonious cycle of life, death and birth” (ibid, p.18).

Language and the Palaeolithic Wild

In arguing for a postmodern conception of wilderness that at the same time represents a posthistoric return to a mode of environmental relationship identified by him with the Palaeolithic, Oelschlaeger argues against thinking that remains “enframed within a static and substantialist, and therefore modernistic, view of the universe” (1991, p.342). In order to adequately develop such a conception, argues Oelschlaeger, we must change our culture, but “To change culture one must reconsider language, radically reconsider language. (1995, p.50). Drawing on Gary Snyder and Heidegger, he argues that to express the experience of wilderness we must resort to poetic language to reveal that “language is ontogenetic, and brings forth a human space in which *Homo sapiens* dwells” and reanimate “an ancient, premodern way of being in the world . . . rooting . . . the human project in a natural soil . . . that green world from which we have come” (1992, p.307). To comprehend what exists “wild and free . . . naturally outside our culturally defined web of language and definition” we must become “thinking poets and poetic thinkers” (ibid, p.308). A similar idea is found in the work of Hans Peter Duerr.

In *Dreamtime: Concerning the Boundary between Wilderness and Civilization*, Duerr argues the need to move beyond the prejudices of idealism, reductionism and scientism that what is experienced “only *appears* to be something particular, but is *basically* something different” and recognize that “not *all facts* become apparent in *every* language, certainly not in the castrated variety customarily employed in academe” (1985, p.128). For Duerr, wilderness exists beyond the boundary that co-defines it against civilization, but in order to understand either, that boundary must in fact be crossed. “In contrast to our own culture,” Duerr argues,

the societies possessing what we call archaic cultures have a much clearer idea about the fact that we can *be* only what we are if at the same time, we are also what we are *not*, and that we can only know who we are, if we experience our boundaries and, as Hegel would put it, if we thus cross over them. . . . It means . . . that we ourselves should turn wild so as not to *surrender* to our own wildness, but rather acquire in that way a consciousness of ourselves as tamed, as cultural beings. (ibid, p.125)

For Duerr, such a turning wild means experiencing the altered states of consciousness associated with shamanism, witchcraft and magic, and in particular the kinds of shape-shifting in which humans ritualistically “transform” into wild animals, forces of wild nature, spirit travellers, or anything radically “other” to their normal social identities. This is found not only in Palaeolithic cultures, he argues, but in the history of witchcraft and occult magic concurrent with the history of western civilization so frequently the target of Christian persecution, for example in accounts of Latvian, Slovenian, Italian and Bavarian peasants in the 1600s and 1700s (ibid, pp.33-7). To understand civilization and what it takes for granted in nature as the object of science, we must move beyond the limits of its language and sense of reality, into the unknown of the wilderness experience.

Wilderness as Dreamtime: The Unfolding of Place and Difference

Common to such experiences, argues Duerr, is an altered experience of time: “‘Between the times’ when the old time is over and the new one has not yet begun, everything is beyond the bounds of normality. Order becomes reversed and its continued existence is threatened. The powers of order and those of chaos are joined in battle” (ibid, pp.33-4). He continues further on,

‘Between the times’ indicated a crisis in the ordinary course of things. Normality was rescinded, or rather, order and chaos ceased to be opposites. In such times of crisis, when nature regenerated itself by dying first, humans ‘died’ also, and as ghostly beings ranged over the land in order to contribute their share to the rebirth of nature. (ibid, p.35)

According to Duerr, this became the various traditions found in various historical accounts throughout Europe that he calls The Wild Hunt, where bands of men would ride the countryside, possessed by wild nature spirits, creating chaos, yet re-establishing the order of things on their own terms—within limits. On the one hand, they created havoc, on the other they established *the law*. For Duerr, the experience of wilderness involves a very different experience of time to its conventional conceptualizations in modern societies and their concept of history, and one intimately linked with the experience of mortality and death.

For Oelschlaeger and Shepard, the Palaeolithic wilderness together with the grounding of its mythic idea in the continuing experience of the kind of environment to which it refers, does not simply entail some prehistoric dreamtime before our linear historic sense of time. The problem is, argues Oelschlaeger, that “the *idea of history* itself precludes any understanding of a *Paleolithic idea of wilderness*” (ibid, p.7). In *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*, Shepard casts this from a somewhat existential perspective, quoting and expanding upon Octavio Paz:

“The past reappears because it is a hidden present. I am speaking of the real past, which is not the same as ‘what took place.’ . . . What took place is indeed the past, yet there is something that . . . takes place but does not wholly recede into the past, a constantly returning present.” History as written documentation of “what happened” is antithetical to a “constantly returning present,” and as a result its perception of time and change is narrowly out of harmony with the natural world. Written history is the word. Time is an unfinished, extemporaneous narrative. (1998, p.7)

Oelschlaeger and Shepard argue that this sense of time intrinsic to the experience of wilderness has its nonlinear but irreversible unfolding from the primordial origins of human existence in Palaeolithic nature, but is still *immanent* within contemporary experience. The problem is, they argue, that modern thought and industry have a tendency to annihilate its wild possibilities.

Shepard gives a clear sketch of how he imagines the states of consciousness that makes a Palaeolithic conception of wilderness comprehensible. Rather than comprehending themselves as historically temporal beings in isolation from the natural world, argues Shepard,

Prehistoric humans, in contrast, were autochthonous, that is, “native to their place.” They possessed a detailed knowledge that was passed on from generation to generation by oral tradition through myths—stories that framed their beliefs in the context of ancestors and the landscape of the natural world. They lived within a “sacred geography” that consisted of a complex knowledge of place, terrain, and plants and animals embedded in a phenology of seasonal cycles. But they were also close to the earth in a spiritual sense, joined in an intricate configuration of sacred associations with the spirit of place within their landscape. Time and space as well as animals—humans—gods—all life and nonliving matter formed a continuum that related to themes of fertility and death and the sacredness of all things. During prehistory, which is most of the time that humans have been on earth, the dead and their burial places were venerated and mythic ancestors were part of the living present, the dreamtime ones

whose world was also the ground of present being. Ignore them as we will, they are with us still. (ibid, pp.7-8)

For Shepard, in the Palaeolithic wilderness is no inhospitable wasteland to get lost in, far from home, but the home of the human species itself, where we are native to *place*. For David Abram, the Australian Aboriginal traditions of Dreamtime and the Dreaming of songlines is a contemporary manifestation of what originated in the palaeolithic experience of wilderness. “The Dreamtime”, argues Abram, “is not a finished event” but rather “an ongoing process—the perpetual emerging of the world from an incipient, indeterminate state into full, waking reality, from invisibility to visibility, from the secret depths of silence into articulate song and speech” (1997, p.169). According to Abram, the fact “That Native Australians chose the English term ‘Dreaming’ to translate this cosmological notion indicated their sense that the ordinary act of dreaming participates directly in the time of the clan Ancestors, and hence that that time is not entirely elsewhere, not entirely sealed off from the perceivable present” (ibid). The Dreamtime actions of the Ancestors creates the Dreaming of place, country, from a journey, an adventure in song that shapes the world itself into existence, and at the end of each Ancestors’ trail of creation or songline, that ancestor goes “‘back in’ (becoming *djang*, in Gunwinggu terminology), transforming himself (or herself) into some physical aspect of the land, and/or metamorphosing into the plant or animal species from which he takes his name” (ibid, p.165).

These meandering trails, or Dreaming tracks, are auditory as well as visible and tactile phenomena, for the Ancestors were singing the names of things and places into the land as they wandered through it. Indeed, each ancestral track is a sort of musical score that winds across the continent, the score of a vast, epic song whose verses tell of the Ancestor’s many adventures, of how the various sites along her path came into being (and hence, indirectly, of what food plants, water sources, or sheltering rocks may be found at those sites). The distance between two significant sites along the Ancestor’s track can be measured, or spoken of, as a stretch of song, for the song unfolds in an unbroken chain of couplets across the land, one couplet “for each pair of the Ancestor’s footfalls.” The song is thus a kind of auditory route map through the country; in order to make her way through the land, an Aboriginal person has only to chant the local stanzas of the appropriate Dreaming, the appropriate Ancestor’s song. (ibid, p.166)

According to Abram, “every Aboriginal person, at birth, inherits a particular stretch of song as his private property, a stretch of song that is, as it were, his title to a stretch of land, to his conception site” (ibid), where by conception site is meant not where the sexual act took place, but the place of the individual’s conception from the Dreaming that gives them an individual identity inseparable with that country and the Ancestral Dreaming that gives it its distinguishing features. Of course, what Abram means here (at least, we *hope*), but fails to qualify when he says “every Aboriginal person”, is “every Aboriginal person who still inhabits their Ancestral territory and adheres to this tradition” or “every Aboriginal person who adhered to this tradition”—for the experience of contemporary Indigenous Australia cannot be summarized by a glance at an old ethnographical study or two, or even one’s personal experiences with it, and individual Aboriginal people have a right to speak for themselves. In any case, Abram continues: “The sung verses that are the tribesman’s birthright, of which he is now the primary caretaker, provide him also with a kind of passport to the other lands or territories that are crossed by the same Dreaming”, and “He is recognized as an offspring of that Ancestor whose songline he owns a part of, a descendant of the Dreamtime Being whose sacred life and power still dwells within the shapes of those lands” (ibid, p.168). Mythic time is brought to life:

What happened once happens again and again. The Dreaming, the imaginative life of the land itself, must be continually renewed, and as an Aboriginal man walks along his Ancestor’s Dreaming track, singing the country into visibility, he virtually *becomes* the journeying Ancestor, and thus the storied earth is born afresh. (ibid, p.170)

According to Abram, the wild nature of the landscape itself defines human existence and experience through human sensuous embodiment. This also exists beyond human existence and control but is an active generator of and interlocutor with it. It cannot be defined in any conceptually fixed way but only grasped and given over into *this very process* of becoming—the presencing and grasping of place, self and other. *Through* the life and death of the person, it not only *tells* its stories, sings its songs, and brings to reality its geographical and biological

shape and natures, but *lives* them, *lives* its Dreaming, bringing what is eternally invisible and secret once again forth into the revelation of performative temporal, sensuously dreaming presence. What remains wild in all this is that nature, Earth, place—the Dreaming—can only be grasped and experienced as the most intimate interlocutor of all, the environing, locating Other, that defines human existence, one’s own being and all that is and can be known from within.

Palaeolithic Art: Sex, Death and Difference

Mick Smith begins his critique of the concept of ecological sovereignty (2011) with an analysis of Georges Bataille’s interpretation of the Paleolithic cave painting at Lascaux referred to as *Scene of a Dead Man*. This analysis gives us some important clues for how we might conceive of the kind of Palaeolithic idea of wilderness suggested by Oelschlaeger and Shepard. In this painting, a human figure (with a bird-like head and an erection) lies beside a bison which appears to have gored it, and which, at the same time, has itself been mortally wounded by the human’s spear, its guts spilling out. According to Bataille, this represents the dawning of human self-awareness in the awareness of death, that (according to Smith) “he, like Heidegger, regards as distinguishing human from animal existence” (p.4). However, this awareness is not just that of death and its existential implications, but, in Bataille’s own words, “the fact of being suspended, hung over the abyss of death, yet full of virile force” (2005, p.173, in *ibid*, p.2). This “virile force” is at the same time presented by Bataille in terms of a human *sympathy* towards the animal, through what is termed the “sympathetic magic” of the artistic act. Bataille speculates that

before the hunt, on which life and death will depend, the ritual: an attentively executed drawing, extraordinarily true to life, though seen in the flickering light of lamps, [which surely adds movement and vitality to the drawings] completed in a short time, the ritual, the drawing that provokes the apparition of the bison. This sudden creation had to have produced in the impassioned minds of the hunters an intense feeling of the proximity of the inaccessible monster, a feeling . . . of profound harmony. . . . As if men, obscurely and suddenly had the

power to make the animal, though essentially out of range, repond to the extreme intensity of their desire. (2005, p.51, in *ibid*)

Smith interprets this in the following way:

This creative act is magical and sympathetic both in the sense of the animals being drawn (represented and made to appear before those present) approvingly and beautifully lifelike, and in their subsequent being drawn *toward* the presence of the hunt that is to follow. Of course, the “sympathy” of sympathetic magic does not extend to not killing the animal, but nonetheless, as the image in the shaft depicts, the human desire to live through the hunt is also realized to entail a much more ambiguous desire for the death of another animal. In other words, this image seems to illustrate an ethical quandary coeval with the emerging awareness of the human being’s own mortality whereby the temporary postponement of that inevitable human death brings about the permanent loss of Others’ lives. On Bataille’s reading, then, this painting at Lascaux is also indicative of the birth of humanity’s ethical as well as artistic sensibilities, and what is more, of an ethical sensibility directed precisely toward nonhuman animals. (*ibid*, p.3)

If Bataille is right, argues Smith, this “was a world as yet without human dominion, one that did not presume or need to argue the purported naturalness of the distinction (the setting apart and setting above) accorded by the human to the human” (*ibid*, p.5). However, he argues, the problem with Bataille’s interpretation is that it is of this as a mere historical moment, and “of the people of Lascaux as just a primitive precursor of modern society’s conception of humanity, as the first of ‘our’ sort” (*ibid*, p.6). What such a view conceals is that “from humanity’s very beginning, *which is impossible to pinpoint*, our self-understandings have been caught up with our troubled relations with the lives of other animals”, and this represents “a ‘moment,’ a torsional effect, that twists our currently accepted sociocultural trajectory, revealing hitherto unsuspected ethical possibilities opened by the self-understanding of human mortality” (*ibid*, p.4). What ought not to be underplayed however in Bataille’s interpretation is the emphasis on *virility*—the extreme eroticism of the image. As with the later Freud, it is both Eros and Thanatos, sex as life *and* death, that are fundamentally constitutive of human identity here, unlike the exclusive focus on the latter

and its temporal ecstases in Heidegger. Sympathetic magic is the sexual magic whereby the sympathy between the human and the animal, and identity and self-differentiation of the human within the ecstatic ruptures of nature, in sexual life and death, are realized through this sympathy. Self and other find their existence defined in a mutual but asymmetrical ecstatic sacrifice necessitated.

Smith relates the power of the Lascaux image to speak to us today in terms articulated by Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*, whom he quotes:

It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, continuously one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent.

(in *ibid*, p.1)

This moment is to be understood not as some kind of historical or mythic moment in the past or imagination, but as the continuity of a predicament that still defines our existence. Insofar as it still transcends the ability of our concepts to completely grasp it, we might say, following Adorno's concept of negative dialectics, that it stands as the self contradiction of the human-animal or human-nature. Insofar as it is immediate for our experience as an intuition of otherness—other *than* what we can conceive—it is without self-contradiction. This theme will be dealt with in more detail throughout this thesis.

Oelschlaeger argues that human identity itself comes to be through a wild other that is both internal and external to it. He quotes Shepard's *Nature and Madness*:

much of the unconscious life of the individual is rooted in interaction with otherness that goes beyond our own kind, interacting with it very early in personal growth, not as an alternative to

human socialization, but as an adjunct to it. . . . Identity formation grows from the subjective separation of self from not-self, living from nonliving, human from nonhuman, and proceeds in speech to employ plant and animal taxonomy as a means of conceptual thought and as a model of relatedness. (ibid)

He argues that “experience of the wilderness as an ‘other’ is necessary to any grounded understanding of human beingness and articulation of individual identity” (ibid, pp.8-9). For Oelschlaeger, wilderness relates to the speculated Paleolithic idea and experience in contemporary terms as “what remains for most—and has been for me—a terra incognita, a forbidden place, a heart of darkness that civilized people have long attempted to repress—that is, the wilderness within the human soul and without, in that living profusion that envelops all creation” (ibid, p.1). Wilderness, as definitive of human existence from its origins, is both external to us and our civilizations, and within us, within civilization. How this is so is one of the major themes of this thesis, and articulated in terms of the different ways in which we experience nature, and human experience within it, as out of human control.

Duerr: Wilderness as Civilization Defining Through “Becoming Animal”

One aspect of the Lascaux image and other Palaeolithic cave art (for example, the so-called Sorcerer of Trois Frères) that is important for grasping the possibilities inherent in a Palaeolithic or otherwise environmentally embodied experience of wilderness and wildness is the fact that what is depicted are human figures that are part-animal. Duerr, in his emphasis on altered states of consciousness where human beings transform into other animals, amongst other things, attempts to show how not only do such experiences stand in contrast to civilization and human identity, but also *define* them. But this has not simply occurred in some passively given sense. According to Duerr, the enactment of the wild overturns the established social order and proceeds to reorganize it. As such, and as being necessarily definitive of civilization, it becomes in effect the very act of *power* that establishes (or at least, *re-establishes*) what is wild, and what is civilized, human, and non-human.

As noted earlier, Duerr writes of what he calls the Wild Hunt, a kind of ritual spanning many cultures across centuries, where lawless bands of individuals possessed by spirits of wild nature would ride through the wilds and terrorize but also exercise acts of power within human settlements, engaged in both violent and ecstatically orgiastic behaviour that both turned social roles, identities and norms on their heads, and helped to re-establish them. The Wild Hunt, he argues,

was felt both to threaten disaster but also bring fertility. . . . Most likely, groups of this nature represented survivals of associations, the members of which had to 'die' in the wilderness as children who 'between the times' lived outside the law. . . . they were 'neutral' ones from the beyond, and for precisely this reason, they were called upon to punish serious deviants from the norm. However, such 'dead' could easily become really dead. For unlike later police forces, they often encountered forceful opposition, which they in turn were not allowed to avenge.

(1985, p.37)

By embodying both the animal other *and* death, the power and ordering chaos of life and death could be re-established, redefining the human and the civilized. The term "becoming animal" has been used in different ways by both Deleuze and Guattari and David Abram as ways of subverting the totalizing powers of civilization and language and being liberated by re-establishing the irreducible bodily reality of one's own existence and its resistance to categorical human/other dichotomies within a wild ecological context. Later, Duerr argues that civilization, in becoming increasingly complex, lost this direct knowledge of the wildness it is defined against. It

encountered the things of the other world by inhibiting, repressing, and later 'spiritualizing' and 'subjectivizing' them. Here lies the root of all 'theories of projection', which were one day to be developed by Feuerbach and Marx, by psychoanalysts and by positivistic critics of ideologies. That which was outside slipped to the inside, and if on occasion it was unable to deny its original character it was integrated into subjectivity as being that which was 'projected.' Nothing is allowed to be outside anymore, since the mere conceptualizing of the outside is the true source of anxiety. (ibid, p.45)

Such a process, according to Duerr, has a rather familiar pattern:

Initially, this displacement process especially involved those who were situated in a particular manner on the boundary, and who since ancient times were in some uncontrollable way open to the other world. These were women, and among them those who had specifically developed their ability to cross over that line at one time or another. (ibid)

Through the process of civilization, according to Duerr, its defining other, wilderness, has vanished from view, been swallowed up by it. With this disappears our possibilities for self-knowledge as civilized, tamed beings, and the degree to which we might still be unconsciously wild, and slaves to it. The wildness within us and civilization, when unrecognized and unreckoned with, not grappled with, could be the very thing that is destroying the wilderness outside our cities and towns, and threatens to destroy us. Instead of attempting to simply resist or deny it, it must just do to come to terms with it and dissolve false dichotomies of “wild” and “civilized”, by realizing the intrinsic wildness *of* civilization. Nature is out of our control in more ways than we like to think.

Etymological Origins of “Wilderness” and “Wild”

According to Roderick Nash, etymologically speaking,

In the early Teutonic and Norse languages, from which the English word in large part developed, the root seems to have been “will” with a descriptive meaning of self-willed, willful, or uncontrollable. From “willed” came the adjective “wild” used to convey the idea of being lost, unruly, disordered, or confused. (2001, p.1)

According to Gary Snyder, wild comes from the “faint pre-Teutonic *ghweltijos* which means, still, wild, and maybe wooded (*wald*) and lurks back there with possible connections to ‘will,’ to Latin *silvia* (forest, sauvage), and to the IE root *ghwer*, base of Latin *ferus*, (feral, fierce) which swings us around into Thoreau’s ‘awful ferity’ shared by virtuous people and lovers” (1992, p.26). In Old English, argues Nash, the word “‘dēor’ (animal) was prefixed with wild to denote creatures not under the control of man” (ibid). He identifies one of the earliest written instances of this in the foundational (8th century) Anglo-Saxon heroic epic *Beowulf*, “where wildeor appeared in reference to savage and fantastic beasts inhabiting a dismal region of forests, crags, and cliffs” (ibid). However, Nash also identifies an etymological connection with the German *Wildnis* and *Wildor*. According to Patrick Kupper, *Wildnis* “has always been an “other place,” a place of difference, distinct by its very separation from society’s cultivated spaces” (2012). Etymologically speaking, he argues, it is “related to the words *Wald* (forest) and *Wüste* (desert or wasteland)” (ibid). He gives a historical account of its origins of usage:

During the Middle Ages, *Wildnis* became most closely associated with dense forests, and later on with mountainous areas as well. The *Wildnis* was imagined as an unfriendly and dangerous place where wild beasts roamed, including wild men and demons of all kinds. It was definitely a place to avoid. In popular fairy tales children got lost in it, while it also provided the stage for heroic tales of knights displaying their courage by deliberately entering the *Wildnis* to rescue princesses and fight wild creatures. (ibid)

Nash, however, cites Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in arguing that

Wildnis has a twofold emotional tone. On the one hand it is inhospitable, alien, mysterious, and threatening; on the other, beautiful, friendly, and capable of elevating and delighting the beholder. Involved, too, in this second conception is the value of wild country as a sanctuary in which those in need of consolation can find respite from the pressures of civilization. (2001, p.4)

Wilderness, from the beginning, could mean both death and danger, and nurturing or refuge. This seems to contradict a common claim made by critiques of American conceptions of wilderness, which are thought to be at odds with more traditional historical conceptions of it. William Godfrey-Smith, for example, argues that

The predominant Graeco-Christian attitude, which generally speaking was the predominant Western attitude prior to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century romanticism, had been to view wilderness as threatening or alarming, an attitude still reflected in the figurative uses of the expression *wilderness*, clearly connoting a degenerate state to be avoided. (1979, p.311)

This argument was later taken up by William Cronon, whose seminal article ‘The Trouble with Wilderness’ has been one of the most influential critiques of the idea of wilderness. In it, he argues that before the 19th century, the word “wilderness” referred to an environment that was “‘deserted,’ ‘savage,’ ‘desolate,’ ‘barren’ – in short, a ‘waste,’” and “Its connotations were anything but positive, and the emotion one was most likely to feel in its presence was ‘bewilderment’ or terror” (1996, p.70). Kevin Deluca and Anne Demo (2001) also argue that wilderness is nothing but an elitist 19th century cultural construction of predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon middle and upper class males, and this line of argument stretches back to the work of 19th century historian Frederick Jackson Turner (1893). These critiques of the concept of wilderness will be examined and assessed in detail in chapters Four and Five. In what follows, some historical textual evidence within the history of the concept will show that in addition to wilderness being viewed as dangerous wasteland, more positive values have also been attributed to it from the beginnings of its history in written language. It will also be noted that such conceptions have not necessarily made such an absolute differentiation between wilderness and wildness on the one hand, and civilization and human beings on the other, as some more recent forms of the concept seem to insist upon. Rather, what emerges is a constant shifting of perspective between their identity and their difference that itself reveals the nature of the relationship at stake.

Wood, Wilderness and Wildness: a Reading of Layamon's Brut

Nash identifies the first instance of the term wilderness in English in another heroic poem, written in Middle English, of the 13th Century, Layamon's *Brut*, also known as the *Chronicle of Britain*, which is a historiography that identifies the founder of Britain as the mythical Brutus of Troy, and includes the first English language version of the Arthurian legend. In this text, not only the term wilderness but also the term "wild" are featured frequently throughout the narrative. Brutus marches "to the wood, to the wilderness", where he does battle with a Greek king (1847, p.23). Wilderness is frequently paired with forest, in the phrase form, "the wood, the wilderness", and sometimes also with "heath and fern". But this is not all that is wild. Brutus and his men set sail, and "they went out in *the* 'wide [wild] sea,—the wild *waves* were stilled; two days and two nights of *the* [wild] sea *they* were" (ibid, p.47) and on an island they find "wild deer" and the "Trojan men drew toward the deer, and did of the wild *creatures* all their will" (ibid, p.48). The epic itself, the sea journey, the origination myth of a civilization, is an adventure that is constantly characterized as being *wild*. When he and his crew land in Britain at Totnes, up the river Dart, they encounter giants. Brutus and his "good folk" fired arrows at them, and "The arrows were grievous to them, 'and' they withdrew to the hills, and in the wilderness 'in' caverns dwelt'" (ibid, p.77). A great early British King, Belin, Layamon recounts, had

In hand all Britains land; he went over all *the country*, and established [the] laws. He viewed the woods and the wilderness, *the* meadows and [the] moors, and the 'high mountains [fair water], *the* boroughs and towns and all *he* beheld it attentively. (ibid, p.205)

The wilderness here seems as integral to the sense of what is included in the country as the boroughs and towns, and has laws applied even in relation to it. We cannot then, in this sense, interpret wilderness as necessarily the antithesis of civilization, as it in fact seems to be included within it, and formative of it.

Throughout Layamon's text, wilderness is a place where people take strategic refuge, and conceal themselves, others, and important objects. A number of individuals even build *castles* in the wilderness to defend themselves. We find a certain Androgeus marching "[in]to a wilderness, 'in'to a great wood", where he rouses his soldiers to do battle against the British King Cassibelaune alongside Julius Caesar (ibid, p.366). "Be no knight so mad, nor warrior so 'wild ... that 'he' ever speak [a] word farther than his spears point, nor from his comrades ridel united [soon] we shall glide, fast [advance] together, and our foes fell" says Androgeus to his troops (ibid). This echoes another, earlier passage, where Brutus is to do battle with the Greek king, and he commands of his soldiers "that none be so wild, none [nor so void of wit], that *he* [any] word utter, nor talk with speech, before he hears my horn blown 'with great sound'" (ibid, p.34). On the other hand, Caesar himself, Layamon recounts, "fought as a wild boar" (ibid, p. 320). Taking on of the traits of wild animals, animals out of human control, can in the one context lead to one's ruin through one's lack of restraint, and yet in another, for the same reason, can allow a human being to defeat his enemies and rise to greatness. Civilization can *collapse* into wildness, or it can come to be through it, be created out of it.

There is a debate in the scholarship of early British epics such as *Beowulf* and *Brut* regarding whether they originated as written works, influenced as their form and content appears to be by Virgil and the latin forms in French medieval romance and the monastic tradition, or whether much of the poetry and content *just as much* springs from a more indigenous or Germanic *oral* tradition of poetry, song, and storytelling. Layamon was himself a priest, and his work was based largely on Wace's *Roman de Brut*, which in turn was based on Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (history of the kings of Britain, *itself* based on yet earlier ecclesiastical histories). His work would thus seem simply to express a latin ecclesiastical historiographic tradition inherited from the French. Mark Amodio, however, argues that "lexicon and syntax, often cited as signs of his idiosyncratic and archaic behavior, rather provide strong evidence of his ties to the specialized language the scop employed" (1987). The scop was Old English poets who, according to Jay Rudd's *Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature*, were respected as the keepers "of the tradition that united" their people

(2006, p.569), of their “oral history and heroic tradition” (ibid, p.568). According to this line of thought, the Scops utilized repetitive rhythmical formulas to weave and innovate upon their histories, to bring them into the captivating immediacy of living oral tradition.

According to Rudd’s *Encyclopedia*, “Layamon’s *Brut* is twice as long as Wace’s poem, and differs in a number of ways . . . Layamon adds material that reflects an earlier, more brutal warrior society” (ibid, p.392). According to Antonio Garcia, “Layamon’s changes in battle scenes go beyond the linguistic exercise of translating Wace’s *Le Brut* from Norman-French to an archaistic English” (English abstract, 1995). Could it be that Layamon’s rhythmic, repetitive use of “wild” and “the wood, the wilderness” in describing these very battle scenes, and their preliminaries and diversions, stems directly from this tradition? Certainly the terms themselves are Germanic. As to the precise qualities of performance within this tradition, there is also some disagreement; on the one hand, the scops are understood to have been upholders of a solemn cultural tradition, whether they were travelling poets or in the employ of lords and kings—like priests. On the other hand, the very word *scop* is identified as originating from the Old Norse “skop (mocking, scoff-ing)”, and “Sometimes the stories were historical, but more often they were entertaining and (seemingly) carefully crafted to suit the particular audience” (Sauer, 2008). It seems in some sense that the scops may have been as much court and travelling *jesters* and entertainers as serious, holy bards. However, it is also possible that the formulas of this same Germanic tradition structure many of the more *serious* conflicts it depicts around a structure of “the *senna*, ‘a stylized battle of words’ consisting of ‘threats, insults, challenges, and the appropriate replies’ (Harris 1979:66), or the *flyting*, ‘a stylized exchange between hostile speakers of traditional provocations (insults, boasts, threats, and curses), typically organized in the basic pattern Claim, Denial, and Counterclaim’ (Clover 1979:125) ‘... a set piece drawing on a common stock of clichés which are genre-specific’” (Olsen, 1986, p.587). This implies that there may well have been a constant continuity between the comical and earthly, and the heroic and tragic, between high culture and low in the oral tradition. In Layamon, it seems to be the wildness of the landscape itself, as well as the characters within it, that partake of this dialogical structure not only of claim and counterclaim, but of charge and retreat, a flight into the wilderness to gather one’s inner resources, and then a clash of wild human natures out in the open, from “the wood, the

wilderness”, to “like a wild boar”. For the mythic historiography is not just a history of the people, but of the land itself, and their connection to it, their claim to it, their dependence on it, and their origination from it.

Such view of the origins of the term wilderness in English is in stark contrast to that of Raymond Chipeniuk, who argues that “Outside religious texts, Old English *wildeornes* is all but unattested”, and that “There is good reason to believe that until recent times the word “wilderness” has belonged more to high culture than to the vernacular” (2012). But this assumes that from the beginning, the sense of wilderness had a *biblical* context, and none of these associations with oral culture that seem so evident in the early epics, which although suffused with Christian themes, also contain plenty of pagan wildness and civilization. The homilies of the 13th century that use the term, the same era as the *Brut*, have none of the rich, earthy, land embedded romance of the epic.

Although epics such as *Beowulf* and *Brut* may have originated in cultures where there was no genuine distinction between high and low cultures, they emerged as written works using the literary techniques of a monastic culture which establishes itself as high in contrast to the illiterate masses. On the one hand, they have become divorced from the need for individuals to inhabit a natural environment and memorize and embody its stories as part of the necessities of an oral cultural tradition and its transmission, mythologizing these environments together with their heroes, with that word, “wilderness”. Yet on the other, they still play the role not only of establishing high culture remote from nature, but of giving the common illiterate masses, still close to the earth, their sense of place, history and identity with their environment, complete with “wild” heroes, albeit in a manner appropriated and mediated by this ecclesiastical seizure of power via the written word. Following a line of interpretation developed by Marx, we might say that the theme of wilderness in *Brut* creates a myth about a kind of landscape and way of life that has already disappeared, and in so doing *idealizes* the transition from a tribal to a feudal society. Such idealizations of this process emerge *against* the contradicting brute earthy realities of its establishment and maintenance,

including the environmental destruction and the suffering for the masses this entails, and the disengagement from and domination of these masses and environment by the priestly and aristocratic-warrior classes. Wilderness becomes a symbol for an as yet unrealized individual human freedom and intimacy with natural energies and environments, an idealized past representing what cannot yet be realized, but nevertheless remains resistant to the status quo. How wilderness continues to be conceptualized in this manner is a central theme to be developed throughout this thesis that it is hoped can reveal both the problematic nature of idealized concepts of wilderness, *and* the idea that there is no such thing.

The Biblical Wilderness

Since its earliest usage in the English language, wilderness has referred on the one hand to the European landscapes of epic historiography, and on the other, as a translation of certain biblical concepts found from 13th century homilies onwards. According to Robert Leal, “the English word ‘wilderness’ translates a number of Biblical Hebrew words, which are ‘*arabah*, *šammah*, *šemamah*, *siyyah*, *haraboth* and *yešimon*”, however the most frequently used word is *midbar* (2004, p.37). *Midbar*, argues Leal, “describes not so much arid desert as grazing land, principally in the foothills of the south of Palestine, which was not exploited for agricultural purposes” (ibid). According to Leal,

The prophet Joel refers on three occasions to “the pastures of the wilderness.” (1:19, 1:20, 2:22). . . . James Hasting points out that *midbar* could vary considerably in size, ranging from vast regions to quite limited spaces. Some examples of the use of *midbar* in the sense of pasture are:

- Genesis 36:24b: “he is the Anah who found the hot springs in the *midbar*, as he pastured the asses of Zibeon his father.”
- I Samuel 17:28: “And with whom have you left those few sheep in the *midbar*?”
- II Chronicles 26:10a “And he built towers in the *midbar*, and hewed out many cisterns, for he had large herds, both in the Shephelah and in the plain [...].”

In these and most other verses of similar context *midbar* is generally translated into English as “wilderness”. In French (and in other Romance languages) “desert” (*désert*) is the preferred translation. Given the sense of the Hebrew word, both translations are often manifestly unsatisfactory. (ibid)

In other examples, argues Leal, the translation becomes even more dubious: “In I Kings 19:15 *midbar* relates to the outskirts of a city” (ibid, p.38). Sometimes, however, *midbar* does refer to desert and uncultivated land—usually in terms of a particular place, such as the “wilderness of Edom” (II Kings 3:8-9, in ibid), or according to Robert Funk, even a particular part of Palestine, “all or part of the lower half of the Rift valley, that is to say, the whole of south Judah east of the central ridge from Jericho along the shores of the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba” (ibid).

In the New Testament, according to Leal, “the word most frequently translated ‘wilderness’ is *eremos* (or *eremia*) which Bratton believes is better translated as ‘desert’ or ‘isolated place’”, and “Its root meaning is the idea of ‘abandonment’, whether this refers to a person, a cause, or a locality . . . *eremos* is not necessarily a desert, though this meaning is not excluded” (ibid, p.39). According to Ulrich Mauser, writes Leal,

Jesus’ forty day sojourn in the wilderness immediately recalls both the period that Moses spent on Mount Sinai during the exodus from Egypt into the wilderness and Elijah’s wandering through the wilderness to the same mountain (Horeb). These Hebrew Bible references suggest to him that in Jewish religious perspective ‘mountain’ and ‘wilderness-place’ have certain characteristics in common. As places of retreat and revelation, they are, throughout the Bible, so closely linked that “the barren mountain regions and the wilderness can become identical” (Mauser 1963, 110). . . . It is significant that the Hebrew for “Horeb” has the same root as that for “desolation” or “lay waste”, words related in the Hebrew mind with “wilderness”.

Mauser . . . finds the most noteworthy example of this in the story of the Transfiguration on “a high mountain apart” (Mark 9:2-8) . . . (ibid, p.40)

According to Mauser, in the Bible “the wilderness, the mountain and the sea cannot be isolated from one another” (in *ibid*). This manifests most significantly in Mark’s Gospel, where they have “cosmic overtones” (Leal’s words) and suggest “a deeper level of history” (in *ibid*). “It is remarkable”, argues Mauser, “that all stories in Mark which have the character of the epiphany are related to either wilderness, mountain or sea” (in *ibid*). According to Thomas Dozeman, in the Exodus, the Red Sea is effectively the doorway from, in Leal’s words, “the oppression in Egypt to the ‘freedom’ of the wilderness” (*ibid*, p.41). According to Leal,

At the very beginnings of Hebrew history sea and wilderness are closely linked. That this association continued is suggested, among other things, by Isaiah’s reference to “the wilderness of the sea” (21:1) and perhaps also by his later reference to “Leviathan, the dragon that is in the sea” (27:1). (*ibid*)

He also cites Johannes Pedersen as establishing a link in the Hebrew mind between wilderness, the ocean, and death: “To illustrate this link he invokes the experience of Jonah, certain of the Psalms, and verses such as Job 26:5: ‘The shades below tremble, the water and their inhabitants.’ He concludes:

He who is in Sheol is also in the ocean, because they both denote the subterraneous, negative power, the world of death and chaos. (Pedersen 1959, 463) (in *ibid*)

Sheol is the Hebrew underworld, the land of shades, the shadows of the former living selves, of the dead. The question is, how did these kinds of contexts translate into English and other Western European languages and cultures, and help shape and transform the meanings of wilderness within them?

Wilderness as Place of Inner Transformation in Medieval Art and Literature:
Janet Poindexter Sholty

According to Janet Poindexter Sholty, common threads in fact developed between Western medieval conceptions of wilderness and Biblical ones from the early middle ages, influenced heavily by Neo-Platonic thought. Sholty argues that “the wilderness as a landscape of personal crisis becomes in the Middle Ages a significant part of the representation of interior experience in painting and literature” (from abstract, 1997). She explains this Neo-Platonic influence in the following terms:

the use of setting to represent interior experience may be traced back to the Neo-Platonic use of space and movement to define spiritual development. Separating themselves as far as possible from the material world, such writers as Origen and Plotinus avoid use of representational detail in their spatial models; however, both the visual artists and the authors who adopted the Neo-Platonic paradigm, elaborated their emotional spaces with the details of the classical *locus amoenus* and of the exegetical desert, while retaining the philosophical concern with spiritual transition. (ibid)

Sholty expands on this:

The wilderness motif, as it occurs in medieval art and literature, derives from four sources: from the Neo-Platonic model of the personality, represented by the schools of Athens, Rome and Alexandria, and by Philo Judaeus and Plotinus; from Greek and Roman pastoral poetry from Homer and Theocritus to Ovid, Virgil and the poets of the Silver Age; from the desert as a spiritual *locus*, as found in the Bible and as elaborated in the writings of Origen of Alexandria and of Augustine, Bishop of Hippo; and finally, from the events of conquest, conversion, and settlement in Europe. (ibid, p.12)

Here Sholty gives an explanation of the historical source that gave rise to kinds of mythic-heroic historiographic narratives we find in works such as *Brut* (as distinct from the classical and exegetic sources) which

Originates in the experiences of upheaval as the remnants of the Roman Empire are invaded and divided by the northern tribes, and as settlers from Mediterranean Europe move into Britain and Germany. Although not at first recorded directly in literary sources, these exposures to the hardships of frontier life without doubt colored the imaginations of the settlers and their descendents, and therefore, the understanding of the wilderness motif. (ibid)

Here the frontier to be conquered works in two directions—from the Roman world to Britain and Germany, and from the north, *into* the Empire as it breaks up and transforms. Sholty also draws a parallel between these experiences of frontier, conquest, conversion and settlement, and those that came later, in particular, with the discovery of the New World, and the sense of wilderness developed in pursuit of the vanishing American frontier, with all its similarly inner romantic ideals. According to Sholty, romantic and medieval artists “shared a similarity in representative concept: They viewed nature as a text to be read; they represented spiritual crisis in the icon of wilderness landscape; and they figured individual psychological development as movement with landscape” (ibid, p.1).

Within the medieval tradition, Sholty argues, wilderness represents the spiritual journey of the iconic individual’s own life, through the fallen realm of appearances of this world, and all its inner dimensions that have their spiritual counterparts manifest in earthly allegorical terms, to the eternal truth beyond this life. One travels through “The Wilderness of This Life” and navigates “The Thickets of the Heart” (ibid, p.iv). She explains that

Analysis of wilderness as an image for spiritual and emotional transition in medieval literature and art relates the texts to an iconographic tradition which, along with motifs of city and garden, provides a spatial representation of interior progress, as the medieval dialectic process provides a paradigm for intellectual resolution. Such an analysis relates the motif to

the core of medieval intellectual experience, and further suggest significant connections between medieval and modern narratives in regard to the representation of interior experience. (ibid)

In literature, Sholty gives the following examples:

because it includes both the rhetorical and exegetical models, *The Divine Comedy* of Dante Alighieri is a paradigm of the wilderness motif, in the harsh wood of the *Inferno* and the ancient wood at the top of Mount Purgatory. Earlier narratives, however, reflect more limited and particular uses of the image. *Beowulf* and the Anglo-Saxon elegies associate a frontier wilderness with personal heroism, with the rigors of pilgrimage and exile, and with the evil from outside the boundaries of the community or settlement. The French, English and German romances associate the forest and waste land with trials of virtue and honor. Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*, *The House of Fame*, and *Troilus and Criseyde* equate wilderness with personal crisis, adopting the motif from continental sources influenced by classical models. *The Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, connecting time, space and movement, reflect the passages from one stage of life to the next and from life through death to eternity. Other significant English uses of the motif occur in alliterative and stanzaic romances, in the Corpus Christi cycle plays, in popular carols and ballads, and, moving into the fifteenth century, in the Robin Hood ballads and in Thomas Mallory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. (ibid, p.8)

In all of these, Sholty argues, wilderness is a place *through which one passes* symbolic of the entire *inner* journey of life to death. As already noted, she relates this directly to the romantic colonial conceptions of wilderness in the history of the American frontier. In this regard, it is also worth noting how this *spiritually symbolic* conception became utterly *reified*, literally, in the Twentieth Century concept of wilderness embalmed in the wording of the Wilderness Act of 1964 (to be treated in greater detail in section II) as a place where “man himself is a visitor who does not remain”. What is crucial for the argument of this thesis here is that we have a process whereby on the one hand, the loss of a directly significant, actively transformative relationship to wild nature in the transition from tribal to medieval and modern societies, which represent increasing degrees of, in Marx's term, *alienation* from nature, *also* reifies the

two members of this relationship—human being and activity and wild nature—into mere *things* present at hand, exchangeable in binary opposition as part of a “nature” that represents a separated order of things. On the other hand, what is reified here is the very human experience of this relationship with wild nature, that is, the *inner* experience of life *all the way to death*, or what Heidegger in *Being and Time* called *its temporal being towards death*—what could be more wild? Heidegger and Marx might at first glance seem poles apart in their thinking. However, in the present context, with the reification of both this inner experience of the wildness of one’s existence in life and time towards death *and* the wild nature from which this springs and which is reciprocally transformative with it, alienated in labour and social relations of mere arbitrary *exchange* for exchange’s sake in endless, destructive capitalist expansion, we can also see how wilderness might become at the same time *idealized* in this reification as the place *where we pass through but cannot remain*, that is *primordial, revelatory, liberating, and sublime*. This not only fits into Heidegger’s sense of the reifying abstractions of the merely present-at-hand, but also with his concept of the self-disclosure and self-concealment of being in *phusis* being reified into the mere concept of *nature* as a given, and with his concept in ‘The Question Concerning Technology’ of the being of things, of the world and human beings being enframed and reduced to the mere status of existing in perpetual “standing-reserve”. Chapter Six will take up ways in which both Marx and Heidegger’s thought can provide powerful tools for unearthing problematic and existentially significant ways we conceptualize and interact with wild nature, particularly in terms of the ways we exercise and conceptualize different forms of control over ourselves, one another, and our worldly environments—and hopefully show us some better ones, too.

Jeanne Addison Roberts on Shakespeare’s Wild: Women, Animals, Other

In *The Shakespearean Wild: Geography, Genus, and Gender*, Jeanne Addison Roberts identifies some key ways wildness and wilderness are conceptualized in Shakespeare:

The Wild seems to be envisioned by Shakespeare as inhabited by strange and untamed creatures, fascinating and frightening, offering the lure of the hunt with the goal of capturing or killing the Wild's imagined denizens, but at the same time as providing a reservoir of necessary resources for the maintenance of Culture. Slaves, wives, and beasts of burden are to be drawn from the Wild. Shylock, Othello, women, and domesticated animals are incorporated into Shakespeare's Culture, but they never quite shed their foreignness or become totally trustworthy. . . . the "woman's part" elicits both lust and revulsion . . . the monkey becomes the symbol of lust and the instrument of Jessica's betrayal of her semiacculturated father. Even when domesticated inhabitants are admitted provisionally into the bounds of Culture, their space becomes ghettoized, and the male seems to fear being engulfed by the requisite cohabitation. In his central cultural position he preserves a fantasy of freedom in an idyllic male Wild which excludes intruders, except possibly as prey, and celebrates the pleasures of warfare as sustained and glorified by the complementary delights of male camaraderie and male rivalry. The male Wild offers escape from the complexities and confines of Culture. Sometimes it superimposes itself over a vision of the perils of the female Wild, erasing its unknown threats and ambiguities. Although Shakespeare reflects the traditional Culture/Wild distinctions, he also proves gratifyingly capable of subverting and transcending them . . . (1991, p.2)

The wild is the other depended upon by the patriarchal society in its grand narratives that it can never quite reconcile its illusions with. This is in fact the essence of Shakespeare's narratives, that indivisible remainder. The wilderness within is always Other. The female and other nations, races and locales are symptoms of something that wishes to be more profound, but is not, a wilful madness that cannot be reconciled with itself because in its will, it cannot touch its basis in the lives of others, and in nature, it only finds its own subversion, futility, and mortality. Macbeth's witches are the physical language of this predicament. The storm is the great transformer, the only way the self-outcast male ego can wish its reconciliation with its essential other into existence, in its own final moment of sacrifice. According to Roberts, this essence of conflict in Shakespeare comes to life in the wild landscapes so many of his dramas take place in:

Titus Andronicus and *Venus and Adonis*, both early works, play out the association of the female with the forest, revealing a barely repressed fear of and revulsion to the mysterious “other” and emphasizing the importance of male Culture and male rivalry over erotic attraction. Later plays, beginning with *As You Like It*, show increasing demystification of the forest Wild and increasing certainty of the primacy of male Culture . . . Whereas the early plays deal with the mating of young lovers—the male’s foray into the mysterious female forest—the later plays focus on the problems generated by having incorporated Wild creatures uneasily into Culture. Once the male is enmeshed with the precariously “domesticated” Wild, emphasis shifts toward fears of unbridled lust, infidelity, infertility, entrapment, intractable virginity, incest, and, above all, the menace of women who are not primarily sex objects but cronelike reminders of death (witches, Lady Macbeth, Goneril and Regan, Volumnia, Cybeline’s Queen, Paulina, and Sycorax). The Wild landscape of the later plays is not the fertile forest but the sterile heath, the isolated island, the foreign outpost, the treacherous sea, or the rocky “desert” place. (ibid, p.18)

Roberts neglects the male manifestations of this wildness, as we find in Henry V marshalling his troops to “imitate the action of the tiger!”; in the forest world of Titania and the Faeries that is *also* the world of Oberon and Puck and a certain degree of otherwise unacceptable misogynistic misbehaviour; in various battlefields, and so vividly portrayed in the unprecedentedly grotesque figure of Caliban, who in a sense is all *Others* in one, embodied in *male* form. Shakespeare’s clowns and comic heroes and heroines are the wildness that make life possible, and the uncontrollable passions and uncertainties of men and women alike are what make his tragedies tragic, and his “problem plays” problematic. What is crucial in Shakespeare is the wildness of life itself, male and female, good and evil, and the difficulty of discerning, in the end, what is what, who is who, and what it all means, anyway. Whether in mythic historiography, comedy, tragedy, poetry, or any other way we might characterize the modes in which Shakespeare wrote, there is never a neat divide between wilderness and civilization, but always a hopeless and destructive and at the same time wonderfully spontaneous and creative confusion.

Wilderness in Sturm und Drang

The idea of wilderness is often associated with that broad, cross-cultural movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries known as romanticism. It is often seen as idealizing wilderness, but is also idealized violence, and there is a violence to wilderness. “... die einzige Glückseligkeit die ich kenne, im Krieg zu seyn”—“the only supreme happiness I know, to be in the midst of war” utters Wild, the reckless young hero of Friedrich Klinger’s 1776 play *Sturm und Drang*, the play after which the early, youthful phase of German romanticism takes its name. Wild is not the character’s real name, but an *alias* the English nobleman Carl Bushy uses to conceal his true identity.

WILD: Hey there! Once and for all in tumult and taken for a ride, the senses whirl around like weather vanes in a storm. The wild noise has already thundered such healthfulness into me I’m actually beginning to feel a little bit better. So many hundreds of miles moaning to forget riding here – great heart! You should thank me! Ha! Then while you rage, from out of it feast on the chaos! – how are you? (I:1, from German edition, 2008)

This is my translation of the opening words of the play. Wild has dragged his hapless friends (sometimes at gunpoint) all over Europe and across the ocean in search of something to overturn the terrible malaise of indecisiveness that his all-too-civilized home life has engendered in him, and has finally found it: the decisiveness at the heart of battle, in the midst of the American Revolutionary War. For once he is clear: “I want to join the campaign here as a volunteer. If they will do me the service of shooting me down, well and good! You’ll take my cash and emigrate” (2006, Leidner. Trans., p.128). It is as though Wild has channelled the virtuous side of Hamlet, that archetype of Modern civilization, and managed to break through his indecision and endless ratiocination before it is too late, channelling his madness into a vital, decisive energy. His friends, on the other hand, display all the worst vice of the youth of their age, utterly mired in their own indolence and decadently capricious fantasy. La Feu and Blasius seem to satirically embody different aspects of Rousseau and his ideals. La Feu the fantasist, according to Jutta Kitching, escaping to the idyllic life of a shepherd, “becomes a useless person, falsely believing that he has reached a meaningful life

in retreat and with a companion who is able to share his simplicity” (1967, p.76). This aspect of La Feu’s character is already vividly portrayed, to comic effect, in his first speech:

Magic, magic fantasy! (*listens*) What lovely, spiritual symphonies strike my ear? By Amor! I want to fall in love with an old crone, live in an old, dilapidated house, bathe my tender carcass in stinking puddles of manure, only to curb my fantasy. Is there no old witch with whom I can flirt madly? Her wrinkles would become for me undulating lines of beauty, her protruding black teeth marble columns of Diana’s temple. Her sagging leather breasts would surpass the bosom of Helen. A woman as dried out as I! Hey, my fantastic goddess! I can tell you, Wild, I have conducted myself worthily throughout our travels. I have seen things, felt things, that no mouth tasted, no nose smelled, no eye saw, no mind perceived—(Klinger, 2006, p.126).

There is something of a grotesque reminder in this of Rousseau’s confessions of the influence his childhood reading had on the entire trajectory of his thought, that they “gave me odd and romantic notions of human life, of which experience and reflection have never been able wholly to cure me”. Blasius, who can commit to nothing, seeks his own “escape into nature and from oppression” (Kitching, 1967, p.76), but with final resolve—“I want to become a hermit . . . Earth and Sky will become my friend night and the whole of nature” (my translation from the German). In Kitching’s interpretation, Blasius and Le Feu represent the false freedom of escape into nature and one’s own subjectivity and imagination, whilst Wild, from the outset and as the story progresses, finds the true freedom of direct and decisive engagement with the very civilization and society he had fled, and the drama becomes one of love, and familial and social reconciliation. It is only the “*sturm und drang*” of Wild’s character – his “Wild” temperament and self-sacrificial resolution from the outset, throwing himself into war—that allows that part of civilization to which he belongs to be healed. Kitching argues that in the play and others like it, the “flight into nature, as opposed to that of Rousseau . . . neither redeems man nor improves the social conditions of his time” (1967, p.74). Rather, she argues, heroes such as Wild, as expressions of their authors’ philosophies, “followed Voltaire’s recommendation from *Candide* (1759): “. . .il faut cultiver notre jardin” (ibid). With *Sturm und Drang* we have, in the very birth of German romanticism, an idealization of wild nature that at the same time idealizes what is wild in the human being as

the essential element upon which civilization depends. This romantic notion of wilderness and wildness, however, is a far cry from the concept of pristine wilderness untouched and untouchable by and opposite to the human and civilization often associated with romanticism, and has a seasoned sense of comic irony and social realism underlying it. It is also *openly* colonialist, for it is from the *frontier* that new life and the vigour of youth is given to the older, decaying society. Furthermore, it represents a tradition stretching back to the very roots of European culture and languages that locates wilderness and human civilization in continuous, interdependent interaction.

Wilderness has had multiple meanings throughout the history of Western civilization, and existed, at least as portrayed in the written word, in a constant dialectic with this civilization, as both other and source, place of conflict and transformation, brute reality and escapist fantasy. The more forests and other wild environments have been driven back and human beings enclosed in a world of our own making, the sharper its significance has come into focus. Looking back to the evidence we have of our Palaeolithic past, and throughout this history, what is wild refuses to be either definitively categorized or silenced. What is wild in human experience in the city, today, and what is triggered in the human experience of wilderness environments, and what is *essentially* wild within human beings seems to be both inescapably definitive of our existence, but still yet to fully announce itself. Do we, in seeking it, chase mere illusions, or is there such a thing as wilderness that we might genuinely value outside of ourselves, that at the same time, is still definitive of our existence, and that might release its possibilities?

In the following chapter, I will examine wilderness not in terms of prehistoric speculation and its existential possibilities, its etymology or historiographic myth and literary motifs and their contemporary implications. Rather, I will look to contemporary legal and scientific definitions of wilderness to attempt to grasp the practical meaning of this concept for us today.

2.

CONTEMPORARY DEFINITIONS OF WILDERNESS

In this chapter I will examine different ways in which wilderness and wildness are identified with actual non-human environments, in both legal and scientific terms. I will distinguish between definitions of wilderness as necessarily excluding all forms of human habitation, modification, and history and those which acknowledge and allow for limited forms of such incursions. I will also examine how some definitions overlap between acknowledging the non-human reality of wilderness and identifying it as a cultural construction, and some potentially problematic ambiguities which can arise with these in the contexts of policy and practice.

In general, there are two fundamentally different ways in which wilderness is conceptualized in contemporary terms. It can be thought of as a non-human reality specific to certain kinds of environments, *or* as an entirely human construct, an idea specific to certain cultures and their land practices that does not reflect any more general kind of environment or phenomenon outside of such cultures and practices. Between these two extremes is the view that whilst there is a more or less quantifiable property belonging to physical systems we can refer to as *wildness* (or alternately, wilderness *quality*), areas traditionally *designated* and identified as wilderness are not necessarily defined by such properties, but more usually by

culturally relative ideas. In general, however, concepts of wilderness in use tend to take for granted the physical *reality* of wilderness. In this chapter, I will focus on views which either agree that there is some real thing called wilderness, or at least environments that have measurable qualities usually associated with it beyond the projections of merely culturally relative aesthetic and recreational values. I save discussion of wilderness as an entirely cultural construction for chapter Four, where I will address how this concept arises in *critiques* of the very idea of wilderness.

American Wilderness: The Wilderness Act of 1964

Since many recent ideas and traditions concerning wilderness spring from the United States—with some even claiming it is an exclusively American idea—it is worth considering how wilderness is defined in legal terms in this country. The United States Wilderness Act of 1964 defines wilderness in the following way:

A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value. (in Callicott & Nelson, 1998, p.121)

Environmental philosopher Mark Woods notes that “naturalness” in wilderness is legally interpreted in this act as “the untrammeled condition” of wilderness (in *ibid*, p.135). He quotes Hendee et al. in defining “untrammeled” as meaning ““not subject to human controls and manipulations that hamper the free play of natural forces”” (1990, p.108, in *ibid*, p.134). This, he points out, is not to be confused with “untrampled”, in the sense of not walked upon or treated harshly. In the act, he argues, the term “primeval” effectively *means* “without permanent improvement or human habitation”. Initially, argues Woods, a number of industry groups opposed to this legislation argued that “the Act required an untrammeled condition of wilderness in the strictest sense possible: lands previously impacted by humans in any way could no longer be considered as candidates for wilderness designation” (*ibid*, p.135). This became known as the “purity definition of wilderness” (*ibid*). Whilst this seems to play to wilderness “purists”, the benefit to industrialists was that it meant less land could be protected under this strict categorization. However, in the so-called Eastern Wilderness Act of 1975 Congress rejected this purity definition of wilderness by establishing sixteen new wilderness areas, most of which “contained land that was previously trammeled and impacted by humans” (*ibid*, p.136). According to Woods,

The USFS [United States Forest Service] interpreted the terms “untrammeled” and “primeval” in a backward-looking sense: lands that had been trammed by humans *in the past* and *had lost* their “primeval character” had lost a condition of naturalness required for wilderness designation. The Congressional and judicial rejection of the USFS’s purity definition of wilderness suggested that the untrammeled character of naturalness was more forward-looking: wilderness lands were to be managed in such a way that they *would be* untrammeled and *return* to primeval conditions *in the future*. (*ibid*)

As Wood argues, this opens up the debate as to whether it is possible to ecologically restore *any* landscape to wilderness condition, for example, even “the eventual designation of the Wall Street Wilderness Area” (*ibid*, p.137). Robert Elliot, in his 1997 book *Faking Nature* (and in an earlier 1982 essay of the same name) disagrees that such restoration is possible, arguing that “What is significant about wild nature is its causal continuity with the past, its relationship with an evolving series or sequence of states that are the products of natural forces” (p. 125). Elliot, argues Woods, is arguing for a purity definition of nature. Woods

agrees that “the naturalness of wilderness must have *some* casual continuity with untrammelled naturalness” and that “If a tract of wilderness loses some *essential* feature of wilderness because it has been impacted by humans in the past, then it seems difficult to claim that this same tract of land (now non-wilderness) could ever revert back to a wilderness condition in the future” (1990, in Callicott & Nelson, 1998, p.137)—lower Manhattan won’t cut it. However, if the entire indigenous history of North America also needs to be ignored to designate an area wilderness, then there can’t even be any wilderness in the United States. “Future naturalness should have substantial causal continuity with past naturalness”, he argues, but for legal purposes and practical purposes, “we must reject a strong purity definition of wilderness and argue that naturalness is conditioned by future possibilities as well as past causalities” (ibid, p.138).

Whilst these various legal definitions and interpretations of wilderness, despite their variations and ambiguities, still seem relatively straightforward, in practice, wilderness designation and preservation legislation, policy and practice in the United States allows for a great many exceptions to them which undermine their defining power over *actual* environments. Wilderness designation in the 1964 Act “articulates a preservation rationale and states that certain tracts of land with ‘wilderness character’ be set aside from and closed to future development and human habitation so such lands can be preserved and protected in their undeveloped state or ‘natural condition’” (ibid, p.132). However, the Wilderness Act itself deems that the purposes of wilderness areas it stipulates are “‘supplemental’ to the management of forest lands for recreation, logging, mining, grazing, and water development” (ibid, p.133). Furthermore, notes Woods, Section 4 of the Act “stipulates several important ‘exceptions’ to wilderness preservation by permitting continued use of aircraft and motorboats, hardrock mining, mineral leasing, grazing, access road construction, and water development projects in wilderness areas” (ibid). Furthermore, argues Woods, the 1964 Wilderness Act is not the be all and end all of wilderness law and definition in the United States, as well over 100 wilderness acts have been passed by Congress since 1964 which “mention many other ‘exceptions’ to wilderness preservation that further limit wilderness preservation as defined and mandated in the original act” (ibid).

Woods examines a number of measures used to define wilderness areas in the legislation: roadlessness, perceptual naturalness, and the provision of potential for human solitude and recreation. Section 4 (c) of the 1964 Act states that there shall be “no permanent road within any wilderness area designated by this Act” (in *ibid*, p.138), and Woods notes that “the presence of existing roads will *usually* disqualify an area for possible inclusion within the NWPS” (*ibid*). In 1972, the Southwest Region of the USFS defined a road as “a parallel set of tracks that remained visible into the next season”, such that even “the passage of a vehicle that left tire tracks from the previous year disqualified an area for wilderness recommendation” (*ibid*). Then, in 1976, the US Bureau of Land Management officially adopted the following qualifying definition: “The word ‘roadless’ refers to the absence of roads which have been improved *and* maintained by mechanical means to insure relatively regular and continuous use. A way maintained solely by the passage of vehicles does not constitute a road’ (emphasis added)” (in *ibid*, p.139). This still leaves some ambiguities, however, as an area might not have any roads by this definition, but still be significantly altered by the use of off-road vehicles or it may neglect desert roads that do not require ongoing maintenance. And the issue of roadlessness, argues Woods, “can be very important in establishing the wilderness potential of an area” (*ibid*). One practice he identifies is “cherrystemming” which “involves drawing the boundary of a wilderness area around both sides of a road; thus, the road appears as a ‘cherry’ penetrating the wilderness area (the ‘cherry’ is the adjacent non-wilderness land)” (*ibid*, pp.139-40).

Woods scrutinizes Section 2 (c) (1) of the Act which states that “wilderness ‘*generally appears* to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work *substantially unnoticeable*’ (emphasis added)” and asks if “how a tract of land appears determines whether it is natural or not. Is the naturalness of wilderness grounded in nothing more than this?” (*ibid*, p.140). This leads to a problem of relativism—an area appearing natural, untrammelled by one person may appear significantly modified by another. Sometimes the difference in *appearance* between areas constructed to look like naturally evolved systems and those systems themselves can be quite difficult to discern. To help resolve the legal problem of deciding what is and what is not wilderness, to overcome such

relativism, argues Woods, “we can insist that a particular perception of naturalness or nonnaturalness be backed with supporting evidence” (ibid, p.141).

In terms of the human solitude/recreation requirement in the 1964 Wilderness Act, “The lack of outstanding opportunities within an area to find solitude or recreate primitively”, argues Woods, “could lead to the conclusion that such an area could not qualify as legal wilderness” (ibid). The question of measuring whether a place offers opportunities for solitude again raises the question of relativism or subjectivism. However, since it is *wilderness* solitude that is required, argues Woods, which also requires naturalness, areas untrammelled by human activity, this helps circumvent this problem, because “Although solitude is a state of mind, outstanding opportunities for wilderness solitude necessarily rely upon naturalness” (ibid, p.143). In terms of providing outstanding possibilities for “primitive” recreation (i.e. not motorized or mechanical), argues Woods, it is more difficult to prove any area could *not* provide some form of such opportunities. He concludes that the naturalness requirement of wilderness is logically prior to the requirements for the possibilities of solitude and recreation, as “It makes no sense to say that we can have wilderness solitude in a closet and primitive recreation in Disneyland” (ibid, p.144). In sum, Woods argues that the legal status of wilderness leaves unanswered the question “Is wilderness preservation first and foremost a resource for humans or does it legally mandate valuing a condition of naturalness apart from human utility?” (ibid, p.149).

What the US Wilderness Act of 1964 and subsequent legislation reveal is that in terms of policy, law, and practice, the definition of wilderness seems to be critically dependent on the weight people give to different degrees of environmental “naturalness”—the degree to which an environment is free from human impact and modification, and the potential difficulties and ambiguities in determining what is “natural” in this sense, and what is not.

Wilderness and Conservation Biology: Contemporary Definitions

“Because the concept of wilderness has been primarily a cultural one, the scientific foundation for wilderness is still being established”, argues Julie McGuiness in her article on the webpage for The (Australian) Wilderness Society entitled, “What is Wilderness?” (1999). In ‘Wilderness and future conservation priorities in Australia’, ecologists James E. Watson and colleagues define wilderness as: “large areas that have experienced minimal habitat loss” (2009, p.1029). They acknowledge, in this definition, two things. The first is that there has been some debate “over the appropriateness of the term ‘wilderness’ in the conservation literature” (ibid). The second is that “This definition means that many wilderness areas may have had a long history of human occupation, as is the case in Australia, and the term does not preclude (or ignore) human presence (Lesslie et al., 1988; Mackey et al., 1999; Woinarksi et al., 2007)” (ibid). What is a little unclear in this definition is what precisely is meant here by habitat loss. What of an environment, for example, that over millennia, has transformed from forest to desert? Even the richest rainforest must have experienced waves of succession of different biological populations and the habitats they depended upon over large enough time scales (see Gleason, 1939, Drury & Nisbet, 1972, and discussion in chapter Four). One of the papers Watson et al claim to be following in this definition of wilderness, co-authored by one of its own authors, Brendan G. Mackey, gives a different definition, but one in fact that might help explain what is meant here by “habitat loss”.

Mackey et al, in ‘Wilderness and its place in nature conservation in Australia’ (1999), define wilderness in two ways, making a critical distinction between wilderness *quality*, and wilderness *areas*:

- a) *Wilderness quality* is the extent to which any specified unit area is remote from and undisturbed by the impacts and influence of modern technological society.

b) *Wilderness areas* are places where wilderness quality is recognized and valued by society and are defined using arbitrary thresholds of remoteness, naturalness and total area. (ibid, p.182)

Watson et al are defining wilderness areas in terms of lack of habitat loss, but here, Mackey et al, who they claim to be following, are speaking in terms of being remote from and undisturbed by the impacts of modern technological society, and another quality they refer to (like American definitions) as “naturalness”. They place important caveats on each definition:

Wilderness quality can thus be defined as a function of levels of disturbance associated with modern technological society and, as such, does not deny the reality of Indigenous Australia. In contrast, *wilderness areas* can indeed be regarded as cultural constructs to the extent that threshold criteria are intrinsically value-based and their existence is fundamentally controlled by the contemporary demand for and supply of remote and natural places. (ibid)

The reference here to Indigenous Australia aligns this definition with that of Watson et al, in their admission that wilderness areas may have had a long human history which also refers to Indigenous Australia. This relates directly to the “debate over the appropriateness of the term ‘wilderness’ in the conservation literature” mentioned by Watson et al, who cite in relation to this Deborah Bird Rose (1996), who argues for a shift in the understanding of wilderness to reflect its human history from a Indigenous Australian perspective. According to McGuiness on the Wilderness Society webpage,

In Australia and the United States, wilderness has always been a cultural landscape -- over approximately 50 millennia indigenous people have lived in and altered most of the areas in Australia that we call wilderness. Popular views of national parks and other natural areas as places without people or any human impact have begun to relax. Indeed many contemporary conservation groups, including The Wilderness Society (TWS), share a recognition that wilderness in Australia is, by definition, traditional Aboriginal or Islander land. With regard to Aboriginal and Islander impacts, they discriminate between the impacts of indigenous people practising ecologically sustainable land management, and the very

different impacts of colonial and modern technological society. The crucial issue in the identification of wilderness is not whether an area has been modified by humans, but the extent and nature of the modification.

Given the high correlation between remaining wilderness areas and land which retains cultural importance for indigenous people, wilderness protection in Australia may not be properly achievable unless prior ownership and current Aboriginal and Islander aspirations are comprehensively addressed. TWS is working closely with a number of indigenous communities to meet our joint expectations of 'caring for country'.

(1999)

In contrasting the culturally constructed nature of wilderness *areas* with lack of disturbances associated with modern technological society signifying wilderness *quality*, and relating this to “the reality of” Indigenous Australia, it is implied by Mackey et al that this disturbance itself and the freedom from it are also realities, rather than culturally relative constructs. In terms of the reality of Indigenous Australia referred to, this can only be a reality in terms of, firstly, history, and secondly, the degree to which contemporary Indigenous Australians *continue* to not participate in the environmentally disturbing behaviour of modern technological society, of which they are also a part. But to determine when Indigenous Australians (or any human beings for that matter) *are* or *are not* participating in the disturbing activities associated with this contemporary industrial form of society, the more information we have on how this might be *quantified*, the better. There is also the difficulty of whether, once part and therefore to some degree dependent on the industrial activity of such a society (and so part of the overall population pressure that drives this activity), whether it is even *possible* not to contribute in at least some way to the environmentally disturbing behaviours of such a society. Once a self-aware, environmentally aware member of such a society, it is difficult not to see one’s own contribution and complicity.

Difficulties Determining Wilderness Quality, Boundaries and Scale

Mackey et al base their definition and enquiry into the measurability of wilderness quality on the Australian Government's National Wilderness Inventory (NWI). The NWI indicators determine the extent of wilderness quality, i.e. freedom from encroachment from modern industrial societies. These indicators are:

Remoteness from Settlement

remoteness from places of permanent occupation;

Remoteness from Access

remoteness from established access routes;

Apparent Naturalness

the degree to which the landscape is free from the presence of permanent structures associated with modern technological society;

Biophysical Naturalness

the degree to which the natural environment is free from biophysical disturbance caused by the influence of modern technological society.

(Lesslie et al, Australian Government website, 2008)

Here the concept of (biophysical) naturalness is clarified, defined as freedom “from biophysical disturbance caused by the influence of modern technological society”—which turns out to be *identical* to the definition by Mackey et al of wilderness *quality*, which we recall is “the extent to which any specified unit area is remote from and undisturbed by the impacts and influence of modern technological society”. It also echoes the definition of naturalness in the US 1964 Wilderness Act, which we recall meant “untrammeled”, that is, “not subject to human controls and manipulations that hamper the free play of natural forces”.

Mackey et al argue that the NWI indicators, conversely, “may also indicate processes that threaten ecosystem integrity, and the persistence in a landscape of populations of a native

species” (1999, p.183). This second point regarding population persistence brings their definition closer to that of Watson et al, “large areas that have experienced minimum habitat loss”, albeit the different focus on wilderness quality over wilderness (designated) areas. This together with their argument that “systems must be large enough to incorporate the impact of the largest scaled perturbation” (ibid), is probably why Watson et al state that their definition agrees with that of Mackey et al, despite the apparent differences. From the first point made above regarding the NWI indicators revealing threats, Mackey et al identify six key threatening processes from modern industrial society against which wilderness quality can be measured: “changed fire regimes; changed hydrological regimes; roading; changed vegetation cover; introduced species, and; accelerated global climate change” (ibid).

In terms of relating the influences of modern industrial societies post-colonization to changing fire regimes, Mackey et al concede there is insufficient data to determine the extent of this relationship. Impacts on river systems and hydrological regimes, are “spatially correlated with infrastructure developments like dams and weirs” such that “NWI indicators that describe the presence, density or distance from such structures may be good predictors of these threatening processes”. They identify roads as having adverse impacts associated with “establishment and use including the isolation and fragmentation of populations, the enhanced dispersal of weeds and ferals,” and being “a major source of mortality for populations of animals as a result of collisions with motor vehicles”. The relative intensity of a given land use such as grazing, agriculture, or logging they relate to threatening processes such as “vegetation loss and fragmentation, degradation of vegetation structure, and alteration to the floristic composition”. Furthermore, they argue, introduced predators and herbivores appear in certain arid environments to be “critical in the decline and extinction of certain critical weight range mammals” and in general, feral predators and herbivores “have spread away from the infrastructure and land use associated with modern technological society, and therefore are not always well correlated with NWI indicators. In general, they argue, wilderness quality should “capture the signal of many threatening processes”. However, they argue, there are some threatening processes “for which wilderness quality indicators such as the NWI are inadequate and for which additional indicators need to be developed”, and

furthermore, “There are also some threatening processes for which it may be technically impossible to develop suitable disturbance indicators” (ibid).

Reflecting on the current state of empirical research into quantifying wilderness quality based on indicator measures, Mackey et al argue that “Conclusive testing of hypotheses concerning wilderness and aspects of nature conservation in Australia are, at the present time, constrained by the absence of available relevant data at required levels of spatial resolution” (ibid, pp.183-4). Their attempt to test the hypothesis that “areas with low wilderness quality correlate with areas that have higher numbers of rare, threatened or endangered species”, limited by the lack of available data, was inconclusive, but found significant evidence suggesting it held true for plant species, but not necessarily for mammals (ibid, p.184). For example, they found that certain areas in the arid zone “have high threatened species and high wilderness quality” which “may be due to the impact of exotic animals on key refuge areas in patchy, low productivity environments”, and that “While these impacts are a consequence of modern technological society they are not captured by the NWI indicators” (ibid). What became clear is the dependence of determining the level of disturbance and ecosystem loss or damage (and inversely with it, wilderness quality) on context. What must be grasped are the relative differences between how different kinds of threatening processes might impact different kinds of ecosystems, to varying degrees of intensity. “Only by examining wilderness quality within an environmental context”, they argue,

can relationships be established between wilderness quality indicators and threatening processes. This is because the ecological impact of a threatening process varies with the environmental context (e.g., the impact of roading in deserts *vis-a-vis* forests). (ibid)

One thing that begins to become clear is the importance of the difference between effects of modern industrial civilization, and disturbances with other causes. The former are effects that include habitat loss, the isolation and fragmentation of populations, higher mortality rates, vegetation loss and degradation of structure, and species extinctions. However, there is no

doubt that before modern industrial civilization, human societies, whether hunter gatherer, herder or agricultural, all had significantly similar destructive effects on their environments (a good example of literature on this is Tim Flannery's classic, *The Future Eaters*). Clearly, however, the difference is in the sheer *extent* and *intensiveness* of destruction caused by modern industrial society and its processes that makes all the difference. A worthwhile path of study would be to try to discern exactly where these other forms of human society surpass a harmonizing relationship with wilderness comparatively speaking and begin to exhibit similar levels of destruction, that is, where they begin to transform into something like modern industrial society. But another worthwhile consideration is this: if all of these destructive environmental effects were caused not by human beings at all, but simply by other natural processes, this implies by definition that they might, in fact, be wildernesses despite being completely denuded of life. If there was ever life on Mars, for example, this may have been exactly what happened to it, and planetary and solar system processes suggest that over time, this will eventually happen to earth *without* human help.

If naturalness in the sense used by Mackey et al means freedom from the impacts of modern industrial civilization, is not Mars also a wilderness? Possibly, but also, possibly not, depending, once again, on definition. For by including empirical criteria for measuring wilderness quality that relate directly to losses inflicted upon living systems, Mackey et al reveal a biocentric bias to their definition of the natural. If there are no species to lose, then what is wild about the surface of Mars? We can move as many rocks around, dig holes and transform it as much as we like without interfering with any *life* (as far as we know). Could we not blow it up, without violating anything like wilderness? This thesis will in fact argue for a definition of wilderness that, whilst sympathetic to that of Mackey et al, might *also* include *non* biological environments like Mars, and indeed, the cosmos at large. Yet the biocentric bias—the subjective value emphasis on life itself and that upon which it depends, is obviously critical for the questions of human survival and quality of life so urgently thrust upon us by the global ecological crisis. It is simultaneously biocentric and *anthropocentric*. I will argue that these very values, so much part of the solution, are also integral to the problem itself, which I articulate in terms of the difference between what we can control in ourselves, each other, and our environments, and what we cannot, and how this changes relative to the

relational frame of reference. And what is important in this is how the universe *or*, from a slightly different perspective, existence itself (both of which some do, and some do not call “nature”) constitute such activities of control and their limits, how this might differ from or resemble how we experience it subjectively, and what we can know of it.

Two recent discussions of wilderness have in fact attempted to define wilderness positively, in terms of its biological richness and robustness. David Graham Henderson defines wilderness as “land which is characterized by the healthy functioning of an untamed biotic community, that is, by the flourishing of natural purposes . . . the flourishing of untamed animals and untamed plants in untamed relations” (2008, p.83). The choice of the word “purposes” in this definition obviously is controversial, as it raises the question of whether Henderson means this in the teleological sense of an *ultimate* purpose, that each animal and plant is intrinsically *for* some thing or group of things or other, or in the sense of *function*, simply what they *do* in relation to other organisms and their environment. Craig DeLancey (2012) rejects the idea that the planet Mars could be a wilderness—he uses the example, instead, of the Moon:

the criterion of wilderness as a region uninhabited and unaltered by human beings is clearly not sufficient: it would, for example, make the surface of moon or the depths of the Earth’s crust a wilderness. Yet, it is not a sterile expanse of dust nor crushing depths of stone that environmentalists intend to be examples of wilderness. (p.27)

Instead, he defines wilderness as “an enduring ecosystem that, for the available genotypes and resources, is highly optimal in terms of maximizing both the quantity of flourishing individual organisms and the quantity of kinds of organisms, relative to past historical conditions of that ecosystem” (ibid, p.29). Whilst these definitions most certainly identify the kinds of environments that, for the wellbeing of life on earth and any other positive or unique qualities they might have, ought to be amongst the highest priority for protection from the kinds of human activities that threaten to destroy them, and do indeed represent many of the

values associated with wilderness that inspires people to try and protect it, they seem to conflate these potential values of wilderness with wilderness itself. What, for example, of environments that under broader and more traditional definitions, would qualify as wilderness, but only have a limited number of organisms that may not be flourishing as much as we might hope? Imagine, for example, a species of rare orchid existing in a very arid desert region in which life is barely struggling to survive, an environment encroached upon by human activities and other potentially negative environmental factors that nevertheless manages to hold its own ground and survive. Is this not still wild? Ought we not attempt to protect it? An environment may be extremely minimal or even largely devoid of life, yet still play a crucial role in the broader environment and be something on which many life-forms depend—for example, a mountain peak. What would be the grandeur so often associated with wilderness without mountain peaks? Another problem with these definitions is they ignore one of the meanings that has been consistently attributed to the term “wilderness” over the centuries, and that is of “wasteland” in the sense of uninhabitable land. Ought such land not be recognized for its otherness, its independence from human activity as a major shaping factor? The same goes for the Moon or the planet Mars, or any other location in the universe. Just because these environments are not flourishing biologically in a sense which happens to be ideal for human life, ought we to ignore their wild otherness? Henderson, in arguing for the untamed other of wild nature, quotes Val Plumwood, and I quote the same passage, but in the context of this far broader definition of wilderness I am advocating:

The experience of the Other as a void or an absence is a prelude to invasion and instrumentalization, whereas the experience of the Other as a presence is the prelude to dialogue. (1998, in Callicott & Nelson, p.681)

Plumwood, whilst keeping her discussion to terrestrial environments, argues that

wilderness in the *full* sense of the wild Other cannot properly be specified as an *absence* of the human; rather it is the *presence* of the Other, the presence of the long-evolving biotic communities and animal species which reside there, the presence of ancient biospheric forces and of the unique combination of them which has shaped that particular, unique place.

(ibid, p.683)

Ought we also, in the broader sense—perhaps when we are not so concerned with the contingencies of earthly environmental crisis and need—ignore the presence of that red planet we can see in the sky, and the ancient forces that shaped it together with the Earth in the cosmic evolution of our solar system—that *particular, unique place*? What riches might it hold *besides* any use we might make of it or resources we might extract from it, when we do not acknowledge the significance of its presence as Other? But it is time to return to our planet again.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defines wilderness as “large unmodified or slightly modified areas, retaining their natural character and influence, without permanent or significant human habitation” (Dudley, 2008, p.14). What is meant here by *significant* human habitation becomes a little clearer when the primary objectives for wilderness conservation are spelled out along with what are labeled “Other objectives”:

Primary objective

- To protect the long-term ecological integrity of natural areas that are undisturbed by significant human activity, free of modern infrastructure and where natural forces and processes predominate, so that current and future generations have the opportunity to experience such areas.

Other objectives

- To provide for public access at levels and of a type which will maintain the wilderness qualities of the area for present and future generations;
- To enable indigenous communities to maintain their traditional wilderness-based lifestyle and customs, living at low density and using the available resources in ways compatible with the conservation objectives;
- To protect the relevant cultural and spiritual values and non-material benefits to indigenous or non-indigenous populations, such as solitude, respect for sacred sites, respect for ancestors etc.;

- To allow for low-impact minimally invasive educational and scientific research activities, when such activities cannot be conducted outside the wilderness area.

(ibid)

The use of the words “without” “permanent” and “significant” in the initial definition in the phrase, “without permanent or significant human habitation” raises potential political and legal problems and possibilities for misuse and confusion, when we can see how clearly it conflicts with what comes next in listing these “Other objectives”. What is asserted here is the fact that wilderness areas *are* inhabited by indigenous communities—what is implied by the secondary positioning of this below the primary objective and its wording, is that this habitation is neither *significant* nor *permanent*! Surely, however, such areas, when inhabited, would be inhabited *permanently* in a similar sense to what this might mean when referring to a city, except that in a number of cases we might have to treat their habitation as not necessarily restricted to fixed singular geographic locations, but ranging over particular *regions*. This pairing of relative insignificance of this secondary consideration regarding the protection of wilderness (and again, the danger here is to view the inhabitants as part of the wilderness without also recognizing the immeasurable significance of their humanity for other human beings—as part of the *fauna*, as has occurred in Australia’s colonial past, for example) also suggests that such peoples, whilst worthy of a secondary consideration of value, might also be insignificant enough to be *moveable*, or worth sacrificing *if push comes to shove*, in favour of the primary objective. One of the most important ideas of this thesis is that, on the contrary, the human activity in wilderness areas of such people is *deeply* significant, because it not only has its own irreducible value in and for those people, but it can also show us ways we might live in harmony with wilderness without destroying it. This is no mere pedantic quibbling. As we shall see in chapter Four, Guha, Callicott and others have found that often such definitions of wilderness as having no “significant” or “permanent” habitation have been used as excuses to actually *displace* indigenous populations from these areas *in the name of wilderness conservation*, often with tragic and disastrous results. This is clearly not what is meant by these “Other objectives”, however, *this* is not so clear from the actual *operational* definition of this protected area management category of “wilderness” that precedes them in the sense of *priority*, following from the initial definition into the “Primary Objective” of keeping them “undisturbed by significant

human activity”. Here, the ambiguity of the term “significant” is all too telling. The problem is that governments base their policies and laws on definitions like those of the IUCN, and wherever there are such ambiguities, unwise and in some cases unjust judgements risk being made based on them.

If we are to allow that there can be human populations within wilderness areas, and admit the significance and value of their cultures and the extent to which their ways of life harmonize with and even help sustain such environments, the question remains: how much human population of wilderness areas is *too* much? The disturbing impacts of modern industrial civilization are not just technological, but are also caused simply by the extent of human population. If human populations in wilderness are increased to a certain point, that population will inevitably impact on the environment in ways which destroy its wilderness quality.

Another subtler potential problem that this definition of wilderness brings up, however, together with the definitions of Watson et al and Mackey et al, is its assumption that modern infrastructure and industry must by definition disturb the natural functioning of such areas to such a degree that it destroys their wilderness quality, which is defined precisely by the absence of this. Yet if we are to learn to live with wilderness without destroying it altogether, and perhaps even find ways of rehabilitating or even recreating it where necessary, it is unlikely the majority of the species will willingly abandon all of the technology, infrastructure and benefits that modern industrial civilization gives us. Rather, as movements like biomimicry, industrial ecology, and various attempts at forming ecological economic and political systems suggest, if there is a solution to the problem of wilderness destruction, it is likely to be as technological as it is ecological, as based in current human civilization as it is in a human return to the simplicities and richness of wild nature.

Understandably, the IUCN and environmental scientists such as Watson et al and Mackey et al. identify the impact of modern industrial society as a major source of habitat loss and loss of wilderness quality in general. The IUCN identify wilderness as having the following distinguishing features:

The area should generally:

- Be free of modern infrastructure, development and industrial extractive activity, including but not limited to roads, pipelines, power lines, cellphone towers, oil and gas platforms, offshore liquefied natural gas terminals, other permanent structures, mining, hydropower development, oil and gas extraction, agriculture including intensive livestock grazing, commercial fishing, low-flying aircraft etc., preferably with highly restricted or no motorized access.
- Be characterized by a high degree of intactness: containing a large percentage of the original extent of the ecosystem, complete or near-complete native faunal and floral assemblages, retaining intact predator-prey systems, and including large mammals.
- Be of sufficient size to protect biodiversity; to maintain ecological processes and ecosystem services; to maintain ecological refugia; to buffer against the impacts of climate change; and to maintain evolutionary processes.
- Offer outstanding opportunities for solitude, enjoyed once the area has been reached, by simple, quiet and nonintrusive means of travel (i.e., non-motorized or highly regulated motorized access where strictly necessary and consistent with the biological objectives listed above).
- Be free of inappropriate or excessive human use or presence, which will decrease wilderness values and ultimately prevent an area from meeting the biological and cultural criteria listed above. However, human presence should not be the determining factor in deciding whether to establish a category Ib area. The key objectives are biological intactness and the absence of permanent infrastructure, extractive industries, agriculture, motorized use, and other indicators of modern or lasting technology.

(ibid, pp.14-15)

There is no doubt that much modern technology and infrastructure, together with excessive human populations, effectively destroys the integrity of such ecosystems, reducing ecosystem processes, services, habitat and species diversity to such a degree that this is what is meant by

saying, “this environment is not a wilderness environment”. The built in assumption, however, in this kind of definition—that modern industrial technology and infrastructure *necessarily* disturb these environments to such degrees that they destroy the ecological integrity that constitutes wilderness quality—does not allow for the possibility that forms of modern technology and infrastructure might be built into such areas *without* such destructive degrees of disturbance, forms that allow this wilderness quality to be *preserved*. Just as these definitions of wilderness allow some degree of human habitation and modification to exist, as represented by certain kinds of indigenous communities and their ways of life, might not there be some ways in which modern technology and infrastructure might also be incorporated into these environments, so long as their impact remains within the same kinds of thresholds? If such forms of technology and infrastructure are possible and their potential impact measurable in such terms, it might be that in general, *more* human technology and infrastructure *outside* these areas might *also* be becoming *less* harmful on the biological environments around them, and may even be in some benign, unobtrusive and limited ways, incorporated *within* them. This becomes more important when considered relative to the possibility of *restoring* depleted environments *back* to wilderness quality that some have called “rewilding”.

According to the IUCN, wilderness is not only restricted to large areas that have not been significantly impacted by modern industrial society, but also:

- Somewhat disturbed areas that are capable of restoration to a wilderness state, and smaller areas that might be expanded or could play an important role in a larger wilderness protection strategy as part of a system of protected areas that includes wilderness, if the management objectives for those somewhat disturbed or smaller areas are otherwise consistent with the objectives set out above.

(ibid, p.15)

Any area “capable of restoration to a wilderness state” – that is, to a comparable level of ecological functioning, integrity and diversity, once so restored, can count as wilderness. In theory, *wherever* human infrastructure, technology and habitation have destroyed wilderness quality, *if* wilderness quality can somehow be restored, the area itself is in as sense still already wilderness. But what is also of crucial interest here is the question of *significance* relative to *scale*. In terms of practical utility, it might, along utilitarian lines, seem best to define only *significantly* large areas as wilderness—that is, areas significant *enough* to be *worth* saving. But as Edward O. Wilson writes, wilderness can be seen to exist at multiple different scales: “A single tree in a city park,” he says, “harboring thousands of species, is an island, complete with miniature mountains, valleys, lakes, and subterranean caverns” (2002, p. 145). Wilson, as an entomologist focused on issues of global biodiversity, amongst other things, is alerting us to the *significance* of ecological processes and phenomena at different scales that are nevertheless crucial for life on earth as a whole. The point of seeing wildness and wilderness at different ecological scales and levels and in different senses—including even *in our own bodies and cognitive processes*—and treating it as significant will be explored most fully in the final chapters of this thesis, where it will be articulated in terms of the concept of control. In this way, the possible meaning of the “wilderness within” posited by Oelschlaeger and others will become clearer.

As argued in this chapter, the problem with restricting the idea of wilderness to biological environments which may or may not sustain human life on earth, rather than expanding it to apparently non-biological environments, is that it ignores many of the things we traditionally associate with wilderness: take the simple example of lightning on a barren mountainside, or a part of a desert where there is little or no life. The elemental processes involved in these are the epitome of our concept of wildness, and when we see the tiger, we see how the same forces of nature has manifest now as a *life-form* with qualities that echo and are dependent on this elemental wildness, just like ourselves. Life and the kind of life-forms that support our own existence emerges from and is dependent on these primary, *non-living* processes, as a *function* of them. The non-living universe gives rise to and determines all life-on earth in ways that are beyond the control of the living. It gives the living the dynamism and energy that defines them. If we are to properly understand what regions of existence are wild, we

ought to understand the encompassing non-living ones as much as the biological ones they contain and sustain and generate.

We might say that the planet Mars *is* a wilderness, perhaps one well worth (mindfully and respectfully) exploring. But we might just as rightly say that the whole *universe*—perhaps we might even call it *existence itself*—is a wilderness, the wilderness that encompasses us, from which we spring, which constitutes our being. However, conceiving of wilderness in this way is not meant as some way to create a transcendent, quasi-theological sense of this cosmic wilderness to make our heads spin edifyingly once again, to re-enchant the world with the wonder that first inspired philosophy. Rather, it is to simply adequately place the significance of the biological wilderness environments and the atmospheric and geological features that help constitute them *for us* in the wider, non-living context of what brings them and us forth into this relationship. Without such a perspective, we are more liable to take this relationship for granted, and not realize the precariousness of our own existence in its fullest and most immediate context. Taking this for granted, we endanger ourselves whilst unnecessarily limiting our understanding not only of nature, but of ourselves.

Epistemological Problems in Defining Wilderness and Nature and the Problems of Ambiguity and Equivocation for Policy and Practice

The possible “reality” of wilderness quality and its contrast with the socially constructed nature of wilderness *areas* for Mackey et al contrasts to some extent with how Watson et al define wilderness areas as being constituted by an apparently natural (or empirical) fact—lack of habitat loss. Such a fact (if we can ever be clear as to what kind of a fact we are looking for) may be identifiable with wilderness quality – habitat loss might even be directly proportional to disturbance from modern technological society. For Mackey et al, however, the difference is that wilderness areas are not defined by their wilderness quality (whatever its relation to lack of habitat loss), but rather, by *whether* their wilderness quality is “recognized

and valued” such that there are *defined* directly in relation to human need or demand for these values—they are a social construct. Mackey et al clarify the key difference between wilderness quality and wilderness areas, by stating that “variation in wilderness quality across the landscape can be measured using explicit, repeatable and quantitative methods”, as opposed to the “arbitrary thresholds of remoteness, naturalness” associated with what they are calling wilderness *areas* (1999, p.182).

The only thing that would, it seems, make the two definitions of wilderness posited by Watson et al on the one hand and Mackey et al on the other equal would be if Watson et al were also to agree that “lack of habitat loss” is also such a demand-value-recognition based social construct. This vague notion does at least seem to be a *relative* value, when we examine once again the processes of succession (and therefore habitat loss) that occur over time in *any* ecosystem. However, its relativity to, specifically, it would seem, disturbance by modern industrial societies, whilst dependent on the socially constructive behaviour of determining *how* and at what point this relationship is to be measured and recognized, must also have some basis in physical fact. If the definition of wilderness areas is dependent on their having the wilderness quality of lack of disturbance by modern industrial societies or a related lack of habitat loss, and *also* dependent on people recognizing, valuing and demanding these qualities, they are still physical qualities (even if we were to absurdly reduce them to Lockean “primary” qualities) that must in some sense be independent of how human being conceive of and value them. However, what might help qualify how we distinguish between the conception of Watson et al. of wilderness areas that seem to be definable in terms directly related to what Mackey et al. call wilderness *quality*, and the kinds of arbitrary cultural constructions the latter are referring to when *they* speak of wilderness areas, is to realize a degree of ambiguity inherent in the distinctions made by Mackey et al.

On the one hand, Mackey et al. speak of the critical difference between wilderness quality and wilderness areas, describing the former, as we have seen, as explicitly empirically quantifiable and measurable. They view the latter as arbitrarily measured social constructs, where only portions of wilderness quality are selected based on subjective values and

choices. At the same time, in the very definition they give of wilderness quality, they speak of wilderness quality as being predicated of “any specified unit area” being measured in explicitly empirical terms. In this sense, does it not seem somewhat absurd to argue that whilst we can empirically mark out a geographical area and empirically measure whether or not the area as a whole has a greater degree of wilderness quality than non-wilderness quality, this is *not* an area we can define in terms of the predominance of this wilderness quality compared to non-wilderness quality—that is, not a *wilderness area*? To make it a little more explicit, the problem is that Mackey et al have failed on the one hand to account for the apparent contradiction of utilizing the concept of *area* in the very definition of empirically quantifiable wilderness quality, whilst saying that wilderness *areas* are *not* empirically quantifiable, but value-based social constructions. On the other hand, they have failed to qualify exactly what they mean by wilderness area. Clearly, for example, we might mean, as Watson et al seem to, that wilderness areas are precisely those “unit areas” identifiable by their wilderness *quality* (if we equate lack of habitat loss with lack of disturbance from modern industrial society). The mistake Mackey et al are making is that they fail to qualify their definition by saying something along the lines of, “what we are meaning here by wilderness areas are areas defined by populist notions of what wilderness is that do not accurately reflect whatever their actual wilderness quality may be; areas that might on the one hand be defined informally by diverse individuals and groups, and on the other, but on the same basis, are actually legally *designated* and referred to as such, due to political and legal decisions based on these subjective ideas”. This would imply that there are in fact two different and conflicting ideas of what actually constitutes a wilderness area. Instead, they seem to be saying “*all wilderness areas*” (or “any concept of a wilderness area”) “are subjective cultural constructions that do not accurately reflect the empirical reality of wilderness quality”. Yet they are still doing this whilst literally referring to empirically measurable wilderness quality *areas*. It seems, in fact, from their definition that it might be clearer to make a distinction between empirically measurable wilderness areas (still taking into account relative differences and epistemological difficulties and ambiguities in how we might accurately make such measures and find their boundaries) and other uses of the term wilderness that only arbitrarily and inaccurately measure such qualities, based not on such empirical factors but on selective subjective social and individual demands and beliefs.

The equivocal ambiguity of the use by Mackey et al of terms such as “wilderness area” “unit area” “wilderness quality”, “cultural construct” and “empirically quantifiable” is not altogether unselfconscious. In using these terms, they seem aware of the precarious fluidity of meaning and usage inherent in their use, and to acknowledge the kinds of controversies that might arise as a result. This perhaps partly justifies what seems to be, ultimately, a lack of epistemological commitment. Yet this hestiation has the unfulfilled potential to reveal itself as a form of pragmatic epistemological humility based on largely nonmoralistic and empiricist principles, a potential revealed somewhat enigmatically in their conclusion:

If there is no material thing that is wilderness, then it is an idea, a cultural construct. Of course, nature conservation, for much the same reasons, is also fundamentally a cultural concept. Science has the role of assisting in the development and application of ideas in wilderness and nature conservation using methods that are explicit, repeatable and testable. As concepts of wilderness and nature conservation have evolved, and demands on conservation science have changed, the role of wilderness within the broader scope of nature conservation has shifted dramatically. We argue that the environmental attributes that underpin the notion of wilderness (attributes that relate to the impacts and influence of technological society in the landscape) now have a particular currency as concerns in nature conservation focus ever more strongly on human impacts on ecosystem structure and function and the integrity of ecological systems from landscape to global scales. (ibid, p.185)

In general, ecological science, even more so than other biological sciences, bases itself not on scientific theories formulating mathematical laws, like physics, but on hypotheses, generalized mathematical models and taxonomies reflective of characteristics of the complex dynamic systems involved, and the diverse relative perspectives from which they can be measured. Given this complexity and relativity of perspective, however, ecology is no less empirical or objective than any other science. Yet nature conservation, say Mackey et al., is fundamentally a cultural concept, in much the same way that wilderness is—and wilderness is by their definition, *if* they say there is no material thing that is wilderness. Yet here Mackey et al. speak of “environmental attributes” that “relate to the impacts of technological society on the landscape” in terms of “ecosystem structure and function and the integrity of

ecological systems” and “underpin the notion of wilderness”. Furthermore, in speaking of wilderness quality as empirically quantifiable, but wilderness areas as mere cultural constructs, they never quite answer this question of *if* there is even such a material thing as wilderness. Pairing this concept with the concept of nature conservation, Mackey et al imply that nature conservation, too, *might* be a mere cultural construct in this way. But what is the reality at stake when we speak of whether nature conservation relates to actual material reality, other than the material reality of nature itself? At what point do the empirical phenomena of “environmental attributes” cease to be represented in their material reality by the idea of wilderness, and perhaps, even, by the very idea of nature itself?

It is important not to confuse *objective* relativity with *subjective* relativism. Examples of such confusions are common. For example, the popular but pseudo-scientific and deeply misleading 2004 documentary *What the Bleep Do we Know!?* interprets quantum theory as meaning that physical states at the quantum level are dependent for their reality on subjective qualities like the intentions and emotion of the observer, giving highly suspicious examples of crystal patterns alleged to have been formed due to the emotional states and intentions of people observing them. Some of this documentary appears to be outright fabrication, however, more disturbingly on a conceptual level it encourages viewers to confuse the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum theory, which states that a particle’s existence as an event *having* a specific position or trajectory at a specific time is entirely dependent on its being observed to have such (otherwise it remains a mere probability of such an event occurring across a certain range of multiple possibilities, represented as its wave function), with the idea that physical reality is subjectively *mind*-dependent. So too, objective relativity of perspective in ecological science can all too easily be confused with subjective relativism applied to objective reality—that is, the idea that our concepts of physical reality are entirely shaped by subjective biases, needs and projections, or cultural customs, which ultimately tell us nothing of the true objective nature of physical reality—if there can even be said to be such a thing. But this kind of subjectivism can have a far more respectable and formidable epistemological justification than the naive hocus-pocus pedalled by the exploitation of wishful thinking and ignorance characteristic of pseudo-science.

To the extent that we are empirical sceptics embracing either the kind of nominalism characteristic of David Hume, or the kind of transcendental epistemology of Immanuel Kant, even in their most pragmatically anti-foundational, pluralistic formulations, we must conclude that even our most fundamental concepts of the nature of (physical) reality ultimately give us no way to differentiate what belongs only to our *ideas* and *perceptions* of them, and any reality of them beyond these subjective experiences and formulations (what Kant called *das Ding an sich*—the thing-in-itself). What we might never be able to know, from such perspectives, is the nature of the thing-in-itself—that is, *nature* itself. In this sense, it is not just wilderness that is a cultural construct, but nature itself. Some contemporary environmental philosophers like Steven Vogel indeed argue this (2002). The relevance of our concepts of nature to our understanding of wilderness, the kinds of problems involved in confusions between different senses of what is meant by “nature” and “wilderness”, and the unavoidable epistemological problems this involves are the subject of Chapter Six of this thesis.

What is particularly problematic in the equivocation of Mackey et al between “unit areas” of wilderness qualities and the concept of wilderness areas in general, is that they aren’t simply absent-mindedly ruminating on possible definitions, but are scientists directly responsible for the kinds of definitions used by the Australian Government and law courts. The article I have been citing is actually based on a report the authors (together with R. D. Incoll) wrote in July of 1998 for The Australian and World Heritage Group, Environment Australia (which the article repeats some sections of verbatim). Furthermore, one of its authors, R. G. Lesslie, developed the indicators determining wilderness quality used by the Australian Government’s National Wilderness Inventory (NWI). Such an ambiguity in the very concepts public policy and law are based on concerning wilderness issues risks affecting the empirical accuracy of decisions made. In equivocating between asserting the existence of specifiable unit areas on the one hand, and outright denying the empirical existence of wilderness areas per se on the other, these guidelines and definitions fail to distinguish that there are actually two different kinds of environments referred to as wilderness, one empirical, the other not. Such an equivocal ambiguity may serve to alienate and confuse some stakeholders, whilst potentially

benefiting others who can use this to justify their agendas. All in all, this may again indeed be politically expedient for some. When scientific definitions in use in public policy and law making equivocate thus, what must inevitably suffer is the causal link between public decision making and the ability to accurately perceive and evaluate empirical facts. This is the link of *evidence* so much of secular civil society and its processes depend upon. It becomes all the more important when such decisions are being made in response to a global ecological crisis constituting the larger empirical context of these facts, with all the urgency that may entail.

In order to develop *clear* and environmentally responsible policies and definitions concerning wilderness and environmental concerns in general, what must be shown in a way Mackey et al do not, is how wilderness and nature are more than the kinds of cultural constructions proposed by Cronon and more radically, Vogel, and how they might be distinguished from such constructions and their incoherencies. Yet it will be argued in Chapter Six, that to do this—to argue for the material reality of wilderness, and in this sense, *nature*—involves a necessarily confrontation with the fundamental epistemological difficulty exposed by Hume and Kant—the question of the reality of the thing-in-itself in the immediacy of experience. I will argue that only in the nature of this question itself—the epistemological *predicament* it presents us with—can the nature of what is called by us nature, in all its wildness, be realized.

Wilderness Defined in Terms of Human Control

Gregory H. Aplet and colleagues at The (US) Wilderness Society, at the turn of the millennium, conducted an investigation into the nature and distribution of “wilderness attributes”. Surveying “over a century of wilderness literature”, they concluded that

‘wildness’ is the essence of wilderness, and it is composed of two essential qualities—naturalness and freedom from human control. Naturalness refers to the degree to which land functions without the influence of people. (Aplet, 2005, p.92)

What is important here is that what makes wilderness wild, that is, what makes it wilderness, is a question of degree, in particular, the degree of control or influence humans have over an environment compared to what is *out of* human control in that environment. So an environment that tends not to have human activity as its dominant shaping factor we might call a wilderness. What is interesting about this particular definition is that rather than using the vague general terms of “disturbance by modern industrial civilization”, and its related “habitat loss”, which are problematic due to difficulties and ambiguities measuring precisely when and where an environment is so disturbed that it ceases to be wild, it gives us a clear distinction: if an environment does not have human habitation and activity, technology, and infrastructure as its dominant shaping feature, it is a wilderness. The current thesis effectively owes its starting point to this definition of Aplet et al. (as well as a suggestion by Jeff Malpas)—the idea that wilderness is essentially nature out of our control.

What Aplet et al. effectively, in their definition, show, is what the disturbance of modern industrial societies effectively *does* that destroys wilderness quality: it replaces the non-human processes and qualities that make the environment what it is with human activities and constructions that replace these qualities. Once again, quite justifiably, we see the biocentric bias in defining wilderness in the definition of Aplet et al., for the reference to land “functioning” without human influence implies *biological, ecological* functioning. This definition of wilderness seems not to apply to the planet Mars. However, it is worth considering this: what if, through natural biological processes, a robust and diverse ecosystem existed somewhere on Earth, but it turned out to be one which was totally toxic to human beings, such that we could not enter it without being poisoned, and that its existence contaminated the biosphere with elements that made human life more difficult and under threat. Would this still be a wilderness? If wildness genuinely signifies what is other to human constructions and activities in the sense of being out of human control, then yes.

The difference for us between the idea of a robust ecological wilderness entirely toxic to human beings and the way we traditionally conceive of the biological functions of wilderness helps expose a further bias in the biocentric-anthropocentric view of wilderness: that towards biological functions that not only sustain and let flourish life on earth, but, specifically, *human* life. Yet even these environments which have this function bring forth viruses and other pathogens that have been extremely harmful to human life, such as HIV, and only bring new life and life-support through the deaths of their own organisms. Furthermore, they in turn are dependent on non-biological factors (geological, cosmological, physical, and chemical). As life sustaining and determining natural non-human processes, they *also* take the form of and determine the nature and destiny of human life and consciousness itself. As such they constitute the non-human basis and cause of the human, and as such, constantly transgress the boundaries between not only wilderness and civilization, but life-support and life destruction. This is so *even in the form of the very activities, technologies and infrastructure which destroy wild nature*. In a way, wild nature, through us, destroys itself. Even the wilderness we identify in terms of the life-support function and “natural services” it gives us *also* gives us disease and death, even *inside us*, and even, for itself. Perhaps, however, it might also, through us (if we can do the right things at the right time), *sustain* itself, whilst it continues also to sustain us. The power of a concept of wilderness and wildness that can also be toxic and destructive to human beings is that, in being truthful to how things are by showing both sides, it also shows us the incredibly contingent nature of the forms of life that keep us alive, well and aspiring to more and more. It shows us that in this wildness, we ought to take nothing for granted—that things can always be otherwise. The clearest scenario we have of this is of a wild planet where a human species has sent itself into extinction, a lesson for dinosaurs who thought they knew better. These themes will be taken up in chapters Six and Seven.

This chapter has attempted to summarize and assess contemporary legal and scientific definitions of wilderness. In the previous chapter, the possible prehistory, etymology and history of the concept of wilderness were explored, but this exploration remained somewhat incomplete. This is because what has not yet been addressed directly is the idea of the *value*

of wilderness to human beings. When wilderness became a topic of political and existential concern in the nineteenth century, and the idea of wilderness preservation emerged, such values began to be spelled out explicitly by its advocates such as Henri David Thoreau and John Muir. Today, in Tasmania, and around the world, people are still camped out up in tree-sits, risking their personal safety and wellbeing to protect wilderness areas, and in the libraries over the past century has sprung a proliferation of views on its meaning and significance that is ultimately beyond the scope of the current thesis, so diverse is the scope of writing in just this one area. It is now time, however, to traverse this terrain, and make what we can of why it might be important to protect wilderness. As such, the themes of both of the preceding chapters will be more fully elaborated and integrated, for facts and values are more deeply intertwined than some philosophers, scientists, and decision makers would care to admit.

3.

WHY PROTECT WILDERNESS?

In this chapter I examine in detail some of the most salient arguments in favour of wilderness protection, before going on in chapter Four to look at some serious contemporary criticisms of the very notion of wilderness and the consequences of actions taken on its behalf. In the chapters that follow I address these criticisms and find some solutions to the problems they present. In this chapter the focus will be on the value of wilderness for those who seek to advocate and protect it, with the hope of also revealing further dimensions of *what* wilderness is or might be.

Biodiversity and the Life Support Function

Wilderness is protected in the United States Act of 1964 for “the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historic use”. In more recent times, wilderness has come to be protected for its *ecological* value. U.S. Forest scientist H. Ken Cordell and colleagues in “The Natural Ecological Value of Wilderness”, argue “Native life support is the ecological value of wilderness” (In Cordell, 2005, p.206). They argue that wilderness provides that life support, through the health of its ecosystems. They define ecosystem health as “the set of natural conditions needing to exist to support native life

forms” (p.209). They observe that whilst over time ecosystems may evolve, in the short term healthy systems exhibit the characteristic of *homeostasis*, which they define as:

one of the most common properties of highly complex open systems. A *homeostatic system* is one that maintains its structure and functions through a multiplicity of dynamic equilibriums rigorously controlled by interdependent regulation mechanisms. (ibid)

In a comparative analysis with other landforms, they conclude Wilderness (the capital W denotes specifically land defined and protected under the Wilderness Act of 1964) areas are more natural—that is, free from human influence – and at the same time have the highest levels of ecological health, and preserve ecosystem diversity and so biodiversity (p.242). They cite G. D. Davis as pointing out, along with many others, “the importance of this for the future of all life on this planet” (p.231).

Along a similar vein, here is what the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity publication for 2010 says about the importance of biodiversity and its need for protection:

The action taken over the next decade or two, and the direction charted under the Convention on Biological Diversity, will determine whether the relatively stable environmental conditions on which human civilization has depended for the past 10,000 years will continue beyond this century. If we fail to use this opportunity, many ecosystems on the planet will move into new, unprecedented states in which the capacity to provide for the needs of present and future generations is highly uncertain. (p.13)

In a recent article entitled ‘Biodiversity loss and its impact on humanity’, reviewing 20 years of biodiversity research, Bradley Cardinale et al. have found that “There is now unequivocal evidence that biodiversity loss reduces the efficiency by which ecological communities capture biologically essential resources, produce biomass, decompose and recycle biologically essential nutrients” and “There is mounting evidence that biodiversity increases the stability of ecosystem functions through time” (2012. p. 60). They also found that “The

impact of biodiversity on any single ecosystem process is nonlinear and saturating, such that change accelerates as biodiversity loss increases” and that “Diverse communities are more productive because they contain key species that have a large influence on productivity, and differences in functional traits among organisms increase total resource capture” (ibid, p.61). Furthermore, “Loss of diversity across trophic levels has the potential to influence ecosystem functions even more strongly than diversity loss within trophic levels”—losses at different levels across food chains can have broader ecosystem consequences, and “Functional traits of organisms have large impacts on the magnitude of ecosystem functions, which give rise to a wide range of plausible impacts of extinction on ecosystem function” (ibid). The major impact on humans of biodiversity loss they identified relates to the “services” biodiversity provides for human primary industry, most notably, food production:

For provisioning services, data show that

- (1) intraspecific genetic diversity increases the yield of commercial crops;
- (2) tree species diversity enhances production of wood in plantations;
- (3) plant species diversity in grasslands enhances the production of fodder; and (4) increasing diversity of fish is associated with greater stability of fisheries yields. For regulating processes and services,
- (1) increasing plant biodiversity increases resistance to invasion by exotic plants; (2) plant pathogens, such as fungal and viral infections, are less prevalent in more diverse plant communities; (3) plant species diversity increases aboveground carbon sequestration through enhanced biomass production (but see statement 2 concerning long-term carbon storage); and (4) nutrient mineralization and soil organic matter increase with plant richness. (ibid, p.62)

Overall, however, whilst possibilities for global food, fibre and wood supply are directly affected by biodiversity loss and crucial for human survival and industry, Cardinale et al. argue that “Without an understanding of the fundamental ecological processes that link biodiversity, ecosystem functions and services, attempts to forecast the societal consequences of diversity loss, and to meet policy objectives, are likely to fail” (ibid, p.66). What their

study seems to indicate, however, is how the intricate interdependence of global ecosystems and their species and processes means that any losses may have much broader ecological consequences than can be predicted. The full consequences of biodiversity loss on the potential for human survival and wellbeing remain unknown—how much can we do without before it all collapses?

One problem with equating wilderness with biodiversity is that areas identified as having high biodiversity do not necessarily equate with contemporary scientific definitions of wilderness. For example, a 2003 study by R. A. Mittermeier et al. (edited by Wilson) differentiates the world's wilderness areas from its "biodiversity hotspots". They found that wilderness covers 44% of the planet's land. This land is inhabited by only 3 per cent of the world's human population. Their method was to measure regions with less than five people per km² that have retained at least 70% of their "historical habitat extent (500 years ago)" (p.10309). They found that "most wilderness is not speciose"—that is, not high in biodiversity (ibid). The five wilderness areas that are relatively higher in biodiversity compared to the rest, located in "Amazonia, Congo, New Guinea, the Miombo–Mopane woodlands, and the North American deserts" represent only 18% of plants and 10% of terrestrial vertebrates as endemic to them (ibid), and cover only "6.1% of the planet's land area" (ibid, p.10310). On the other hand, the world's 25 biodiversity hotspots "hold nearly 3 times as many endemics in an area one-fourth as large" (ibid). Norman Myers et al. define biodiversity hotspots as places "where exceptional concentrations of endemic species are undergoing exceptional loss of habitat" and found that "As many as 44% of all species of vascular plants and 35% of all species in four vertebrate groups are confined to 25 hotspots comprising only 1.4% of the land surface of the Earth" (2000, p.853). In these definitions of wilderness and biodiversity hotspots, the wilderness areas with lower but still significant biodiversity are under far less threat, due to their mixture of ecological robustness and low human population, whilst the hotspots are areas being critically reduced by human activity containing the highest biodiversity. Whilst they advocate that the five relatively high biodiversity wilderness areas which cover 6.1% of the Earth's land ought to be protected, Mittermeier et al. argue that "most conservation should remain concentrated . . . in the hotspots of biodiversity" (2003, p.10312).

A potential problem with this differentiation of biodiversity hotspots from wilderness are the ideas that wilderness, to exist, must be of a certain size to make its conservation seem “significant”, and that wilderness is necessarily largely uninhabited and without human modification. Clearly, most of the world’s biodiversity hotspots are hotspots precisely because of the degree of impact we human beings are having on them. But they are *also* hotspots, of course, because of their tremendous biodiversity which is not to be found elsewhere on the planet. But if the human encroachment is *why* this biodiversity is disappearing, replaced by shopping malls or monocultures, the biodiversity clearly does not exist *within* these replacing environments—as anyone strolling through a mall or cotton field can observe. Rather, these environments seem to be ones that exist on the fringes of human settlements or *between* human settlements and seem *to be* wilderness in the sense of largely uninhabited or unmodified land. They are environments which may be damaged or significantly altered by human activity, but which still bring forth the greatest diversity of life on earth anywhere on the planet, and as such are distinctly different to environments that have human beings as their *dominant* shaping factor, such as the mall and the cotton field. Within them, all the richness and uniqueness of life on earth in its own processes and forms can be witnessed. Within them, nature is out of our control as their dominant shaping factor—in other words, it is literally *wild*. Would it not make more sense to define these environments—in so much more danger and need of protection—as wilderness, too? This is indeed what this thesis argues, and what Edward O. Wilson, for one, seems to be referring to when he speaks of wilderness at different scales, argues against strict definitions of wilderness, and speaks of biodiversity in terms of wild nature and wilderness (1994, 2002). What would be required, however, for conservation purposes, is that wilderness areas with high biodiversity would still have to be identified and prioritized over ones with less, especially the critically endangered ones. But a critical benefit of this, apart from gaining the enormous support of environmentalists we find behind wilderness preservation movements for the world’s most critically endangered areas, is that in conceptualizing and experiencing wilderness as nature out of control and including these areas, we might see how nature is out of our control closer to home, and in some senses in which *we need it to be*. But for this to occur, our global practices of identifying and defining wilderness need to change away from

the purist model that appeared in the United States in the 1960s, back to the more latent traditional conception we find as far back as in Layamon's *Brut*—of wilderness being wild nature not only remote from human society, but that also help to shape it, as a part of its very texture and upon which it depends, within and without.

Whilst some wilderness areas have a relatively high biodiversity that ought to be protected, these areas are under less danger and have significantly less diversity than the 1.4 per cent of biodiversity hotspots. They also constitute only a small proportion of the global wilderness, when wilderness is measured as land that has less than 5 people per km². But it is not clear that this is how we ought to measure wilderness; we might instead define it as the kind of environment that does not have human habitation and activity as its dominant shaping factor. More ongoing research would be required to determine what levels of population and what kinds of human activity still allow environments to be shaped only *partly* by humans, and on the whole still by natural processes.

As current legal and scientific definitions stand, the need to preserve biodiversity is not a strong justification for wilderness preservation, and in fact any prioritization of this over the hotspots would, of course, *damage* biodiversity—an environmental property which, as we have seen, human populations depend upon for our survival and economic wellbeing in ways not yet fully understood. A huge mistake would be simply to *equate* wilderness, under current legal and scientific definitions, with biologically diverse environments. Yet even if we can start to define wilderness to *include* the biodiversity hotspots, to preserve biological diversity, we would not need to preserve anything like the full 44% of the Earth's land already defined as wilderness. Wilderness and biodiversity are not the same. If we need to protect one, we do not necessarily need to protect the other. At the same time, the hotspots model of biodiversity is not all there is to this concept. For example, an environment may have low diversity, but contain a number of rare species. Ought that environment be allowed to be destroyed, just because it is not currently either *high* in diversity of species, *or* under obvious threat? On the other hand, if we define wilderness as natural environments out of human control as their dominant shaping feature, it means the environment might still be considered as wilderness

even if sections of it are clear-felled and then regenerated, provided that natural processes are allowed, for the most part, to determine its overall features. The question for loggers and other industrialist then would not be one of wilderness versus industry, but of “how much is too much?” Industry and market reliance on economies of scale might certainly prove unsustainable. Even if the biodiversity of a region seems statistically insignificant compared to the hotspots, does it really mean that it *is* insignificant—once it’s gone, it’s gone.

In addition to these grounds for biodiversity protection in environments we may or may not understand to be wild or wilderness, biodiversity loss also means the loss of the scientific, aesthetic, and possibly *intrinsic* value of countless species and environments. Whilst preserving the life-support or socioeconomic function of biodiversity may be the most *urgent* grounds for conserving *some*, but not all wilderness areas, there are other important reasons for protecting wilderness *and* biodiversity. When we define wilderness as environments where nature is out of human control, we can protect these environments simply by preventing human activity from encroaching natural environments to such a degree that it becomes their dominant shaping features. Under this definition, many of the wooded foothills around cities (like Hobart, the capital of Tasmania, where I live), and bush reserves within cities, although modified by human beings, would still fit the definition of wilderness. Wilderness can be both remote, and in our own back yards. Either way, it is worthy of careful attention and preservation.

Wilderness as object of research and development

Nelson and Callicott in their 2008 anthology include a series of early 20th century writings arguing for the scientific value of wilderness. For example, “Animal Life as an Asset of National Parks”, written in 1916 by zoologists Joseph Grinnell and Tracy L. Storer, argues that protecting wilderness areas can be of great value for scientific research into natural history (2008, p21). Biologist Francis B. Sumner (1920) focused on the urgency of protecting

vanishing wild environments for such purposes. In 1925 forest ecologist Barrington Moore argued for the protection and designation of wilderness national parks so that “the scientist may have an opportunity to study nature’s laboratory” (in Nelson and Callicott, 2008, p.49). Ecologist Victor Shelford argued for the establishment of nature sanctuaries in which “the natural fluctuations of organisms are allowed free play and serve among other things to show what natural fluctuations in abundance are like” (p.92).

Many of these arguments for wilderness preservation for the purposes of scientific enquiry are even more valid today. But if we do not include the 1.4% of the earth’s surface upon which so much of its biodiversity exists in the hotspots as that wild nature we wish to protect, the idea of prioritizing wilderness conservation along these lines would seem to miss the kinds of environments most ideal for the purposes of research and development—and miss them for good, as they are vanishing forever. What disappears with them is a record of the evolution of life on earth, and countless complex, unique adaptations, life-forms, and environments that can reveal not only what is and has been, but also what is *possible* in biological terms. In short, the biological sciences are being greatly impoverished by the loss of the greatest store of their subject matter. And what is true for science is true for the development of new food crops and cultivation techniques, the extraction of medicines and chemicals, and countless other beneficial possibilities *that depend on its applications to these environments*.

“Biodiversity is our most valuable but least appreciated resource,” says Wilson. “No way exists to assess this treasure house of the wild except to grant that it is immense and that it faces an uncertain future” (1994, p.269). Janine Benyus (1997) takes this idea further when describing a whole aspect of modern ecological design and technology as engaged in a process of *biomimicry*: nature’s “laboratory” becomes the blueprint for human technology. Robert Frosch and Nicholas Gallopoulos (1989) coined the term “industrial ecology”, and in broader economic terms, Paul Hawken and Amory and Hunter Lovins call this the next industrial revolution, the design paradigm of so-called “natural capitalism” (1999). From such viewpoints, the very raw material for the greatest technological developments, when

adequately protected and studied, simultaneously allows these developments to be the most ecologically sustainable ones. Progress both preserves and reinvents the wild. The logic is clear enough: the richest biological powerhouses that currently support life on earth can not only feed our technology, but in their very structures and processes allow it to be modelled *in dynamic harmony* with such structures and processes. And from this logic can be drawn a certain conclusion: that only when human infrastructure, economies and technology have sufficiently integrated those aspects of wild nature that sustain life on earth into their own design for them to work in harmony with wild nature does the risk of human-inflicted global life-support collapse subside.

These are powerful arguments because of the current global scientific consensus that something must be done to avoid such a collapse, as expressed in political terms in statements by organisations such as the United Nations. The future of science and technology, and human development also depends on there being a sufficiently rich natural world for human beings to explore and exploit. These arguments can be taken in their own right as justification for wilderness preservation on the grounds of our dependence on it for life, livelihood and development, *when* the world's 25 biodiversity hotspots can be included within its definition and prioritized on their own terms for conservation. But there are also other significant arguments for the protection of wilderness and indeed, biodiversity.

Wilderness as a source of the sublime and ethical value

For Edmund Burke, the sublime in nature, that “comes upon us in the gloomy forest, and in the howling wilderness” (Part II, §V), is that which causes delight through giving us an experience of pain or terror and a sense of our mortality *at a distance*. For Burke, it is capable of filling us not with the pleasure we experience at viewing something merely *beautiful*, but with an astonished, thrilling *delight* (2007, Part I §VII, XVIII, Part II §1-II) that reveals to us something of eternity and infinity (Part II, §IV). In wilderness, we can experience a power, grandeur, and terrified delight that has a more profound impact on us than the pleasures of the merely beautiful, and shows us possibilities and powers that far transcend our own experience and mortality. Whilst not a proponent of wilderness in its own right, Burke identifies it as a fundamental source of the sublime experience he analyses and celebrates. But the experience of wilderness need not be the experience merely of the tourist on the mountain, gazing off into the distance like Caspar David Friedrich’s *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*. Nor need it be that of the photographer or the postcard. In fact, what is most valued in the experience of wilderness is far more direct than Burke’s safe vantage point could allow.

According to Julian Young, the sublime emerged as a significant aesthetic category towards the end of the 17th century, when a French translation of Longinus’ essay ‘On the Sublime’ (*Peri Hupsous*) appeared and there was an increase in travel which came with emotionally charged reports of travellers’ experiences in nature. According to Young, the Longinus essay “noted the capacity of certain works of art and nature to generate ‘ekstasis’, to ‘transport [their audience] ...out of themselves’” (2005, pp.131-2). For Young, the first philosophically interesting account of the sublime appears in Kant. Kant’s crucial insight, according to Young, is that in experiencing something that makes us recognize, in Kant’s own words, “‘our physical impotence, considered as beings of nature’” ([CJ p. 101] in *ibid*, p.133), and therefore, as with Burke, our own mortality, we also experience something else:

a kind of *ekstasis*: we discover, as Kant calls it, a “supersensible” (CJ p. 96 et passim) side to our being, something that is “superior” to our natural self. In experiencing the sublime we transcend our everyday selves, undergo a kind of “out-of-body” experience. We are, says Kant (making use of the fact that the German word for the sublime, *das Erhabene*, literally means “the raised up”), “raised up above fear of [the] ... operations of nature” (CJ p. 103). (ibid, p.134)

There are two different kinds of experience of the sublime, for Kant, the *mathematical* and the *dynamical*, which Young explains: “Examples of the former are the night sky, the pyramids, the interior of St Peter’s in Rome; of the latter, overhanging rock masses, hurricanes, waterfalls and black skies shot through with lightning flashes” (ibid, p.133). The mathematical sublime is the experience of being overwhelmed by a sense of infinite magnitude, and gives rise to an awareness of what is supersensible in the theoretical sense of the ideas of pure reason, whilst the dynamical sublime is the experience of being overwhelmed by nature’s power, which gives rise to the thought of God’s supersensible power to determine how things ought to be. For Kant, these feelings lead us to the thought of the moral ideas of God, Freedom and Immortality that allow us to establish the positive freedom of a moral will spontaneously positing a kingdom of universally rational ends. This allows us to be released from the false freedom of sensual determination, the reacting to and arbitrary choosing between sensory stimuli in an always already causally determined realm.

For Kant, explains Young, “freedom is just the triumph of the moral will over sense” (ibid, p.135). However, argues Young, Kant’s justification for equating the sublime with moral ideas was that ““without development of moral ideas, that which we, prepared by culture, call sublime presents itself to the uneducated man merely as terrible”” (in ibid). Young calls this “both patronizing and absurd” (ibid), and then turns to Schopenhauer, who took up Kant’s idea of the sublime, but rejected its equation with moral ideas. For Schopenhauer, the feeling of the sublime arises when the sensuous will to life is overcome by a contemplative consciousness of the eternal within one’s own subjectivity in the face of an object that threatens one’s life. As Young describes it,

The subject experiences a special feeling of “exaltation (*Erhebung*) beyond the known hostile relation of the ... object” (WR I pp. 201–2). As in Kant’s account, therefore, the key to the sublime is *ekstasis*. The joyful element is the ecstatic transcendence of everydayness, of embodied and mortal individuality. (ibid, p.136)

For Schopenhauer, this has two aspects: the recognition, as with Kant, of the feebleness of one’s own mortal, natural being, faced with annihilation; and the fact that the subject also “. . . feels himself as the eternal, serene subject of knowing, who as the condition of every object, is the supporter of this whole world ... [it] being only his representation” ([WR I p. 205] in ibid, p.136). Schopenhauer, argues Young, is far more explicit in describing the sublime in terms of an experience of being confronted with death, so what becomes clear is that “Part of the feeling of the sublime is, as Heidegger puts it in *Being and Time*, a ‘running-forward (*Vorlaufen*)’ into death” (ibid). The difference with Heidegger, however, is that for Schopenhauer, the experience of mortality is shifted from one’s individual sense of mortality to a general, encompassing sense of the mortality of human beings as such. Another crucial point of distinction between Schopenhauer’s sublime and that of Kant and Burke for the current discussion is that, as Sandra Shapshay has pointed out, “Schopenhauer disagrees with Kant’s claim that we must ‘find ourselves in safety’ and may not actually be in danger in an experience of the sublime” (2012, p.490). For Schopenhauer, the removal from danger need not be physical, but could in theory be simply a removal of consciousness from *the sense* of danger or fear associated with it in a more directly life-threatening situation. The direct experience of wilderness, beyond photographs and scenic lookouts, is a combination of both—the danger of death being at a safe distance, and the danger of death sometimes being all too close.

For Young, both Kant and Schopenhauer essentially make the same error in that instead of recognizing the experience of the sublime as an expansive *ekstasis* into being itself, beyond one’s mere self, they reduce this beyond to nothing but the thought of an absolute, ideal, eternal and singular transcendental subject. In Schopenhauer, the joy associated with the sublime is directly associated with a sense of the overcoming of one’s own death by realizing

the immortal within one's own subjectivity and mortality. Young agrees that this overcoming of death in the experience of the sublime is a profound thought in that it realizes that, in Schopenhauer's words, "'we are one with the world and are therefore not oppressed but exalted by its immensity' (WR I p. 205)" (ibid, p.140). This, according to Young, is "the essential character of the epiphany of the sublime" (ibid, p.140). Young agrees with Freud that the experience of the sublime is an "oceanic" one of expansion into being. For Young, a philosophy that accounts for such an experience whilst avoiding the solipsistic idealism of Kant and Schopenhauer is that of later Heidegger, for whom

Being, that is to say "nature", in a deep sense of the word, is multi-aspected, a "plenitude" of "facets" (PLT p. 124) nearly all of which are unknown to, indeed inconceivable by, us. So, like an iceberg, Being is, almost entirely concealed, almost entirely, as Heidegger puts it, "secret", a "mystery". And this makes it magical, awesome. In other words, "sublime". (ibid, p.141)

Young explains how the sublime finds its way into Heidegger's own terminology: "Though Heidegger rarely uses the word 'sublime', his most fundamental concern is with what he calls 'the *Ereignis*', the experience of which he describes – using Longinus' word – as one of *ekstasis*; "transport and enchantment' (GA 65 p. 70)" (ibid, p.132). Heidegger's work on concepts of nature, being, time and place and the impact of technology and instrumental reason will be of increasing importance throughout this thesis, and will be addressed in more detail in chapter Six.

According to Iris Murdoch, "if we consider what may be actual experiences of sublime feelings, these feelings are not at all easy to interpret, and we may suspect them to have to do, in their real complexity, not only with morals but also with sex" (1959, p.49). For Murdoch, the sublime is an experience of the absence of self, but in the sense of a selflessness, compassion, and in a word—love. It is this that we find in works that shake us as Loginus suggested—in the works of Shakespeare and Tolstoy—an utter selflessness imaginative

absorption in the possibilities of the particularity of others, and in this is our freedom. For her, art and morals are of the same essence, love:

Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality. What stuns us into a realization of our supersensible destiny is not, as Kant imagined, the formlessness of nature, but rather its unutterable particularity; and most particular and individual is the mind of man. . . . One may fail to see the individual because of Hegel's totality, because we are ourselves sunk in a social whole which we allow uncritically to determine our reactions, or because we see each other exclusively as so determined. Or we may fail to see the individual because we are completely enclosed in a fantasy world of our own into which we try to draw things from outside, not grasping their reality and independence, making them into dream objects of our own. Fantasy, the enemy of art, is the enemy of true imagination: Love, an exercise of the imagination. . . . The tragic freedom implied by love is this: that we all have an indefinitely extended capacity to imagine the being of others. Tragic, because there is no prefabricated harmony, and others are, to an extent we never cease discovering, different from ourselves. . . . Freedom is exercised in the confrontation by each other, in the context of an infinitely extensible work of imaginative understanding, of two irreducibly dissimilar individuals. Love is the imaginative recognition of, that is respect for, this otherness. (ibid, pp.51-2)

For Murdoch, one of the things that gives rise to sublime love is what triggers the imagination in the "unutterable particularity" of nature. We do not simply imaginatively expand oceanically into being, but into the irreducible particularity of *each* being or thing, as we encounter them, and find ourselves most confronted by the particularity of each other, and our freedom in the capacity to imagine what that is like. It is this encounter with the particular other, not the threat of death, that gives rise to the sublime, for Murdoch, and without this particularity and encounter and all its difficulties, there can be no *ekstasis*, no going beyond oneself, for we go beyond ourselves precisely into the imagining that is a response to the utter particularity of each other. Murdoch says that these feelings have to do with sex, but this is as much as she says on this matter, and from this we might infer that by this she implies that a significant *part* of the experience of the particularity of one another that is particularly *intense*

and involves the love and compassion in imagining how things are for this unutterably particular other is sex. But this is just one of the physical and emotional extremes, a potentially cathartic one, which the encounter with the other and the sublime possibilities of love entail, that ground it in the body and the problematic nature of desire and repulsion. But in this, there is not only freedom in the limitless capacity to imagine the particularity of the other, but also in the particularity of each from being ultimately categorizable. Unless this freedom is *imagined*, however, by compassionate, loving others, this particularity will not be freed in practice, because it will come up against others who do not allow for its particularity. All that is left is “the war of all against all” when the particularity of how things are for others is not compassionately and continually further imagined. What is different about Murdoch’s view of the sublime is that it is not merely something that arises as a response to natural or life-threatening phenomena at the geographic and spatial limits of civilized lives as in Burke, Kant and Schopenhauer, but which is always already intrinsic to human existence and perception. In this way it is more compatible with the Heideggerian view presented by Julian Young, which is not just about certain kinds of environments or encounters, but being itself.

Already, in the art of the Lascaux cave, we have an expression of the kind of imagining Murdoch associates with the sublime, between humans and nature in the form of other species. Here it is expressed as a sympathetic magic that entails the possibility of such a self-sacrifice to the particular other as an erotic, ecstatic freedom, and in its image confronts us with something continuous, intrinsic and immediate in the “unutterable particularity” expressed, as Benjamin remarked. At the same time, what is in this image comprehends the sense of the sublime in the face of peril and death as posited by Burke, Kant, Schopenhauer and Heidegger. In the ecstatic existential human experience of wildness in wilderness, all of this comes together. It is now time to explore some of the values the inheritors of the romantic tradition of the sublime have found in wilderness.

For Emerson, if we spend enough attentive time in wild nature, a “wild delight” will “run through us” (*CPW*, p.311). His conception of the beauty of wild nature is that essentially “It is the herald of inward and internal beauty, and is not alone a solid and satisfactory

good”(p.315)—that is, it is the external reflection of the soul in the divine design of the world, and the harmony perceivable in it is the means to attaining one’s own natural grace. “In the woods,” he says,

we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life—no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. (ibid)

For Emerson, the sensuous aesthetic power of wild nature here awakens a sense of union with its divine source. But what of this thrill of the sublime so attractive to Burke, Kant and Schopenhauer? Emerson never addresses this directly, but argues that “The uneasiness which the thought of our helplessness in the chain of causes occasions us, results from looking too much at one condition of nature, namely, Motion” (p.138). For Emerson, nature’s secret is the hidden unity in the duality of rest and motion, of change and the identity, the unity of the universal. “Even the corpse has its own beauty”, he says (p.313). For him, the spiritual value of wild nature is ultimately only as a vehicle to be superseded and dominated for men to reach their highest physical and spiritual potential:

‘Nature is not fixed but fluid. Spirit alters, mould, makes it. The immobility or bruteness of nature, is the absence of spirit; to pure spirit, it is fluid, it is volatile, it is obedient. . . . The kingdom of man over nature, which cometh not with observation—a dominion such as now is beyond his dream of God—he shall enter without more wonder than the blind man feels who is gradually restored to perfect sight.’ (p.328)

This anthropocentric idealism was further articulated by Thoreau. When he says, “in Wildness is the preservation of the world” (in Callicott & Nelson, 1998, p.37), he means, amongst other things, the possibilities for the building of a great civilization through its conquest. Thoreau romanticizes the idea of forging into the heart of the wilderness, and building a splendid new civilization there: “Westward the star of empire takes its way,”

(1982, p.308), he writes, and prophesies that the founders of this great new civilization will, like Romulus and Remus, suckled by the wolf, “draw their nourishment and vigor from the same wild source,” as have “the founders of every State that has risen to eminence” (p.309). He also romanticizes aspects of indigenous occupation of wild lands, specifically, how the Hottentots of Southwest Africa and some North American Indians ate the raw marrow of the koodoo antelope and Arctic reindeer respectively, arguing, “Give me a wildness whose glance no civilization can endure,—as if we lived on the marrows of koodoos devoured raw” (ibid). The sublime as the thrilling terror of wild beasts and landscapes threatening human mortality now turns into the thrill in the primal power of surviving this wilderness by overcoming them, and thereby partaking in this wildness—in the thrill of the kill and the devouring of raw meat. At the same time, he encourages the encroachment of even *farmland* into wilderness areas, writing “the farmer displaces the Indian even because he redeems the meadow, and so makes himself stronger and in some respects more natural” (p.313). In extolling the virtue of wildness, Thoreau certainly does *not* promote unrestrained behaviour, but on the contrary, the Spartan discipline that grappling with nature and living off the land necessarily entails. In fact, at a certain point he came to a rather different view than the one romanticizing the eating of freshly killed raw marrow. Thoreau, in engaging more directly with wild nature than Emerson, *embodied* and reflected its contradictory aspects – flux and strife, on the one hand, and the eternal, perfect, ideal unity of all being at the heart of the impermanence of wild nature.

In Thoreau’s celebration of wild nature and heroic individualism is a deep sense of spirituality. He writes of bathing in Walden Pond early each morning as a “religious exercise, and one of the best things which I did”, citing characters apparently engraved on Confucius’ bathtub: ““Renew thyself completely each day; do it again, and again, and forever again”” (p.60). “The morning,” he writes, “the most memorable season of the day, is the awakening hour” – not just literally, but in the sense of *enlightening*: “for an hour, at least, some part of us awakes which slumbers all the rest of the day and night. . . . Morning is when I awake and there is a dawn in me”. “We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake,” he urges, “by an infinite expectation of the dawn” (p.61), to be awakened to it by our own Genius,

awakening the organs of the soul. Hearing the journey of a mosquito in the early hours, for Thoreau, was as affecting as any heroic trumpet “that ever sang of fame. It was Homer’s requiem; itself an Iliad and Odyssey in the air, singing its own wrath and wanderings. There was something cosmical about it; a standing advertisement, till forbidden, of the everlasting vigor and fertility of the world” (p.60). He quotes the Vedas ““All intelligences awake with the morning”” and argues that “Poetry and art, and the fairest and most memorable actions of men, date from such an hour”. This last point is the most important, he argues, for although

It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts. Every man is tasked to make his life, even in its details, worthy of the contemplation of his most elevated and critical hour. (p.61)

For Thoreau then, in the wild dawning’s “celestial music”, far away from “factory bells”, the spiritual truth of nature has the power to awaken within us the greatest ethical, intellectual, and creative powers, a potential that yet remains unfulfilled, for

The millions are awake enough for physical labor; but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake. How could I have ever looked him in the face? (pp.60-1)

For Thoreau, finding the truth means looking beyond mere appearances towards the eternal, but by finding the underlying reality of these temporal appearances *within* the wildest engagement with the world itself: “our vision does not penetrate the surface of things,” he writes, “We think that that *is* which *appears* to be”. At the same time, whilst “In eternity there is indeed something true and sublime,” he argues that

all these times and places are now and here. God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages. And we are enabled to apprehend at

all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us. (p.65)

Whilst wild nature is full of wonders, and the world full of distractions and complexities, Thoreau argues we need to cultivate a clarity and simplicity within ourselves reflecting the simplicity and power of the dawn and of nature itself: “Let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito’s wing that falls on the rails” (ibid) – to know the real, to “come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call *reality*, and say, This is, and no mistake; and then begin, having a *point d’appui*”, a base or point of support. “Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in,” he writes. “I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbled with stars” (p.66). At the same time, in encouraging a direct engagement with worldly nature, Thoreau was not encouraging a sensuously indulgent existence by any means, and in the sense of our natural tendencies towards such idle indulgence, argued, “Nature is hard to be overcome, but she must be overcome” (p.147), by hard physical work, not as an end in itself – “I do not wish to be any more busy with my hands than is necessary” (p.66), but so the mind might be liberated from such indolent sensuality. The individual, to make the inspiration of the wild available to the soul, must be physically and mentally purified, and to such an end, Thoreau eventually came to advocate vegetarianism, and the avoidance of rich food supplemented with condiments to increase pleasure, alcohol, and even tea and coffee. “I believe that every man who has ever been earnest to preserve his higher or poetic faculties has been particularly inclined to abstain from animal food, and from much food of any kind,” (p.143) he writes, arguing that eating flesh and engaging in other culinary indulgences retards the imagination. He believed the stage of vegetarianism to be “part of the destiny of the human race,” (p.144), a view which came to him by “listening to the faintest but constant suggestions of his genius”, because, “No man ever followed his genius till it misled him”.

If the hunter has a taste for mud-turtles, muskrats, and other such savage tid-bits, the fine lady indulges a taste for jelly made of a calf’s foot, or for sardines from over the sea, and they are

even. The wonder is how they, how you and I, can live this slimy beastly life, eating and drinking.

Our whole life is startling moral. . . . the laws of the universe are not indifferent, but are forever on the side of the most sensitive. Listen to every zephyr for some reproof, for it is surely there, and he is unfortunate who does not hear it. (p.145)

If we can learn to cultivate, as the Vedas advocate, “A command over our passions” (p.146), we can realize that “Chastity is the flowering of man; and what are called Genius, Heroism, Holiness and the like, are but various fruits which succeed it”. We can eat purer, cleaner, simpler food, and drink only that purest of liquids, water, realizing at the same time that “He who distinguishes the true savour of his food can never be a glutton” (p.145). This way, we come to treat ourselves “with ever increasing respect” (p.148).

“The universe is wider than our views of it,” says Thoreau, echoing Hamlet, “Yet we think that if rail-fences are pulled down, and stone-walls piled up on our farms, bounds are henceforth set to our lives and our fates decided” (p.211). Yet physical explorations of the wilds of the world are of no real use to us unless we also explore and come to know ourselves, for “Herein are demanded the eye and the nerve” (p.213). We must learn to actively dream, for

if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavours to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours . . . will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them. (p.214)

At the same time, Thoreau encourages a pragmatic humility, saying, “Love your life, poor as it is. You may have some pleasant, thrilling, glorious hours, even in a poorhouse” (p.217), and although “Some are dinning in our ears that we Americans, and moderns generally, are intellectual dwarfs compared with the ancients, or even the Elizabethan men,” we should realize that “A living dog is better than a dead lion. Shall a man go and hang himself because he belongs to the race of pygmies, and not be the biggest pygmy that he can? Let everyone mind his own business, and endeavour to be what he was made” (p.215).

For Thoreau, the possibility of human genius arising is entirely dependent on wilderness. That is, only through wilderness, or through some experience or intuition of wildness, are the greatest feats of the human intellect and imagination possible. “In Literature,” for example, he says, “it is only the wild that attracts us . . . It is the uncivilized free and wild thinking in ‘Hamlet’ and the ‘Iliad’, in all the Scriptures and Mythologies, not learned in the schools, that delights us” (1982, pp.313-4). Genius is “a light which makes the darkness visible, like the lightning’s flash, which perchance shatters the temple of knowledge itself” (p.314). He was not alone in this thinking. Novalis wrote:

The raw discursive thinker is a scholastic. The true scholastic is a mystical subtilizer. Out of logical atoms he builds his universe—he annihilates all living nature in order to put an artifice of thought in its place. His objective is an infinite automaton. Opposed to him is the raw intuitive thinker. He is a mystical macrologue. He hates rules and fixed forms. A wild, violent life prevails in Nature—everything is alive. No laws—arbitrariness and miracles everywhere. He is purely dynamic. (in Halsted, 1969, p.353)

This association of wild nature and genius is echoed in a more subdued form in Kant, who in his *Critique of Judgement*, defines genius as the “talent (natural gift) that give the rule to art” (2000, p.186). It is “an inborn productive faculty of the artist,” which “itself belongs to nature” and is “the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art” (ibid).

For Kant, the genius of those predisposed to be artists (which, like Novalis, is the only sense in which he used this word, genius) is *not* a product of any actually real phenomenon of nature, as it is for Thoreau, but is, like the sublime, a product of the transcendental ideas. It is the spontaneous capacity of the imagination for a great deal of *thinking* upon ideas which have no corresponding *concept*, “that no language fully attains or can make intelligible” (ibid, p.192), over a “multitude of related representations, which let one think more than one can express in a concept determined by words”, “to animate the mind by opening up for it the prospect of an immeasurable field of related representations” (ibid, p.193). It is the “rule nature gives to art” only inasmuch as those predisposed to imagining and thinking through its representations are, by what is given *a priori*, unable to quantify it definitively, logically. The faculty of genius is the faculty for transcendental aesthetic ideas that endlessly relate the imagination to the understanding (ibid, p.194).

Goethe clearly saw the role nature played in the genius of Shakespeare:

The structure of his plays, in the accepted sense of the word, is no structure at all. Yet each revolves around an invisible point which no philosopher has discovered or defined and where the characteristic quality of our being, our presumed free will, collides with the inevitable course of the whole. . . . Nature! Nature! Nothing is so like Nature as Shakespeare’s figures. (1994, pp.164-5)

“By means of genius,” said Kant, “nature does not prescribe the rule to science but to art...” (2000, p.187). But Goethe did not see such a gulf between art and science as Kant did. In response to criticism of his *Metamorphosis of Plants*, Goethe wrote, “They forgot that science arose from poetry, and did not see that when times change the two can meet again on a higher level as friends” (1995, p.xxi). He also wrote, “There is a delicate empiricism which makes itself utterly identical with the object, thereby becoming true theory. But this enhancement of our mental powers belongs to a highly evolved age” (ibid, p.307). These thoughts of Goethe are highly suggestive, but alas, were never fully developed—by him at

least. But the possibility that the nature that inspires the poet might also be the inspiration for science is still clear in his thoughts. This theme will become extremely important in chapter Six, where the possibility of the coexistence of scientific rationality and the poetic disclosure of being will be shown to be crucial for our understanding of wilderness, and the wildness of our own existence, and nature itself understood as the presencing of being.

Sampson Reed, one of Thoreau's New England contemporaries and predecessors, argued that wild nature inspires both the genius of the poet and the scientist. In 1821, he had already written,

. . . in nature both the sciences and the arts exist embodied . . . There is unison of spirit and nature. The genius of the mind will descend, and unite with the genius of the rivers, the lakes, and the woods. Thoughts fall to the earth with power, and make a language out of nature . . . Science will be full of life, as nature is full of God. She will wring from her locks the dew which was gathered in the wilderness.
(in Miller, 1979, pp. 52-3)

And in 1826:

The natural world was precisely and perfectly adapted to invigorate and strengthen the intellectual and moral man. Its first and highest use was . . . to draw forth and mature the latent energies of the soul; to impart to them its own verdure and freshness; to initiate them into its own mysteries . . . (ibid, p.55)

But perhaps, after all, there is nothing so secret or special in this. If wilderness is nature's laboratory, then, for the curious mind, it must contain the essential impetus for the development of science. But this has been evident from the beginning, when the first proto-scientists, the pre-Socratic philosophers, began their quest for a first principle of nature, and found it in water, fire, and the elements. And before them, the Egyptians had already founded

the mathematics that came to puzzle the Greeks, not through theorizing, but through *building*. Thales was also an irrigation engineer, a farmer, a businessman, a politician. Two thousand year later, Leibniz was building dams, channels, and military hardware, and securing the Hanoverian succession to the English throne; Newton, designing a system for mapping the world by the stars and sea, for its conquest. For science and art have come about through the struggle against nature, the struggle against the wilderness, as well as through the desire to harmonize with it. Yet a total destruction of wilderness could mean that this most extraordinary line of intellectual development, from its most scientific to its most creatively expressive forms, could come to an end, given its dependence on this raw material, this vital, dynamic substratum of human potentiality, potency, power.

Thoreau's philosophy of the wild was essentially a philosophy of human freedom. Another environmental philosopher who equates wildness with freedom is David Rothenberg, who writes:

The *wild* is more than a named place, an area to demarcate. It is a quality that beguiles us, a tendency we both flee and seek. It is the unruly, that which won't be kept down, that crazy love, that path that no one advises us to take—it's against the rules, it's too far, too fast, beyond order, irreconcilable with what we are told is right. Wild Thing. Wild Life. Wild One. Wild Child. Wild Culture. You make my heart sing. But who knows what tomorrow may bring? (1995, p.XVII)

Rothenberg gives a good sense of how much of Western and perhaps global culture is suffused with the never-finally-categorizable sense of what is wild, unruly, already beyond, within. At the same time, in identifying it as "that crazy love" we are reminded of Murdoch's idea of the sublime as the love that imagines what is unutterably particular in the other, beyond categorization. He show us that wildness is both recursively polysemic *and* isomorphic—it's meaning keeps transforming, and yet in those very transformations is something everywhere recognizable. This recognizable consistency within the flux and difference, which Kant recognized as the essence of genius in the imagined other that cannot

be ultimately grasped in any concept, will be analysed in chapters Six and Seven in terms of how we conceptualize nature and our existence as natural beings, as it relates directly to the definition of wilderness as nature out of our control. Rothenberg continues,

The wild refers to many things. In wildness is the preservation of the world, says our canonized curmudgeon Thoreau. He did not say “wilderness.” He did not mean wilderness. He meant the breaking of rules, the ostracized life in the midst of his peers. Walden Pond is a mile from downtown Concord, and a train runs close to the far shore today just as it did back in Henry David’s time. That nearness is the wild in it. To buck civilization right in its midst. He said the wild is all that interests us in literature. That’s where he lures us away from losing ourselves in nature to finding a deep surge of nature far inside us, what he named as the soul force behind creativity. Poet Philip Booth echoes the sentiment: “whether we live and write in sight of Mt. Rainier or in midtown Manhattan, no matter where we experience being in place, we immerse in our deepest selves when we begin to write. It’s from instinctive memory, from *the wilderness of the imagination*, from *a mindfulness forever wild*, that Art starts.”

For Novalis, Goethe, Reed and Thoreau, wild nature itself gives rise to art, to the kind of genius that can be equated with the works of Shakespeare. And what, after all, *is* genius other than that which most liberates us in art, philosophy and science? It is that thing in human works which, when apprehended, makes life so much more than it could otherwise have been, profoundly transcending our usual limits, giving us a radical freedom. What is wild is free, and can free us. But as Phillip Booth tells us, this wildness is also within us, and can emerge whether we are in Manhattan or in the wilderness proper. As being “within our deepest selves”, it is what is instinctual and at the same time, most *initimate*—and what could be more instinctual and intimate than the love that imagines beyond *conceptual* limits the unutterable particularity of the other, in the face of death and the contingent needs of the temporality of our existence? It what Murdoch recognizes as sublime in the works of Shakespeare somehow identical with what Goethe describes as “Nature! Nature!” and Thoreau described as his “uncivilized free and wild thinking”—but also with the Heideggerian sublime possibilities of realizing the nature of our being in time, and of the presencing of being in place, itself? In Chapter Six, it will be argued that nature and our

existence within it is *already* sublime in this sense, already with the potential to liberate us via our capacity for the “wild, uncivilized thought” of nature that transcends its concept in imagining the unutterable particularity in the presencing of the Other. In this possibility is the possibility for a creative *praxis* transcending the modes of production that obscure the reality of natural being for us and inhibit our freedom, expressing our inner wildness.

As with Emerson, for Thoreau, the ultimate aesthetic and spiritual value of wilderness is as the source of the greatest human potential imaginable, but this time in *both* its sublime and its beautiful aspects, and in a much more primal, practical, and sometimes even violently *embodied* sense. And Thoreau went further: for him, *only* through a direct and sustained immersion in wilderness might we become the best we can be, for it is the ultimate ground through which the greatest human *virtues* emerge. And unlike Emerson, Thoreau tries to reach *beyond* the human, into not only the mysteries of the soul, but the mystery of *things* – even if only to fall back immediately into his anthropocentric perspective.

In Thoreau’s writing, the need for wilderness preservation had not yet arisen; it was as though the wilderness of the West was inexhaustible. Not so very many years later, however – still within Emerson’s lifespan, at least – a very different understanding of the aesthetic and spiritual values of wilderness began to emerge, together with the perception of an urgent need for its protection, in the writings and campaigning of John Muir. As with Thoreau and Emerson before him, he considered the inner life of the soul superior to the mere experience of the senses, and at the same time saw wild nature as perhaps the ultimate point at which to realize one’s unity with the divine through a rapturous experience of its beauty and wonder. However, there is something of an ecological “Copernican Revolution” in Muir’s environmental thinking that radically differentiates him from his forebears:

The world, we are told, was made especially for man - a presumption not supported by all the facts. . . . With such views of the Creator it is, of course, not surprising that erroneous views should be entertained of the creation. . . . Now, it never seems to occur to these far- seeing teachers that Nature’s object in making animals and plants might possibly be first of all the

happiness of each one of them, not the creation of all for the happiness of one. Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation? And what creature of all that the Lord has taken the pains to make is not essential to the completeness of that unit - the cosmos? The universe would be incomplete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge. . . . This star, our own good earth, made many a successful journey around the heavens ere man was made, and whole kingdoms of creatures enjoyed existence and returned to dust ere man appeared to claim them. After human beings have also played their part in Creation's plan, they too may disappear without any general burning or extraordinary commotion whatever. (1916)

Here, unequivocally, and perhaps for the first time, wild nature is considered to be of more than the merely instrumental value of bringing forth the greatest potentials of the human soul; here, it is an end in itself, in the scheme of which any human values, spiritual or not, may prove to be ultimately insignificant. Nor is this merely a recognition of the intrinsic value of nature as a whole, it is also a recognition of the possibility that each and every form and entity that belongs to it might even have its own intrinsic value, might be an end in itself, existing *for* itself.

Seven years after Muir made this observation, in 1923, Edwin Hubble observed that what was then called the Andromeda Nebula, which, like countless similar forms, seemed to be a distant cloud of gas in the night sky, was actually composed not of gas, but of stars—that it was a galaxy amidst a universe of other galaxies like and unlike our own. In the words of astrophysicist and science writer John Gribbin,

As other techniques were developed to measure distances to galaxies . . . it eventually became clear that just as there are hundreds of billions of stars in the Milky Way Galaxy, so there are hundreds of billions of galaxies in the visible Universe, which extends for billions of light years in all directions. (2003, p.590)

This view of the universe empirically exposes the anthropocentric ontologies of the likes of Emerson and Thoreau as pure absurdities. Whatever the universe and nature are, it is probably fairly safe to assume that fulfilling the divine destiny of any one species is *not* its ultimate purpose or function, and that it is unlikely it could even have such a thing. In this light, we must conclude, as Muir did before us, that the aesthetic and spiritual value of wild nature *to us*, whilst of course reflecting to us the biases of our own perceptual limitations and needs, can no longer be thought of as something either specifically designed *for* human beings, nor as the only possible value *in* this wild nature itself. In fact, according to contemporary wilderness proponent Holmes Rolston III, the more we can recognize the *intrinsic value* of wild nature, the more *instrumental* (spiritual and aesthetic) value it can have for us:

In a final paradox, when we humans recognize values outside ourselves, we realize within the subtlest value of all. . . . it results in our further spiritualizing. We become nobler spirits, encompassing the wild other for itself and in the whole, not humanistically. Nature surpasses herself to generate the most exceptional novelty yet. We praise the productive source, and praise the values found instrumentally and intrinsically among the myriad natural kinds. We cannot produce ourselves and must value the system that has. But the systemic source cannot reflectively evaluate what it has produced; only we can. In humans, an evolutionary ecosystem has become conscious of itself. (1986, p.141)

The only problem with Rolston's view of wilderness is that he insists that it can only be defined as the "places on Earth where the nonhuman community of life is untrammelled by man, where we only visit and spontaneous nature remains" (1991, in Callicott & Nelson, 1998, p.384). This is because he rejects the view put forth by opponents of the wilderness idea he is defending like J. Baird Callicott, whom he quotes,

"man is a natural, a wild, an evolving species, not essentially different in this respect from all the others." Poets like Gary Snyder perhaps are entitled to poetic license. But philosophers are not, especially when analyzing the concept of wilderness. They cannot say that "the works of man, however precious, are as natural as those of beavers," being "entirely natural," and then,

hardly taking a breath, say that “the cultural component in human behaviour is so greatly developed as to have become more a difference of kind than of degree.” If this were only poetic philosophy it might be harmless, but proposed as policy, environmental professionals who operate with such contradictory philosophy will fail tragically. (ibid, p.369)

What Rolston identifies here is a paradox not as easily dismissed as he wishes to, with an absolutely definitive ontological distinction between the human and the natural or the human and the wild. Part of the reason for this is that he is unconsciously moving between two different senses of the word nature, as John Stuart Mill warns us against in his 1874 essay, “On nature”, and the tendency for which Steven Vogel uses as an argument *against* the very idea of nature as anything more than a human construction (2002). In one sense, what is meant by “nature” is simply all things and their causes, including human beings and human constructions. In the other, “nature” means all that which is not human or not produced by humans. But the confusion of these two senses, I argue, is not simply some kind of intellectual oversight, but represents the kind of existential paradox we in fact confront as human beings, both belonging to and having a sense of being entirely separate from nature—as-Other—as *visitors, who do not remain* (in our temporal, mortal existence). This is a paradox that has confronted us since the days of the Lascaux painting, and is so vividly portrayed in its erotic ruptures of life and death, the sympathies in its image between the human and non-human so incisively interpreted by Bataille and Smith, as discussed in chapter One. In chapter Six I will argue that it is precisely the ways in which this paradox presents itself to us in experiences of wilderness that gives rise to the kinds of beliefs about wilderness Rolston represents. I will argue that it does so *relative* to the kinds of practices whereby we socially construct our views of nature and the human, and that in the paradox itself is the key to understanding the significance of wilderness as nature out of our control. One thing wilderness philosophies like that of Rolston fail to see is the wild Other in ourselves and our civilization that, unrecognized and unmediated, risks destroying the wilderness around us, and us with it. So far, what we are failing tragically in policy and practice to do, despite protecting a great deal of wilderness as Rolston defines it, is to protect those crucial hotspots which contain the greatest wild diversity of life, but which we

ourselves have already made radical incursions into and live too close to for purists to see the wildness in. But wildness means nothing other than “freedom from control”.

Psychologist and wilderness researcher Robert Greenway speaks of “the wilderness effect”. His research, conducted over thirty years of guiding and observing wilderness trips and experiences, suggests time spent in wilderness can have an extremely positive effect on both mental and physical health. From “700 questionnaires, 700 interviews, 52 longitudinal studies, and more than 300 personal responses to trips (stories, myths, poems and drawings), among his findings are the following:

90 percent of respondents described an increased sense of aliveness, wellbeing, and energy;

90 percent stated that the experience allowed them to break an addiction (defined very broadly—from nicotine to chocolate and other foods) . . .

and

77 percent described a major life change upon return (in personal relationships, employment, housing, or life-style) (in Roszak et al., 1995, pp. 128-9)

In one of Greenway’s own personal accounts of a trip, he describes the experience of encountering the particular details of the wild environment: “we found in tiny scale and modest simplicity perfection all around us” (ibid, p.126). He continues,

without knowing quite how it happened, distance disappeared and there was an openness to each other, that embraced the pool, the river, and farther out into the wilderness, the “other world,” the whole Earth, the universe.

We looked frankly at each other, enjoying our clear eyes, our health; smiling, weeping, we saw each other as if for the first time, as if there had never been any distance. Some quietly spoke from their hearts, simple things—sharing a memory, thanking someone for a favor. (pp.126-7)

This account suggests that, perhaps as a result of the benefits claimed by participants, there is also, in collective experiences of wilderness, the possibility for vast improvements in the quality of human relationships, including people's communication and social skills. Such an "opening out" further resembles both the *ekstasis* of opening out to nature, being, and opening out to the particularity of each thing and one another, encounters resembling both Iris Murdoch's and the Heideggerian sense of the sublime.

In chapters One and Two we observed different ways in which wilderness was defined in contrast to the disruptive behaviours of human societies, particularly modern industrial societies. Max Oelschlaeger, Paul Shepard, Hans Peter Duerr and David Abram were seen to advocate a posthistoric primitivist conception of wilderness, where the *experience* of wilderness was seen to resemble the supposed experience of Palaeolithic humans and so contemporary indigenous peoples. There are obvious problems of "romantic primitivism" here, where the historical and indigenous Other is idealized, generalized and appropriated (ignoring the real "otherness" of individuals and cultures and their rights to represent themselves and their own experiences) for each thinkers' own purposes, showing an exploitative and disingenuous (or at least extremely naive) lack of originality. However, these thinkers also posit values in the experience of wilderness that, importantly, at least in principle, are able to overcome many of the ills of contemporary industrial societies which give rise to the destruction of wilderness and biodiversity in the first place, and that furthermore cause a significant alienation and limitation of the possibilities of human experience.

Oelschlaeger argues for a postmodern wilderness philosophy that effects what he calls a postmodern hierophany, grounded in a scientific cosmology of creative evolution, that reawakens "a primordial sense of the fundamental mystery and gratuitousness of human existence, some sense of the infinite and transcendent beyond merely human purpose and life" (1991, p.341). Such a philosophy would effectively transpose what the Palaeolithic "intuited . . . human finitude, the miracle and utter gratuity of existence" into a postmodern

“creation story” which allows “a blurring of ontological lines between the real and the factual, that world known and revealed to experimental science, and the imaginary and fantastical” (ibid, p.331). The term “creative evolution” comes from Bergson, whom Oeschlaeger quotes:

It must not be forgotten that the force which is evolving throughout the organized world is a limited force, which is always seeking to transcend itself and always remains inadequate to the work it would fain produce. The errors and puerilities of radical finalism are due to the misapprehension of this point. It has represented the whole of the living world as a construction analogous to a human work. (in ibid, p.342)

For Oeschlaeger, as with Bergson and Heidegger, the problem with modern industrial societies is that they conceptualize nature and human existence precisely in such instrumental terms, whilst the (wild) being of nature and human existence is irreducibly different to these categories and uses which merely arise *from* it. As already noted in chapter One, for Oeschlaeger, Shepard, Duerr and Abram, a direct encounter with wilderness, which is simultaneously a “wilderness within”, entails a different kind of experience of *time*, which essential involves an encounter in the *place* and landscape of the wild Other that also nurtures in the cycle of life and death, and shakes one’s sense of reality and logic away from fixed categories into the dynamic *becoming*, *presencing*, or *duration* of what is most immediate and transforming as particular in our existence.

David Abram draws on the phenomenologies of Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger to argue for a need to return to a mode of experience predating the written word, where the environmental intertwining of subject and object that defines our existence becomes present to us once again through the direct experience of the senses. For Abram, this entails a commitment to an *animistic* ontology of eco-phenomenological interdependence. This requires us to view each thing we encounter, and the world itself, as animate, an actively ideational entity:

To describe the animate life of particular things is simply the most precise and parsimonious way to articulate the things *as we spontaneously experience them*, prior to all our conceptualizations and definitions. . . . Our most immediate experience of things is necessarily an experience of reciprocal encounter – of tension, communication, and commingling. From within the depths of this encounter, we know the thing or phenomenon only as our interlocutor – as a dynamic presence that confronts us and draws us into relation. We conceptually immobilize or objectify the phenomenon only by mentally absenting ourselves from this relation, by forgetting or repressing our sensuous involvement. To define another being as an inert or passive object is to deny its ability to actively engage us and to provoke our senses; we thus block our perceptual reciprocity with that being. By linguistically defining the surrounding world as a determinate set of objects, we cut our conscious, speaking selves off from the spontaneous life of our sensing bodies. . . . If, on the other hand, we wish to describe a particular phenomenon without repressing our direct experience, then we cannot avoid speaking of the phenomenon as an active, animate entity with which we find ourselves engaged. To the sensing body, *no* thing presents itself as utterly passive or inert. *Only by affirming the animateness of perceived things do we allow our words to emerge directly from the depths of our ongoing reciprocity with the world.*

(1996, p. 56)

The title of Abram's book is *The Spell of the Sensuous*. This is meant literally—what has been labelled in studies of indigenous hunter-gatherer cultures as magic is found to have a real source in the interdependently animate nature of *sensuous* worldly embodiment. It is only through the *senses* that the world *ever* speaks to us. According to Abram, this sensuous, animate reality is the reality not of time and space as distinct dimensions, but of *place* and its *rhythms* and chaotic, bewitching embodiments of sensuous *encounter* with the life of all that is Other to yet also constitutive of self. Language lives through the senses and the expressions they encounter in the environment, in the body, and communicated directly through spoken word, ritual and song. “Each place its own psyche” argues Abram, “Each sky its own blue” (ibid, p.262).

Abram, like Oelschlaeger and Shepard, views wild nature as something that cannot be properly grasped through a historical or linear sense of time, but in the phenomenological embodiment of temporal immediacy. Like Heidegger, he does so in terms of death, and the temporality of human mortality, but instead draws upon, again like Oelschlaeger and Shepard, “the view of death expressed in the songs and practices of indigenous, oral cultures” to propose “an ecological, postmodern interpretation of death” (1995, p.97). “An ecological interpretation of dying”, he argues,

would be one that recognizes the living not as a determinate mechanism but as a magic webwork of reciprocities and cyclical relations between diverse symbiotic entities—diverse cells, tissues, organs—all engaged an ecstatic, improvisational dance. The body, acknowledged as an interdependent and shifting lattice of relationships, is a living ecosystem, a microcosm of the encompassing order, or equilibrium, in which it is embedded. Death might then be interpreted as that moment when the central equilibria of the body begin to break down, the moment at which this field of recursive relations no longer maintains itself as something relatively separate or autonomous, but instead begins to open outward into the larger field of relations—into the soils, the waters, and the air—opening outward, that is, into *space*, the very realm that envelops me as I write this. (ibid, pp.97-8)

This is not to trivialize death, however, he argues, for “death, in indigenous cultures, has its mystery and its terror, yet this is not because it is anticipated as the impending cessation of existence” (ibid, p.98). It entails an ecstatic, fully embodied and sensuously present way of living in belonging to place and wild nature, for

Death, for oral peoples, is not felt as the approach of nonbeing or nothingness. Rather the awesomeness of death is that of an astonishing metamorphosis, the imminence of one’s reincorporation into the encompassing cosmos. Those who have died are not elsewhere—they are present in the very space that enfolds us, in the ripples that move through a flock of birds turning in the sky, in the sounds of a stream, or the wind sighing in the grasses. Death, in such a culture, is not the closure of time, but a gateway into environing space. Indeed, it is these same spatial depths from whence we each emerge at the moment of birth. The dead and the not-yet-born, the past and the future, are somehow present in this very space that sensorially envelops us. (ibid)

Yet in life, argues Abram, we sometimes have experiences where the senses lead us to imaginatively open out, leaving our bodies with the air we breathe out to explore the possibilities of the world around us. Wilderness itself can trigger this:

Sometimes it is the wild earth itself who draws us out, coaxing us into its depths, making us run, leap and cry in delight at this vastness, ducking into holes or swinging on branches or just lying back on the grass and staring at stars; looking up through the swirling lens of earth's sky, gazing out across the solar depths, beyond Saturn, beyond Neptune, floating out into the very Body of the galaxy, grazing the stars with our eyes, our fingers brushing the grass, our mouths drinking the night air. Earth does this to us sometimes, or the wind does it, turning our whole body inside out so that we are outside ourselves without having to leave, finding ourselves, by virtue of being in *this* place, suddenly connected to *all* places. It is this that makes my words wonder if there's an eternity to be had not by getting *beyond* this world but simply by being *in* it, not by escaping the body but by *becoming* the body. (ibid, p.99)

Such an experience, argues Abram, "is neither of time nor of space, but of earthly *place*—of this breathing world as a locus of mysteries in which we participate" (ibid). "When I allow the past and the future to dissolve, imaginatively, into the immediacy of the present moment," observes Abram, "then the present itself expands to become an enveloping field of *presence* . . . vibrant and alive . . . the enveloping sensory landscape" (ibid, p.100). "In this open present," he argues, "I am unable to isolate space from time, or vice versa. I am immersed in the world" (ibid).

According to Edward Casey, wilderness, the place of the wild, can guide human beings to realize that "everything is at once natural and cultural, not only "in us" but *in the natural world* as well" (1993, p.252). Through the human encounter with wilderness emerges what he calls a *thickening* that he describes as a "dense coalescence of cultural practices and natural givens" where they "sediment and interfuse" (ibid, p.253). What is possible, he argues, is that within this process, the land itself, in the particularity of the wild place it presents, can take

the lead. He refers to such an approach as practice as *lococentrism*, where we might be guided by a “polymorphism of wild Being” in the wild places of earth, where “the primacy of earth extends from the mythical to the mundane” (ibid, p.265). For Casey, all places, including wild ones, bring the temporality of our being into existence by being not static stages for action, but on the contrary, precisely what afford us the possibility of *motion*, and therefore, the journeys of our lives. Places are “the foci of flow on the pathway of the journey”, he argues (ibid, p.280). Within them, stability and movement are “complementary, each enhancing the other in the course of a journey that is as placeful as it is eventful” (ibid, p.286). As such, he argues that “time and space, rather than existing before place and independently of each other, *both inhere in place to start with*” (ibid, p.288) and “the same intertwining also gives rise to movement” (p.289). Casey argues that “The *in* of intimacy resides in place *before* it resides in the more determinate modes of in-hood that inhere in being-in-the-world, a term which we have every right by now to replace with *being-in-place*” (ibid, p.314). Wilderness is the place where we can follow the land to intimately teach us our own place intertwined in nature and culture.

Jack Turner, like Abram, advocates the direct experience of wilderness as an experience of the sacred and of place. He rails against what he calls the “abstract wild” of deep ecology, and argues along the lines suggested in Walter Benjamin’s essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, that even taking photographs of wilderness areas removes one from such experience, by robbing one of the experience of their “aura”—as Turner personally experienced after a spontaneous encounter in the wild with some Native American rock art. He quotes Benjamin in arguing that what is lost is “its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (ibid, p.14). He gives a quote from Benjamin which elaborates this idea in an appropriately similar context:

The elk portrayed by the man of the Stone Age on the walls of his cave was an instrument of magic. He did expose it to his fellow men, but in the main it was meant for the spirits. Today the cult value would seem to demand that the work of art remain hidden. Certain statues of gods are accessible only to the priest in the cella; certain Madonnas remain covered nearly all year round; certain sculptures on medieval cathedrals are invisible to the spectator on ground

level. With the emancipation of various art practices from ritual go increasing opportunities for the exhibition of their products. (225) (in *ibid*)

Once again we confront Lascaux via Benjamin, and the importance of the intimacy of the image and the encounter *in its place*. Through the process of being exhibited, the aura of the art in the particular encounter in its landscape is lost, the very quality of its presence. For Turner, this

is the heart of the matter. If I have an interest in preservation, it is in preserving the power of presence – of landscape, art, flora, and fauna. It is more complicated than merely preserving habitat and species, and one might suppose it is something that could be added on later, after we successfully preserve biodiversity, say. But no, it's the other way around: the loss of aura and presence is the main reason we are losing so much of the natural world. (*ibid*, p.15)

This is a crucial thought: that unless we can recognize what is being lost *in our own experience* in the loss of wild nature, the physical and practical externalities of this will never adequately be dealt with. According to Turner,

The easiest way to experience a bit of what the wild was like is to go into a great forest at night alone. Sit quietly for awhile. Something very old will return. It is very well described by Ortega y Gasset in *Meditations on Hunting*: “The hunter . . . needs to prepare an attention which does not consist of riveting itself on the presumed but consists precisely in not assuming anything and in avoiding inattentiveness. It is a ‘universal’ attention, which does not inscribe itself on any point and tries to be on all points” (130). . . . Alone in the natural world, time is less dense, less filled with information; space is close; smell and hearing and touch reassert themselves. The wild is keenly sensual. In a true wilderness we are like that much of the time, even in broad daylight. Alert, careful, literally “full of care.” Not because of principles, but because of something very old. (*ibid*, pp.26-7)

There is something about the direct experience of wilderness, argues Turner, that elicits a deeper and more refined form of awareness than human beings in modern industrial societies

are otherwise capable of experiencing. We hear this idea already in Thoreau, and certainly also in Muir—it echoes through the generations. In it there is something approaching the sublime love in being confronted by and finding our freedom in being forced to imagine the particularity, the difference to us, of this other as we experience it. Wildness is difference.

Jeff Malpas (2012) begins his book *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place* with the following quote from Heidegger's essay, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking":

Accordingly, we may suggest the day will come when we will not shun the question whether the opening, the free open, may not be that within which alone pure space and ecstatic time and everything present and absent in them have the place which gathers and protects everything. (p.1)

Malpas, in interpreting the critique of technological rationality exemplified particularly in Heidegger's essay "The Question Concerning Technology", argues that

Once we analyze the operation of technological modernity topologically, then we can see how it actually transforms our experience of place in ways that are at odds with the underlying character of place, and the underlying character even of that mode of being that belongs to technological modernity itself, but which it also conceals. My emphasis on the importance of concepts such as openness, indeterminacy, wonder, and questionability, and the modes of comportment associated with them, is intended to direct attention toward key elements in an experience of place that obscures neither its own embeddedness in place, and the nature of that embeddedness, nor the character of place as such. Moreover, that we should look for a more concrete solution to the problem of technological modernity, while unsurprising, is also mistaken. Our contemporary situation is not the result of a process over which we, either collectively or individually, have mastery. Indeed, the desire for mastery, and the appearance of the entire world as potentially subject to control, is itself an integral element in the particular formation of the world that is technological modernity. The relinquishing of the desire for control, and the recognition of the extent to which all-encompassing solutions are

beyond us, will themselves be key elements in that “other beginning” that might presage the shift to a truly “postmodern,” “post-technological” world. (pp.68-9)

Malpas’ emphasis on how technological modernity conceals the underlying character of place implies that experiences and areas where either technological modernity or its forms of thinking and behaving are absent—the kinds of experiences and areas one might describe as *wild* might allow for its presencing, and therefore help facilitate such an “other beginning”. In particular, his use of the words “relinquishing the desire for control” entails an allowing precisely of that which is *out of our control*—*wild*. Yet Malpas elsewhere (2011) argues along lines suggested by J. B. Jackson that the concept of wilderness when applied to the role of place and landscape in constituting human experience entails the kinds of idealization of forests and woodlands, place and the human-nature relationship that obscure their reality. He argues with Jackson that “the tendency for the preoccupation with and valorization of wilderness landscapes leads to a misconstrual of our proper relationship to landscape, to a neglect of certain forms of landscape, especially the urban, and so to a certain detachment from the actual places in which we live” (p.15). This gives wilderness and landscape a spectatorial character, he argues, particularly through landscape photography which presents it as vulnerable but pristine and in a sense “timeless” and “gives rise to a deep contradiction between the self-evidently human character of wilderness itself (even the grounding of wilderness in a certain form of human experience), and the desire to maintain wilderness as something apart from the human” (ibid, p.16). J. B. Jackson’s critique, in the essay ‘Beyond Wilderness’ will be examined in the following chapter, and will help reveal the uneasy tension between idealizations of wilderness resulting from a political economy that annihilates it, and the realities of this vanishing wild nature. This in turn opens up questions about how we conceive of the human-nature relationship which can cause the kinds of confusions that lead to false ideas of wilderness, the subject of chapter Six. However, the idea of wilderness both Jackson and Malpas seem to be arguing against is the pristine, purity definition advocated by Rolston and others, rather than the view myself (and others, mainly implicitly) have put forth of wilderness as places where nature is out of our control on any scale, that allow for human presence and activity and in fact, can only be grasped in terms of it. Some important criticisms of the former concept of wilderness, which in general presume

to be critiquing the very idea of wilderness as such, will be examined in the next chapter, whilst in chapter Five I will argue that the definition of wilderness as nature out of our control withstands and to some extent even justifies these criticisms.

Poet and wilderness philosopher Gary Snyder argues that

It has been a part of basic human experience to live in a culture of wilderness. There has been no wilderness without some kind of human presence for several hundred thousand years. Nature is not a place to visit, it is *home*: and within that home territory there are more familiar and less familiar places. (1992, in Oelschlaeger, p.24)

He also argues that “Wilderness is not limited to the two percent formal wilderness areas. Shifting scales, it is everywhere: ineradicable populations of fungi, moss, mould, yeasts and such—that surround and inhabit us” (ibid, p.30), and he speaks of “the wild in human beings” (ibid, p.31). His essay is entitled ‘The Etiquette of Freedom’, where the wildness of wilderness is conceived in terms of both nature’s freedom from the constraints of human control and categorization, and *human* freedom from such control and categorization. In a sense, it is an enquiry into the very *nature* of human freedom that finds that this freedom has as its essence the freedom of wild nature itself. For Snyder, a similar kind of care needs to be taken in being mindful of wild nature as that suggested by Turner, subtle and delicate, but also with the awareness that “The world is sharp as the edge of a knife” (ibid, p.33). The way of inner freedom is also that of “minding nature’s way”, for “the lessons we learn from the wild become the etiquette of freedom” (ibid, p.38). When we consider this in Heideggerian terms related to the possibilities of place as the presencing of being, as suggested by Abram and Malpas, we find that for Heidegger, “*the question concerning the essence of human freedom is the fundamental question of philosophy, in which is rooted even the question of being*” (2002, p.203). Heidegger defines freedom here as “*the condition of the possibility of the manifestness of the being of beings, of the understanding of being*” (ibid, p.205). As such, it entails and necessitates causation, the being of reasons for being within the differential relations of being in the world, but is also that which is always prior to these in the presencing of being itself, which we have seen he refers to elsewhere as “the opening, the

free open . . . that within which alone pure space and ecstatic time and everything present and absent in them have the place which gathers and protects everything”. In chapter Six, I will examine how the experience of wilderness as precisely such an “unutterably particular” presencing of place that gives rise to feelings of sublime expansiveness and imaginative love can, at the same time give rise to views of nature which problematically idealize it together with the possibilities of human freedom in a way that conceals this essential mode of being. I will show how such idealizations might originate in the contradiction the wilderness experience presents within the modes of being characteristic of modern industrial, technological societies, in relation to the potential within them to realize the particularity and freedom of self and others, and the degree to which this is thwarted.

What is wild in wilderness—out of our control—can trigger what is already wild within us, in the mind, the imagination, when we experience it, and help us to also see what is wild all around us, in cities and towns—and realize our own greatest potential for creativity, love and *freedom from human control*, internally and externally. At the same time, what is wild in wilderness is also wild in our bodies, and exists in a continual flow of energy, elements and nutrients between them. What is prior experientially, ontologically, existentially, is also prior *physically*, within and without. To destroy one might just be to destroy both.

4.

THE PROBLEM WITH WILDERNESS

In this chapter, I will review some of the most significant critiques of the idea of wilderness that have emerged in the past three decades, and their antecedents, where appropriate. In general, all of these critiques are aimed at the definition of wilderness we find in the Wilderness Act of 1964 (which also happens to resemble that found in most dictionaries), and advocated by activists like Dave Foreman and thinkers like Bill McKibben and Holmes Rolston. J. Baird Callicott refers to this as the “Received Wilderness Idea”. I will let these criticisms speak for themselves as much as possible, and show how they give us good reasons for rejecting this so-called Received Wilderness Idea, despite some flaws in the arguments, particularly those related to the history of the concept. I will then demonstrate in the following chapter how whilst these critiques justify abandoning this idea, most of them do not hold up against the idea of wilderness as nature out of human control or similar contemporary ideas of wilderness or their historical precedents.

Wilderness as Cultural Construct

In “The Trouble With Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature”, environmental historian William Cronon argues that wilderness is not a genuine form of non-human nature at all, but an unnatural human construct reflecting “our own unexamined longings and

desires” (1996, p.7). At the same time, Cronon acknowledges the reality of what is experienced in the non-human environments that we now equate with wilderness: “Remember the feelings of such moments, and you will know as well as I do that you were in the presence of something irreducibly nonhuman, something profoundly Other than yourself”, he writes (ibid, p.8). Cronon argues, however, that the associated concept of wilderness, which he identifies as that of “a pristine sanctuary where the last remnant of an untouched, endangered but still transcendent nature can for at least for a little while be encountered” and “an antidote to our human selves, a refuge we must somehow recover if we hope to save the planet” (ibid, p.7), is a cultural construction originating from the newfound reverence for “wilderness” in 19th and early 20th century white American males such as Thoreau, who linked escape into wilderness with salvation, and Muir, who described these landscapes as “Heaven” and “Eden”.

Before the 19th century, argues Cronon, the word “wilderness” referred to an environment that was “‘deserted,’ ‘savage,’ ‘desolate,’ ‘barren’ – in short, a ‘waste,’” and “Its connotations were anything but positive, and the emotion one was most likely to feel in its presence was ‘bewilderment’ or terror” (ibid, p.8). With this concept were the strong associations of its biblical contexts of usage, where the Children of Israel flee and Christ is tempted by Satan. In general, he argues, it represented “the antithesis of all that was orderly and good” (ibid, p.9). The concept’s transformation came about from two primary sources, argues Cronon: the idea of the sublime in European romanticism, and the establishment and vanishing of the American frontier. The problem with this view, as we saw in chapter One, is that the weight of historical textual evidence in no way backs it up. Since its first appearance in the English language, the term wilderness has had both negative and positive connotations, as well as spiritual and prosaic. In the early epics it was not only a place of peril and adventure, but also of retreat, regrouping, and refuge, and even in the Bible, it does not simply mean desert, nor are its connotations entirely negative, but were also associated with escape, spirit, and transformation. By the time European romanticism arrive on the scene and with it, Klinger’s (practically forgotten) play *Sturm und Drang*, with its frontier setting, irony about Rousseauian nature worship, and protagonist, Wild, who goes to a war on the edge of a

wilderness and learns what it is to be civilized, its meanings were already full with a rich and ambiguous diversity.

Cronon describes the romantic idea of the sublime he associates with Edmund Burke, Kant and Wordsworth, as a reformulation of the biblical wasteland as a place where one might not only be able to encounter the devil, but more importantly, to encounter God. However, this is as far as Cronon's treatment of this subject goes, and he does not attempt to elaborate on how this concept of the sublime was important for these thinkers, or what it said about their cultures or encounters with their environments beyond this single point, and its transmission to the American wilderness tradition via Thoreau. According to Cronon, however, as people followed Thoreau's example, this very wilderness was being domesticated, such that its sublime and divine aspects become transformed from a cause of awe and thrilling terror in Wordsworth, and the "solemn solitude" this inspired in Thoreau, to, for Muir, something welcome and comforting. What Wordsworth, Thoreau, and Muir have in common, however, he argues, is that they represent a view of "the mountain as cathedral" (ibid, p.12).

According to Cronon, the establishment of the American frontier aroused a movement of "romantic primitivism", dating back "at least to Rousseau" and expressing "the belief that the best antidote to the ills of an overly refined and civilized modern world was a return to simpler, more primitive living" (ibid, p.13). Cronon cites the 19th century historian Frederick Jackson Turner as describing a process where people could move "to the wild unsettled lands of the frontier, shed the trappings of civilization," and

rediscovered their primitive racial energies, reinvented direct democratic institutions, and thereby reinfused themselves with a vigor, an independence, and a creativity that were the source of American democracy and national character. Seen in this way, wild country became a place not just of religious redemption but of national renewal, the quintessential location for experiencing what it meant to be an American. (ibid)

According to Turner, says Cronon, however,

by the 1890s the frontier was passing away. Never again would “such gifts of free land offer themselves’ to the American people. “The frontier has gone,” he declared, “and with its going has closed the first period of American history. Built into the frontier myth from its very beginning was the notion that this crucible of American identity was temporary and would pass away. Those who have celebrated the frontier have almost always looked backward as they did so, mourning an older, simpler, truer world that is about to disappear forever. That world and all its attractions, Turner said, depended on free land – on wilderness. ... To protect wilderness was in a very real sense to protect the nation’s most sacred myth of origin. (ibid)

Included in this mythology, argues Cronon, was the notion that “wilderness was the last bastion of rugged individualism” (ibid). He points to the fact that a writer of the period, Owen Wister, celebrated this manly individualism, whilst at the same time making “contemptuous remarks about Wall Street and Newport” suggesting civilization “sapped his energy and threatened his masculinity” (ibid, p.14)—himself a member of the elite (most “civilized”) class. Elaborating, Cronon explains:

The very men who benefited from urban-industrial capitalism were among those who believed they must escape its debilitating effects. If the frontier was passing, then men who had the means to do so should preserve for themselves some remnant of its wild landscape so that they might enjoy the regeneration and renewal that came from sleeping under the stars, participating in blood sports, and living off the land. The frontier might be gone, but the frontier experience could still be had if only wilderness were preserved. . . . wilderness came to embody the national frontier myth, standing for the wild freedom of America’s past and seeming to represent a highly attractive natural alternative to the ugly artificiality of modern civilization. The irony, of course, was that in the process wilderness came to reflect the very civilization its devotees sought to escape. (ibid, pp.14-15)

Wilderness, argues Cronon, became a constructed playground for urban elites:

Ever since the nineteenth century, celebrating wilderness has been an activity mainly for well-to-do city folks. Country people generally know far too much about working the land to regard *unworked* land as their ideal. In contrast, elite urban tourists and wealthy sportsmen projected their leisure-time frontier fantasies onto the American landscape and so created wilderness in their own image. (ibid, p.15)

Cronon also points to the irony that the frontier itself was often quite a violent place due to the Indian wars, in the final stages of which the human inhabitants were “rounded up and moved onto reservations” (ibid). Establishing the very myth of “virgin” wilderness involved “The removal of Indians to create an ‘uninhabited wilderness’”, says Cronon, and this shows us “just how invented, just how constructed the American wilderness really is” (ibid, pp.15-16). And this also involves the erasure and denial not just of the Indian population and their habitation and claims over the land, but this history itself, in favour of the heroic creation myth.

Ultimately, argues Cronon, the idea of wilderness stems entirely from the creation of delusional yet wilful forms of escapism that deny history:

In virtually all its manifestations, wilderness represents a flight from history. Seen as the original garden, it is a place outside of time, from which human beings had to be ejected before the fallen world of history could properly begin. Seen as the frontier, it is a savage world at the dawn of civilization, whose transformation represents the very beginning of the national historical epic. Seen as the bold landscape of frontier heroism, it is the place of youth and childhood, into which men escape by abandoning their pasts and entering a world of freedom where the constraints of civilization fade into memory. Seen as the sacred sublime, it is the home of a God who transcends history by standing as the One who remains untouched and unchanged by time’s arrow. No matter what the angle from which we regard it, wilderness offers us the illusion that we can escape the cares and troubles of the world in which our past has ensnared us. (ibid, p.16)

Wilderness serves as a projective idea of something ultimate, some extreme formulation of human hopes and desires, and a craving for something authentic and real that instead

becomes merely *ideal* amidst the reality of artificial lives, argues Cronon. “Those who have no difficulty seeing God as the expression of our human dreams and desires nonetheless have trouble recognizing that in a secular age Nature can offer precisely the same sort of mirror”, he points out, to such a degree that today, “wilderness serves as the unexamined foundation on which so many of the quasi-religious values of modern environmentalism rest” (ibid). The idea of wilderness is based on a contradiction:

Only people whose relation to the land was already alienated could hold up wilderness as a model for human life in nature, for the romantic ideology of wilderness leaves precisely nowhere for human beings actually to make their living from the land.

This, then, is the central paradox: wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural. If we allow ourselves to believe that nature, to be true, must also be wild, then our very presence in nature represents its fall. The place where we are is the place where nature is not. If this is so – if by definition wilderness leaves no place for human beings, save perhaps as contemplative sojourners enjoying their leisurely reverie in God’s natural cathedral – then also by definition it can offer no solution to the environmental and other problems that confront us. To the extent that we celebrate wilderness as the measure with which we judge civilization, we reproduce the dualism that sets humanity and nature at opposite poles. We thereby leave ourselves little hope of discovering what an ethical, sustainable, *honourable* human place in nature might actually look like. (ibid, p.17)

The problem with wilderness, argues Cronon is that “to the extent that we live in an urban-industrialized civilization but at the same time pretend to ourselves that our *real* home is in the wilderness, to just that extent we give ourselves permission to evade responsibility for the lives we actually lead”, such that we

inhabit civilization while holding some part of ourselves – what we imagine to be the most precious part – aloof from its entanglements. We work our nine-to-five jobs in its institutions, we eat its food, we drive its cars (not least to reach the wilderness), we benefit from the intricate and all too invisible networks with which it shelters us, all the while pretending that these things are not an essential part of who we are. By imagining that our true home is in the

wilderness, we forgive ourselves the homes we actually inhabit. In its flight from history, in its siren song of escape, in its reproduction of the dangerous dualism that sets human beings outside of nature – in all of these ways, wilderness poses a serious threat to responsible environmentalism . . . (ibid)

Cronon attempts to penetrate into the psychology of the contemporary wilderness idea a little further, explaining that “if we hold up to ourselves a mirror of nature we cannot inhabit”, then

To do so is merely to take to a logical extreme the paradox that was built into wilderness from the beginning: if nature dies because we enter it, then the only way to save nature is to kill ourselves. . . . The tautology gives us no way out: if wild nature is the only thing worth saving, and if our mere presence destroys it, then the sole solution to our own unnaturalness, the only way to protect sacred wilderness from profane humanity, would seem to be suicide. It is not a proposition that seems likely to produce very positive or practical results. (ibid, p.19)

Cronon sees a form of the self-annihilating logic in the belief in wilderness in expressions of a desire to return to a more primordial and primitive way of life such as those of Dave Foreman, founder of Earth First!, whom he quotes:

Before agriculture was midwived in the Middle East, humans were in the wilderness. We had no concept of “wilderness” because everything was wilderness and *we were a part of it*. But with irrigation ditches, crop surpluses, and permanent villages, we became *apart from* the natural world. ... Between the wilderness that created us and the civilization created by us grew an ever-widening rift. (ibid)

The only way to transcend this dualism (which Cronon argues this very idea is a symptom and in a sense final expression of, in the first place), according to Foreman, is to “... return to being animal, to glorying in our sweat, hormones, tears, and blood” (ibid, p.20). Foreman’s emphasis on wilderness preservation as the environmental problem of the highest priority is highly problematic, argues Cronon:

Foreman writes, “The preservation of wildness and native diversity is *the* most important issue. Issues directly affecting only humans pale in comparison.” Presumably so do any environmental problems whose victims are mainly people, for such problems usually surface in landscapes that have already “fallen” and are no longer wild. This would seem to exclude from the radical environmentalist agenda problems of occupational health and safety in industrial settings, problems of toxic waste exposure on “unnatural” urban and agricultural sites, problems of poor children poisoned by lead exposure in the inner city, problems of famine and poverty and human suffering in the “overpopulated” places of the earth – problems, in short, of environmental justice. If we set too high a stock on wilderness, too many other corners of the earth become less than natural and too many other people become less than human, thereby giving us permission not to care much about their suffering or their fate. (ibid, p.20)

According to Cronon, the focus on “human” versus “non-human” manages to banish critical questions as to its implications for different human-human relationships, caught as it is in its own narrow cultural interests:

Why does the protection of wilderness so often seem to pit urban recreationists against rural people who actually earn their living from the land (excepting those who sell goods and services to the tourists themselves)? Why in the debates about pristine natural areas are “primitive” peoples idealized, even sentimentalized, until the moment they do something unprimitive, modern, and unnatural, and thereby fall from environmental grace? (ibid, p.21)

The highly problematic implications of this Received Wilderness Idea for different indigenous peoples will be discussed later in this chapter. The kinds of problematic idealizations of nature, fantasized projections in reaction to modern industrial societies’ alienation that Cronon so insightfully identifies in his critique as giving rise to the Received Wilderness Idea will be more closely examine in chapter Six, to help us to understand how its mythic potency and staying power establishes itself in the *experience* of wilderness.

However, it is worth now looking to another writer who revealed more cultural and psychological layers to this mythic conception of wilderness, John Brinckerhoff Jackson.

According to Jackson, the historical origins of the American idea of wilderness begin in the early history of Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. As we saw in chapter One, the term wilderness first appeared in the English language in medieval mythic historiographies such as Layamon's *Brut*, which told tales of the formation of the nation. Wilderness was seen as a place both a source of danger and adventure, and also a source of refuge, a place to regroup and even build a castle. Wilderness in men could either mean their downfall, or could be that "awful ferity" which helped them to win battles, carve out new territory, and establish dominions that included these wilderness areas. According to Jackson, "after the fall of Rome,

the primeval forest was recognized by some as an effective political boundary, a defense against outside enemies and a way of keeping a community intact. When those small, grassy enclaves grew large enough in the Dark Ages to rank as fiefdoms, baronies, even counties, then they had to be protected, and what better way than by preserving the almost impenetrable tangle of trees, dead or alive, vines, marshlands, infested by wild animals, that surrounded it? When the forest acquired a military and political function, it automatically acquired a military and political status: castles, that is to say, walls and towers and trails; and a body of armed men, many on horseback, acting as guardians—and ultimately becoming the rulers. Those lowly farmers and stockmen with their routine of heavy work and their denuded fields and pastures and crude villages needed defense, notably in the matter of keeping wild animals away from crops and livestock: so the corps of mounted protector became part-time hunters. (1994, p.76)

It is worth at this point recalling Hans Peter Duerr's investigation into the phenomenon across European cultures, throughout history, which he calls *The Wild Hunt*: bands of men *embodying the wild*, riding the countryside possessed with spirits between life and death, human and animal, creating chaos but at the same time establishing their own law, their own order. It is also worth recalling, once again, the cave image of Lascaux, the purpose of which

seems to be to create sympathetic wild animal magic *for the purposes of the hunt*, which Bataille identified also as the establishment, imprinting, of the kind of *human* identity he recognized as “the first of *our* kind”. From this interpretation, we might see that what is still so powerful about this cave image for us is that it is such a forceful *act* of power, whereby, though in *sympathy* with wild nature and respect for death, the first possibility of human *dominion* over—and therefore, once and for all, distinction from, wild nature—and anyone *Other* to the figure of the first and foremost hunter is established. It is, possibly, with the *Sorcerer* of Trois Freres, the ultimate territorial scrawling. The wild Other is established as a domain for and through the assertion of self, the act of human power. In this interpretation, it is the first establishment of what Mick Smith calls “ecological sovereignty”.

We might compare this view of the idea of wilderness emerging from the establishment of the wild hunter’s violent self-assertion of dominion (which becomes, eventually, the state, and varolized in mythic historiographies) with Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of the state and its formation. Nietzsche writes in *On the Genealogy of Morals*:

I use the word “state”: it goes without saying who is meant by this – some pack of blond beasts of prey, a race of conquerors and lords, which, organized in a warlike manner and with the power to organize, unhesitatingly lays its terrible paws on a population. . . . It is in this manner, then, that the “state” begins on earth. (1998, [II. 17] p.58)

For Nietzsche, this behaviour comes from the natural inclinations and abilities of such individuals, “Whoever can give orders, whoever is ‘lord’ by nature, whoever steps forth violently, in deed and gesture” (ibid). Their instinct for freedom, that is, the wild nature of their will to power, gives them a creative power beyond all norms, outside the order of things, to imitate, appropriate, innovate, dominate and assimilate all others for the end of this instinct:

With such beings one does not reckon, they come like fate, without basis, reason, consideration, pretext; they are there like lightning is there: too terrible, too sudden, too convincing, too “different” even to be so much as hated. Their work is an instinctive creating of forms, impressing of forms, they are the most involuntary, unconscious artists there are:-- where they appear, in a short time something new stands there, a ruling structure that *lives*, in which parts and functions are delimited and related to one another, in which nothing at all finds a place that has not first had placed into it a “meaning” with respect to the whole. They do not know what guilt, what responsibility, what consideration is, these born organizers; in them that terrible artists’ egoism rules, that as a gaze like bronze and that knows itself already justified to all eternity in its “work,” like the mother in her child. (ibid)

For Nietzsche, the state of being that has this instinct, this “old animal self” trapped within it, as within a labyrinth, but is alienated from it and cannot express it due to the concrete conditions of life *imposed* by such all-devouring acts of domination, is simply what happens to those who are overpowered and organized by such “blond beasts of prey”. The will to power of one group or individual overpowers that of others. But any resistance against the very *principle* of such creative and instinctual violence, argues Nietzsche, any pacifistic or egalitarian yearnings against this are merely forms of *ressentiment*, the futile and dishonest envy of a slave morality as exemplified in Christianity. The feeling of bad conscience that arises within the oppressed, upon which such moralities play, however, for Nietzsche is an illness that resembles a pregnancy, because it still has trapped within it the possibilities of the will to power. It is the wild violence of the will turned in on itself, and it is *this* that brings about inner conflict and contradiction, he argues, and projective, idealized fantasies:

This secret self-violation, this artist’s cruelty, this pleasure in giving oneself—as heavy resisting suffering matter—a form, in burning into oneself a will, a critique, a contradiction, a contempt, a “no”; this uncanny and horrifying-pleasurable work of a soul compliant-conflicted with itself, that makes itself suffer out of pleasure in making-suffer, this entire *active* “bad conscience,” as the true womb of ideal and imaginative events, finally brought to light—one can guess it already—a wealth of new disconcerting beauty and affirmation and perhaps for the first time beauty *itself* ... For what would be “beautiful” if contradiction had not first come to a consciousness of itself, if the ugly had not first said to itself “I am ugly”?

... After this hint, the enigma will at the least be less enigmatic, namely, to what extent an ideal, a beauty can be suggested by contradictory concepts like *selflessness*, *self-denial*, *self-sacrifice* . . . (ibid, [II.18] p.59)

For Nietzsche, only those who can recognize their own wildness and overcome their own weakness and inner conflict can experience the freedom of *creating*, *self-defining* civilization. This is a necessarily violent and painful process, but one that is also joyous, and, in and through wild nature, the source of all joy. Only through recognizing and struggling with one's *animal self*, and through appropriating the wild *other*, assimilating its being and power into one own through creatively organizing acts of domination, can the freedom and beauty of civilized life and its creations be enjoyed, and alienation from what is wild within one overcome.

Returning to Jackson's theory of the historical origins of the American wilderness idea—in the establishment of boundary defining acts of power throughout the land, the wilderness is carved out of the landscape as the defining other, by the defining other of the hunt and its dominion. Wilderness and hunting become the physical, geographic symbols and domain of power over birds, beasts, and people: the sovereignty of the state, meaning the ruling class, the nobility. "Charlemagne in the ninth century organized hunting expeditions," writes Jackson,

sometimes lasting for months, to rid the landscape of destructive wildlife; and the grateful peasantry served as beaters and grooms. Two centuries later, after the Norman Conquest, hunting became the ruling passion of the nobility; and that was when the word *forest* first came into the English language—to designate not a kind of vegetation or topography, but a legal entity: an area outside (in Latin, *fores*) the realm of customary law; an area reserved for certain important persons, the king included, who enjoyed hunting big game. Commoners were subject to ferocious penalties if they presumed to hunt without permission or to poach.

Wilderness thus became the domain of the nobility, an environment where they alone could develop and display a number of aristocratic qualities. (1994, p.76)

According to Jackson, over time the hunt transformed and became more and more civilized and domesticated, and evolved into hunting as a *sport*, as in the example of fox hunting:

The medieval hunt had been military in its discipline, its hierarchical organization, and its rigid delegation of duties. It had made much of the relentless pursuit of large and dangerous animals, and its ritual killing, its final ceremonies were steeped in a macho mysticism of blood and death.

But fox hunting, as it evolved in the last decades of the eighteenth century, was at once more civilian and more civilized. It was socially exclusive and assumed instinctive compliance with unwritten rules of dress and deportment, but gentlemanly rather than military standards of courage and courtesy and restrained competitiveness were the order of the day. It is worth recalling that the sport became popular after the enclosure movement in England had produced a landscape of hedges and open fields with much less woodland, a landscape largely populated by prosperous, independent farmers who had their own hunts designed to eliminate foxes—considered an destructive form of vermin. (ibid, pp.79-80)

In recreational hunting, the wild hunt had lost its wildness and its wild landscape, whilst still symbolizing geographically and socially elite power, rule and prestige. But this wild landscape was regained with the opening out of the American frontier, where sports hunting gained rapid popularity. According to Jackson, the wild landscape was rapidly transformed by human expansion, and became a kind of radically democratized environment where people carved out their own open spaces, retaining woodland for timber and hunting. Wilderness was, in 19th century America, according to Jackson just a functioning part carved out within a wider human landscape of settlement, industry, and recreation. He notes that even for Thoreau, the great advocate of the wild, there was no overarching philosophy, and that Thoreau had no problem with land being both wild and inhabited by humans, whether indigenous or otherwise. According to Jackson, the American experience of nature has been an ongoing relationship of respect and cultivation, and the opening out of spaces through the development of industry and American civilization. He evokes this experience in the idyllic terms of its own tendencies towards nature romanticism. As such, the encounter with wilderness has always been a transitional experience. Yet in the latter half of the Twentieth Century, “nature” started to mean, exclusively, “uninhabited, pristine, endangered, unspoiled

wilderness”, which became prioritized in conversations and decision making about nature, whilst the wealth of human-nature interaction suffusing every level of American history and society began to be ignored.

Ultimately, Jackson’s argument against this idea of nature as pristine wilderness resembles that of Cronon: focusing on wilderness as the source of all natural value ignores, denies, and devalues the realities of the spaces Americans actually live in, and the actual kinds of relationships with nature and the values of it involved. From an essentially positive experience—an experience of wilderness as sublime or even sacred, something seems to happen, where people begin, out of that, to reject all that contrasts with it—that is, civilization itself, and *worship* nature. Jackson describes the initial positive experience in the following way:

its effect is to subdue the omnipresent clamor of the ego and to reveal to us that we, along with all living things, are inseparable parts of the cosmic order. For all its intensity it is a temporary thing; we return to the everyday world, though spiritually transformed. (ibid, p.87)

We are already familiar with these elements in terms of the concepts of the sublime explored in the previous chapter, and of this contemporary kind of experience of wilderness in Greenway’s account of his wilderness therapy trip. The problem is, argues Jackson, that “it all too often inspires the comparison between the primordial natural world and the world most of us live in” (ibid). He gives the example of Edward Abbey, who, in response to his wilderness experiences,

writes eloquently and earnestly, but sooner or later ego takes over, and the mountain eminence where he stands becomes a pulpit, and with renewed passion he denounces commercialism, desert desecration, urbanism, engineering, the consumer society, and overpopulation; on his return to the workaday world he continues, like one inspired, to bash civilization, history, and humanity. “I would rather kill a man than kill a snake” is his

repeated boast. . . . “This love [of nature], when it sets up as a religion,” C. S. Lewis wrote, “is beginning to be a god, therefore to be a demon. . . . If you take nature to be a teacher she will teach you exactly the lessons you had already decided to learn.” In the case of the Sierra Club and of many well-intentioned environmentalists, nature is in fact teaching us that a return to origins, to the pretechnological purity of the past, to a static social order, is the only way to go. (ibid, pp.87-8)

Whilst Jackson’s enquiry into the history of wilderness provides a good background to contrast this radicalized view of what it and nature are and represent, he never explicitly relates how the power relations and psychology involved in its European history from the middle ages transform within American contexts. Cronon’s work gives us a somewhat clearer view in his critique of elitist, individualist romanticism and emphasis on experiences of alienation giving rise to the contemporary idea. In chapter Six, the relationship between the forms of power relations and modes of experience characteristic of modern industrial societies might, as well as having many positive or interesting aspects as Jackson points out, also give rise to the kinds of alienation or escapism triggered by the wilderness experience.

For Cronon, to deal with the most important environmental issues inevitably involves dealing with other human beings and taking responsibility for issues of social and environmental justice, and individual and cultural differences. At the same time it means taking responsibility and valuing not just the most remote natural environments, but also “wild places closer to home”. Cronon argues that his criticism is “not directed at wild nature per se, or even at efforts to set aside large tracts of wild land, but rather at the specific habits of thinking that flow from this complex cultural construction called wilderness” (ibid). The problem is, that he does not clarify here what he means by “wild nature per se” or “wild land”, or how it is, as he very clearly seems to be stating, at all distinct from “these habits of thinking” and “this complex cultural construction”. He makes clear, however, that since human beings have everywhere influenced the natural environment to the point where it cannot truthfully, anywhere be called in these terms, “wilderness”, it is absurd to equate nature and its biological diversity with this, especially when individual endangered species are given priority as emblems for the pristine, transcendent ideal to be saved that is nevertheless nowhere to be found, given the thousands of years of human habitation and

modification that been part of the history of most of the planet, and the sheer extent of contemporary development.

In acknowledging the reality of “wild nature” and “wild places”, Cronon claims that “what I celebrate about such places is not *just* their wildness, though that certainly is among their most important qualities; what I celebrate even more is that they remind us of the wildness in our own backyards, of the nature that is all around us if only we have eyes to see it” (ibid, pp.21, 22). Again, intriguingly, Cronon does not explain what he means by the term “wildness” here, but nevertheless goes on in the next sentence and paragraph to state, “my principal objection to wilderness is that it may teach us to be dismissive or even contemptuous of such humble places and experiences” (ibid, p.22). “Without our quite realizing it,” he argues, “wilderness tends to privilege some parts of nature at the expense of others” (ibid).

Cronon confesses a deep ambivalence towards the meaning of wilderness for modern environmentalism. Wilderness, he admits, can inspire good things and bad:

Any way of looking at nature that encourages us to believe we are separate from nature – as wilderness tends to do – is likely to reinforce environmentally irresponsible behavior. On the other hand, I also think it no less crucial for us to recognize and honor nonhuman nature as a world we did not create, a world with its own independent, nonhuman reasons for being as it is. The autonomy of nonhuman nature seems to me an indispensable corrective to human arrogance. Any way of looking at nature that helps us remember – as wilderness also tends to do – that the interests of people are not necessarily identical to those of every other creature or of the earth itself is likely to foster *responsible* behavior. (ibid)

What we need to do, argues Cronon, is learn to see the wildness in the nature we ourselves live as part of, and are constantly surrounded by, instead of believing only in a wild nature completely separate from all human existence and habitation:

The tree in the garden is in reality no less other, no less worthy of our wonder and respect, than the tree in an ancient forest that has never known an ax or a saw – even though the tree in the forest reflects a more intricate web of ecological relationships. The tree in the garden could easily have sprung from the same seed as the tree in the forest, and we can claim only its location and perhaps its form as our own. Both trees stand apart from us and both share our common world. The special power of the tree in the wilderness is to remind us of this fact. It can teach us to recognize the wildness we did not see in the tree we planted in our own backyard. By seeing the otherness in that which is most unfamiliar, we can learn to see it too in that which at first seemed merely ordinary. . . . Both trees in some ultimate sense are wild; both in a practical sense now depend on our management and care. We are responsible for both, even though we claim credit for neither. (ibid, p.24)

Extending this thought of the wild otherness of both the remote and the familiar, once properly recognized, the need for the inclusion of both as part of the human experience and responsibility for life on earth, Cronon also argues that “We need to honour the Other within and the Other next door as much as we do the exotic Other that lives far away – a lesson that applies as much to people as it does to (other) natural things” (ibid). Finally, in conclusion, Cronon makes explicit what he has been meaning by “wildness”: “the autonomy and otherness of the things and creatures around us – an autonomy our culture has taught us to label with the word ‘wild’”; and here he distinguishes it from wilderness –

wildness (as opposed to wilderness) can be found anywhere: in the seemingly tame fields and woodlots of Massachusetts, in the cracks of a Manhattan sidewalk, even in the cells of our own bodies. As Gary Snyder has wisely said, “A person with a clear heart and open mind can experience the wilderness anywhere on earth. It is a quality of one’s own consciousness. The planet is a wild place and always will be.” (ibid, pp.24-5)

For Cronon, importantly, only by recognizing the importance of wildness, not just that culturally constructed *idea* of certain environments we label as wilderness, can we recognize and take responsibility for the world we inhabit as, rightfully, our home. However, of course, with Cronon, we encounter the same kind of problematic ambiguity encountered in the

scientific and policy definition developed by conservation biologists Mackey et al (1999) examined in chapter Two, who on the one hand defined wilderness *areas* as a cultural construct, and on the other, wilderness *quality* as an empirical quantifiable property measured from “unit areas”. If areas of wild nature or wilderness quality exist and can be measured, how exactly are they *not* wilderness?

By far the most thorough critique of the wilderness idea has been that developed (with many others) over recent times by J. Baird Callicott, as summarised in his essay ‘Contemporary Criticisms of the Received Wilderness Idea’ (Nelson and Callicott, 2008, 355-77).

I am as passionately solicitous of the places called wilderness as any of the defenders of the classical wildernesss idea

says Callicott,

However, in my opinion, the name ‘wilderness’ improperly colours them, frames them, and makes them available for inappropriate uses and abuses” (ibid, p.356)

Callicott’s synoptic critique is perhaps the most important one for the purposes of what the current thesis is arguing for, not merely because of its rigour, but because of Callicott’s unequivocal assertion that there’s simply no point in redefining wilderness, because if we keep using this term for certain kinds of environments, “inevitably our minds will be flooded with all the hogwash the wilderness idea is steeped in”, and visions shall

well up in our imaginations of virile, unconfined recreation, or of reverential pilgrimages in holy sanctuaries unsullied by the presence of profane people and preserved forever just as they always existed, in splendid harmony and balance from time immemorial. (ibid, p.370)

The term is so loaded, he argues, that it will inevitably confuse us into thinking wilderness must remain “natural” in the sense completely unmanaged by humans, preventing controlled burns or culling, for example. For Callicott, the idea that something can be commonly or even scientifically known as wilderness, and at the same time be understood to be areas which humans can, do, and in some cases *should* have a directly transformative and intensive interaction with and even habitation of, is untenable. Yet this is precisely what I, in this thesis, am arguing *for*—and a whole lot more, besides. Before I go on to argue my position, however, I will now analyze what I consider are the two most serious claims of Callicott’s argument, before addressing a third claim, made most explicitly by Sahotra Sarkar in his essay, “Wilderness Preservation and Biodiversity Conservation: Keeping Divergent Goals Distinct” (1999, in Nelson and Callicott, 2008). Together these claims with those of Cronon and Jackson, I argue, constitute the greatest case against retaining or revising the notion of wilderness.

Wilderness as Destructive to Human Populations

Firstly, Callicott claims that the received wilderness idea, when enacted in law, often displaces human populations, and can even lead to genocide, where in case after case, people were forcibly driven from their lands, often with tragic consequences, from loss of life and livelihood, to complete societal and cultural breakdowns.

This argument against the wilderness idea is not as recent as it seems, as Callicott and Nelson demonstrated by citing a 1933 work by actor, writer and indigenous rights activist Chief Luther Standing Bear, of the Oglala Lakota tribe, called *Land of the Spotted Eagle*. In it, he said:

We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and winding streams with tangled growth, as ‘wild.’ Only to the white man was nature a ‘wilderness’ and only to him

was the land 'infested' with 'wild' animals and 'savage' people. To us it was tame. Earth was bountiful and and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery. Not until the hairy man from the east came and with brutal frenzy heaped injustices upon us and the families we loved was it 'wild' for us. When the very animals of the forest began fleeing from his approach, then it was that for us the 'Wild West' began. (in Callicott & Nelson, 1998, p.201).

Already we have a clear critique of the wilderness idea that equates it with a destructive, colonialist, romantic primitivism that projects the violence of the conquerors onto the indigenous population and natural environment. Of course, Standing Bear *could have been* romanticizing the past, as human beings are prone to do—but he could also have been simply stating fact: we will never know. But even before the passing of the Wilderness Act in 1964, the idea of wilderness had become a justification for the formation of national parks and reserves not only in the United States, but across the globe. In 1987, David Harman echoed Standing Bear when he wrote of the devastation wreaked on human populations by the formation of wilderness national parks in Uganda and Nepal, in his paper 'Cultural Diversity, Human Subsistence, and the National Park Ideal' (ibid p.224). Citing John Calhoun and Colin Turnbull, he takes as an example the effect of the formation of the Kidepo National Park in 1962 on the Ik people:

Since people are not allowed to live inside national parks, the Ik were relocated to packed villages on the periphery of the new park boundary. Since in national parks hunting is banned, the Ik were forbidden to hunt in the valley and were instead encouraged to farm. Taken from their mobile existence, the Ik were force-fit into a sedentary, close-quarters life style. Deprived of their social economy and separated from the physical locale that was the basis for their spiritual beliefs, the culture of the Ik literally disintegrated into a travesty of humanity. (ibid, p.222)

Two years later Ramachandra Guha published a paper in *Environmental Ethics*, entitled 'Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique'. This essay is a critique of what Guha saw as a radicalized and specifically American variant

of deep ecology, its “obsession with wilderness” (ibid, p.233), and the unfortunate global consequences of this obsession, as promoted by agencies like the World Wildlife Fund. Using the designation of tiger reserves in India as an example, Guha said:

The designation of tiger reserves was made possible only by the physical displacement of existing villages and their inhabitants; their management requires the continuing exclusion of peasants and livestock. (ibid, p.235)

The absurd thing is, according to Guha, this does nothing to stop the overconsumption and militarism that are the root causes of the environmental crisis. Guha welcomes the deep ecologists’ shift from an anthropocentric perspective to a biocentric one, but argues that their focus on preserving untouched nature ignores wider and more urgent environmental, social and justice issues across the world, and is culturally rooted in a nationalistic, imperialistic, elitist aesthetic of recreational escapism that reinforces the overconsumption it escapes.

In his own summary, Callicott claims the formation of such wilderness areas has led to genocidal campaigns, and continues to do so in Africa and India, forcibly driving and banning indigenous people from their lands and destroying the basis of their cultures, as observed by Turnbull (1972), Harmon, and Thomas (1990), and adding the case of the Juwasi San in the formation of the Etosha National Park in Namibia, Raymond Bonner’s assertion that this kind of thing has happened all over Africa (1993) and Ramachandra Guha’s numerous, widespread Indian examples (1998). Whilst campaigns for wilderness preservation seem politically transparent and ethically justifiable in the United States and Australia, Callicott argues that across the rest of the world “the politics of wilderness preservation are not so unambiguously respectable”, but compromised with alliances *to* “wealthy urban elites, state-sponsored paramilitary terrorists, undemocratic regimes” (ibid, p.361) and *against* the local indigenous peoples still subsisting in so-called wilderness regions.

Broad scale destruction of human culture, livelihood, human rights and in some cases even life is a dreadfully high price to pay even for the urgent protection of biodiversity and its

planetary life-support function. Yet given that wilderness, to be wilderness in purity definitions, must be free from human habitation, cultivation, and influence, it is hard to see how such displacements – even if they involve a voluntary and non-violent relocation – are avoidable, if “true” wilderness is to be protected. For where there are people, unless they are just passing through, as it were, there is no wilderness. But some of the world’s largest areas *identified* as wilderness, and identified as being in need of the most urgent protection, are in fact inhabited by indigenous populations who, understandably, are unwilling to be removed from their land. Who, after all, is it easy to persuade to abandon their home and everything they know? And there is something very wrong here, because when it is convenient to ignore them, indigenous populations are not counted, and therefore an area can be designated wilderness – and yet as soon as this designation occurs, it appears that in many cases, suddenly the indigenous human presence is recognized as a problem which must be removed to protect the alleged wilderness. It seems that in these cases, the notion of wilderness and all it entails ought to be abandoned in favour of an approach that allows for the maximum biodiversity conservation without displacing or harming indigenous populations: here, the “received” purity idea of wilderness most certainly fails – or else, we fail, by protecting biodiversity at the expense of the lives of *other* human beings—and our own humanity. For the utilitarian calculus required here is worse than some of the most horrible examples invented in the thought experiments of ethicists (Peter Singer and Peter Unger immediately spring to mind).

Wilderness as Unscientific

Callicott’s second serious claim is this: that the notion of wilderness is actually *unscientific*. He argues that most of the areas categorized as wilderness have been inhabited by humans for a very long time, humans like the Australian Aborigines and American Indians whose activities have had profound impacts on the environments they have inhabited. This impact has been more profound, he argues, citing Denevan (1998) and Pyne (1997), than the subsequent European invasions, and probably responsible, according to the research of Paul

S. Martin (1973, 1974), for the extinction of 30 *genera* (not species, but whole *groups* of related species) of megafauna in the Americas alone. According to Denevan, between 1492 and 1750, the American Indian population was reduced by up to 90 percent, along with dramatic reductions in regional keystone species, and only then did the illusion of an *untouched, unchanging* wilderness arise, and with it, the somewhat misleading idea of the *balance of nature* (such as that expressed by Moore and other early ecologists), of wilderness remaining in a state of “dynamic equilibrium” for thousands of years.

If wilderness really is, as most dictionary and American legislative definitions state, land uninhabited and significantly unmodified by human beings, then there is no such land on this planet, and as for the oceans—well they certainly couldn’t qualify; and then, of course, the atmosphere, which today, speaks for itself. Wilderness, if we are to keep to these definitions, doesn’t actually exist anymore on planet Earth, and probably hasn’t for a very long time. If wilderness means what it is supposed to mean, then the nearest one is the moon, and then Mars. But so far as I can tell, whatever the red planet has to offer us—if anything – this is *not* what most people mean when they talk about wilderness; at least, not *yet*. So when people talk about protecting this wilderness here in Tasmania, or that wilderness there in Amazonia, they don’t actually *know* what they’re talking about, are living in fantasy—or else, they mean something very different from what these legal and dictionary definitions tell us wilderness is. Of course, this is a very understandable mistake, for all of these areas *appear* to be wilderness – when you don’t know their history. And who learns history these days?

Continuing the critique of the idea of the balance of nature, of wilderness as a dynamic equilibrium, Callicott cites the work of palynologist (palynology is the study of dusts and sediments) Margaret Davis (1969), land ecologists Pickett and White (1985), and Daniel Botkin’s 1990 book *Discordant Harmonies* as evidence for this new paradigm shift in ecology away from notions of balance and stability as a “state of nature”, and therefore of science away from the received wilderness idea.

This kind of attack on the scientific validity of the notion of wilderness is not new, and one of its earliest exponents is also one of the most convincing. In 1963, Stephen H. Spurr, in 'The Value of Wilderness to Science', argued that scientifically speaking "there is really no such thing" (in Nelson and Callicott, 2008, p.121), because, firstly, human beings have an impact on all ecosystems: in a neat and somehow rather illustrative example, he says,

man is influencing the atmosphere to a considerable extent. There is evidence that the production of carbon dioxide by motor vehicles and by heating units has had a material effect upon the carbon dioxide contraction of the atmosphere upon the climate. (ibid, p.127)

Secondly, Spurr argued against the idea of wilderness as representing the "balance of nature": Such a complex never does and never can reach any balance or permanence. It is constantly changing both in time and in space" (ibid, p.123) to the extent that "The forest ecosystem exists only at a given instant in time and a given instant in space" (ibid, p.124) and when seeking it, we can only find "it is therefore impossible to re-establish the wilderness that we in our nostalgia desire" (ibid, p.126).

This line of thought against the idea of a balance of or even stability to complex natural systems was echoed by Donald Worster in his 1990 article, 'The Ecology of Order and Chaos', with an even more profoundly sceptical tone that verges, at least rhetorically, on nihilism. Worster identifies a paradigm shift in ecology away from the idea of nature as a dynamic balance tending towards order, towards a thinking based on chaos and complexity theories and their models of nature as composed entirely of dynamic, *far-from* equilibrium systems. According to Worster, the idea of order and balance in nature was central to the thinking of two of the most influential figures in the history of ecology, Frederic L. Clements and Eugene Odum, first in Clements' notion that "the natural landscape must eventually reach a vaguely final climax stage", in a "steady flow towards stability that can be exactly plotted by the scientist" (in DesJardins, 1999, p.247), and secondly in Odum's notion of ecosystems evolving symbiotically towards a point of "homeostasis" (ibid, p. 248). From as early as 1926, says Worster, there had existed a radically different view, which would come

to overthrow this paradigm much later. Taxonomist Henry A. Gleason argued in an article entitled 'The Individualistic Conception of the Plant Association' that "'Each . . . species of plant is a law unto itself'", and that, in the words of Worster, "there is no such thing . . . as balance or equilibrium or steady-state", but only a nature in which "Each and every plant association is nothing but a temporary gathering of strangers a clustering of species unrelated to one another, here for a brief while today, on their way somewhere else tomorrow" (ibid, p.250). This thinking was reflected in Spurr's 1963 contribution quoted earlier, but it wasn't until Dury and Nisbet's 1973 article, "Succession", according to Worster, that the shift really kicked in. Worster interprets Drury and Nisbet thus:

Change is without any determinable direction and goes on forever, never reaching a point of stability. They found no evidence of any progressive development in nature: no progressive increase over time in biomass stabilization, no progressive diversification of species, no progressive movement toward a greater cohesiveness in plant and animal communities, nor toward a greater success in regulating the environment. . . . The forest, they insisted, no matter what its age, is nothing but an erratic, shifting mosaic of trees and other plants. In their words, "most of the phenomena of succession should be understood as resulting from the differential growth, differential survival, and perhaps differential dispersal of species adapted to grow at different points on stress gradients." In other words, they could see lots of individual species, each doing its thing, but they could locate no emergent collectivity, nor any strategy to achieve one. (ibid, pp. 249-50).

Now, says Worster, with the development of the science of chaos, and its theory of the "sensitive dependence on initial conditions" of dynamic systems, a.k.a. the "Butterfly Effect", and "far-from-equilibrium" dynamics, the paradigm shift is clear. "Nature, many have begun to believe is *fundamentally* erratic, discontinuous, and unpredictable" he argues, "It is full of seemingly random events that elude our models of how things are supposed to work," (ibid, p.252). For Worster, this has profound philosophical consequences:

What is there to love or preserve in a universe of chaos? How are people supposed to behave in such a universe? If such is the kind of place we inhabit, why not go ahead with all our

private ambition, free of any fear that we may be doing special damage? What, after all, does the phrase “environmental damage” mean in a world of so much natural chaos? (ibid, p.253)

It is not clear from his essay, however, that Worster, a historian, has any clear understanding of chaos theory and its implications or interconnections with *complexity* theory. In complexity theory, a phenomenon known as self-organization can occur in dynamic system, where equilibrium and therefore symmetry are broken in the possible range of behaviour and interaction, in which, in the words of Peter Coveney and Roger Highfield “patterns in space and time spontaneously emerge from randomness” (1996, p.154):

This is an example of a *dissipative structure*, a term introduced by Prigogine to emphasize the origin of such self-organization in a far-from-equilibrium thermodynamic process. The term draws attention to the fact that dissipation, frequently associated with the winding down of isolated systems into randomness, can in fact play the very opposite role in underpinning the evolution of complexity. Other dissipative structures include human beings, ecosystems, and the organized light generated by lasers. (ibid, p.162)

From randomness, in other words, emerges an unpredictable but *ordered* dynamic complexity, far-from-equilibrium, but which shows properties of stabilization. But chaos is itself distinct from this kind of self-organization; chaos is a property of causally *deterministic* phenomena, but because each outcome is so sensitive to its initial conditions, chaotic phenomena are those with outcomes the scope, scale and nature of which are impossible to predict. The “meaning of the word ‘chaos’ here,” say Coveney and Highfield, “is quite distinct from its everyday usage: it is used to describe processes that are *not* random but *look* random.”

One might think that the further one goes from equilibrium, the more chaos would occur . . . but the situation is more like that of a cedar tree, where there are gaps between layers of foliage. One can encounter “islands” or “windows” of regularity between regimes of chaos,

and vice versa; inside them are windows embedded within windows. This kind of behaviour . . . is a signature of the complexity that abounds in nature. (ibid, p.169)

The complexity that emerges spontaneously in dissipative self-organizing structures is dependent on innumerable infinitesimal initial causally determinate conditions, and is in this sense chaotically unpredictable, the conditions tending towards a *strange attractor*, that is, a repetitive patterning that shows the dynamic range through which its behaviour *resists* equilibrium, which constitutes its self-organization. What is not clear is where causation becomes determinate, that is, where this order arises in a merely deterministically *chaotic* way, and where, on the other hand, there seems to be no cause at all – that is, the structure literally constitutes itself from nothing more than a *random* dissipation. “Telling deterministic and stochastic chaos apart is one of the principle hurdles that confronts ‘chaologists’” (ibid), argue Coveney and Highfield. But this enquiry may find it has already strayed from science into the philosophical problems of causation and the continuum. What is clear, however is that in neither case can the kind of self-organisation we see in human beings and ecosystems be said to be *caused* by chaos, or to be absolutely chaotic in the everyday sense of itself behaving in an entirely random manner. “Deterministic chaos also blurs our intuitive ideas of order and disorder,” say Coveney and Highfield, and

Confused popularizations of the idea have put forward chaos as an explanation for everything complex, not only things that are unpredictable or unstable, but even when self-organization would be more appropriate. However, no one should be blinded by this buzzword. Order *and* deterministic chaos spring from the same source—dissipative dynamical systems described by nonlinear equations. (ibid, p.174)

Returning to the question of wilderness and the idea of a balance of nature: whilst the approaches of Spurr and Worster may have some real validity, specifically, in the idea that each ecosystem and each organism within it is so unique and impermanent that there can be no definitively identifiable form to wilderness that sets it apart from the rest of the universe, they may be too wholesale in their view of nature as disorder. I cannot help but be reminded of the following observations by Emerson in his *second*, lesser known essay entitled ‘Nature’,

published in 1844: “Motion or change, and identity or rest, are the first and second secrets of nature: Motion and Rest” (*CPW*, p.134).

The uneasiness which the thought of our helplessness in the chain of causes occasions us, results from looking too much at one condition of nature, namely, Motion. But the drag is never taken away from the wheel. Wherever the impulse exceeds, the Rest or Identity insinuates its compensation. (*ibid*, p.138)

Even for Callicott, the wholesale emphasis on chaos and imbalance is going too far, for he urges in another essay, ‘The Implication of the Shifting Paradigm in Ecology for the Paradigm Shifts in the Philosophy of Conservation’ (2003), for us to “be careful not to throw out the ecological baby with the ecological bathwater” (in Nelson and Callicott, p.588). He quotes Picket and Ostfeld (1995): “[T]he balance-of-nature metaphor can stand for some valid scientific ideas. The fundamental truth about the natural world that the idea may relate to is the fact that natural systems persist, and they do so by differential responses to various components” (*ibid*, p.590). Maybe flux and unity really are just different aspects of the same thing. Besides, couldn’t we say that the fundamental *instability* of ecosystems is precisely where their *wildness* lies? Yes, of course we can. But if by wilderness we mean land uninhabited and significantly unmodified by human beings, we would have to look for it elsewhere, that is, on another planet, to find out precisely what kind of dynamic balance, imbalance, or chaotic unpredictability it might exhibit. And that, for the moment, is a little beyond our means, and, well... we might just have one or two more pressing concerns.

In the following chapter, I will give more evidence to argue that the notion of wilderness need not be at all unscientific. But there is yet another sense in which we might say the “received” wilderness idea is unscientific, and one with more serious consequences, that at least need to be seriously considered in tandem with the displacements and destructions of human populations occurring across the globe in its name.

Wilderness as Destructive to Biodiversity and Planetary Life-Support

Perhaps *the* most serious claim made against the wilderness idea is this: that in many cases, the legal designation and protection of areas has actually *decreased* the biodiversity in the regions, and, in so doing it is implied, *decreased* their life-support function for human beings and the planet. In “Wilderness Preservation and Biodiversity Conservation: Keeping Divergent Goals Distinct” (1999, in Nelson and Callicott, 2008), Sahotra Sarkar argues that biodiversity conservation and wilderness preservation are two very different things which need to be understood as such, but which are commonly conflated. A key difference, Sarkar argues, is that whilst wilderness preservation in general seeks to protect areas free from human habitation, “except perhaps for a few species, such as large, wide-ranging predators, there is no *a priori* reason to suppose that conservation of biodiversity requires wilderness, such as national parks that exclude humans” (ibid, p.236). Biologically diverse environments can range from “deserts and forests to farms and horticultural gardens” (ibid), and in global terms, “None of the 18 global hotspots of biodiversity identified by Myers (1988, 1990) satisfies the criterion of either minimal human presence or influence” (ibid, p.237). “Human groups,” says Sarkar,

particularly those that do not use invasive technologies and have lived in a region for many generations, are often integral parts of ecosystems and may have little or no negative impact on biodiversity. Moreover, even intrusive human use may not always be detrimental to biodiversity. (ibid, p.239)

As an example he gives the Amazonian rainforests, an area of extraordinarily high biodiversity, and citing Hecht and Cockburn’s 1990 study, and Posey and Balée’s 1989 compilation, he argues there have been “not only high densities of past human populations in many parts of the Amazon, but also evidence of intensive but stable modulation of forests” (ibid). He even argues that “circumstantial evidence suggests that, in many cases, human intervention has been critical to the maintenance of biodiversity” (ibid, p.240). Citing VS Vijayan’s 1987 study, he gives the example of the Keoladeo National Park in Rajasthan, India, an artificial wetland that also served as a grazing ground for cattle from the

surrounding villages, and had a great diversity of bird species. When the government made the area a park, however, and banned grazing—including police killings of several protestors – this “devastated Keoladeo as a bird habitat” because “*Paspalum* grass, which had been kept in check by grazing, has now established a stranglehold on the wetland, choking the shallow bodies of water” (ibid, p.241). Another example he uses, citing Naban et al. (1982) is that of the Sonoran Desert, where two oases on either side of the Mexican-United States border, have been subject to different forms of management. On the US side the oasis was protected as part of the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, and since this time there has been a significant decline in biodiversity, whilst on the Mexican side, “continued traditional land use by Papago farmers at the Quitovac oasis 54 km to the southeast led to no such decline” (ibid, p.241). Sarkar argues not only that human use need not have a negative effect on biodiversity, but may even, in certain kinds of cases, have a positive effect. Sometimes, but again, not always, it is the preservation of so-called wilderness conditions that in fact has a negative effect.

Despite these differences, there are some important areas of confluence between the goals of wilderness preservation and biodiversity conservation, as Sarkar points out. In positive terms, they share one type of target habitat: “fragile ecosystems or those with rare or endangered species that show little or no human influence” (ibid, p.237). Whilst these areas are rare and might not even have as much diversity *within* them as some of the so-called “hotspots”, they may in fact help preserve *overall* diversity in their more minimal but nevertheless *unique* environments, and so indeed be of some great value for the scientific intellect, if not for future utility. But more important for Sarkar are the negative reasons for confluence: unbridled market forces destroying wilderness areas and biodiversity through resource extraction and overdevelopment, fuelled overconsumption, human encroachment on fragile areas, and invasive technology and infrastructure like roads and mechanized forestry. But for Sarkar, whilst these areas of confluence are important, they are also minute, and should not be overemphasized, particularly where there are significant differences in outcome for biodiversity between allowing human activity and preserving wilderness conditions which may frequently be at odds, in favour of relatively sustainable human activities.

For Sarkar, the primary value of biodiversity conservation is its intellectual interest, which he considers an adequate justification, and apart from potential economic utility, he refers to other possible justifications as “controversial” and “not strictly necessary for an adequate defense of biodiversity conservation” (ibid, p.237). But Sarkar is not only avoiding the controversies of what he calls “consonance with certain cultural and religious traditions”, but, more important and noticeable in its absence, the idea that the future of life on earth is actually *dependent* on the conservation of biological diversity. This is taken for granted by Tim Flannery in his book *Here on Earth*: “It’s earth’s biodiversity that keeps it habitable”, he argues (2010, p.257). As we saw in chapter Three, biodiversity has been found to be highly instrumental in supporting crop production, and the extent of its other environmental “services” remains to be properly grasped. Sarkar also ignore the related idea that the future potential for *human* life *could* become radically uncertain in terms of key areas like food supply if biodiversity drops below certain critical and quite possibly imminent tipping points, as asserted in the latest United Nations report on biodiversity, *GBO 3* (2010), quoted in the previous chapter.

Politically speaking, the establishment of national parks excluding humans from traditional habitats and literally reaping the economic benefits of these environments can create conflicts that “significantly hurt biodiversity conservation efforts” (ibid, p.242), particularly when they are conflated with this wilderness preservation, argues Sarkar. Also, the strategy of creating national parks as protected areas can leave regions outside the reserves entirely unprotected, to the great detriment of biodiversity. As an example he looks at Costa Rica, “usually touted as a success story of biodiversity conservation through . . . wilderness preservation” (ibid, p.243). “Approximately 25% of Costa Rica is set aside on paper as national parks and reserves”, says Sarkar, citing Meffe and Carroll’s 1994 book, yet according to Faber (1993),

whereas 55% of Costa Rica was forested in 1961, only 22% remained forested in 1991. Only approximately half of this forested area was in parks and reserves. This fact makes the 29%

land area in reserves irrelevant because much of this area is neither forested nor otherwise important for biodiversity . (ibid, p.243)

The average annual deforestation rate in Costa Rica was “6.9%, by far the highest in Latin America . . . because the establishment of official conservation areas led to almost total deforestation outside these areas, usually to satisfy economic interests” (pp. 243-4), he argues, whilst according to Wallace (1992), the parks themselves are being ravaged by excessive ecotourism, “Thus, the strategy of wilderness preservation has not be particularly successful in conserving biodiversity” (ibid, p.244).

Another two examples Sarkar uses are from Malaysian Borneo, that of Sabah and the Gunung Mulu National Park in Sarawak. In Sabah, he argues, citing Aiken and Leigh (1995) and Cleary and Eaton (1995), “the major purpose the designation of parks seems to have served in to deflect environmental criticism” (ibid, p.244), two thirds of the reserve area occupied by commercial forests, and outside of a few major national parks, “Sabah is almost entirely logged” (ibid). In Sarawak, the area outside the Gunung Mulu National Park has been extensively logged, whilst only a particular indigenous group are allowed to live in the area, those dislocated by logging deprived of a home. Social interests and biodiversity have suffered equally and for the same reasons.

Sarkar concludes that “Wilderness preservation cannot be used as a surrogate for biodiversity conservation” and that “wilderness preservation and biodiversity conservation may be in conflict” (ibid, p.246). Whilst he concedes that wilderness preservation may have value in its own right – aesthetically and recreationally, for example – preservation should involve negotiation with other interests, such as development, social justice, and socioeconomic needs, and from a scientific perspective, must always give way to the needs of biodiversity, and from an ethical perspective, to principles of justice.

In this chapter, the principle target has been the so-called Received Wilderness Idea. As a cultural construct, it is an idealized projection onto an experience of the sublime in nature of something that can rid us of the ills of civilization. As the pure, raw source of some ultimate balance of nature that we are disturbing at our peril, we find instead dynamic, adaptive, and inherently unpredictable systems that spontaneously exhibit stability. As a place where “man is a visitor, who does not remain”, we find wilderness being constructed by the savage displacement of indigenous peoples from their lands and the destruction of their cultures. And as a place where nature in its rarest and purest form is to be protected, we find instead, in a number of cases, the destruction of biodiversity. The Received Wilderness Idea is indeed a myth that cannot withstand these critiques. But what of the other ideas of wilderness already present in policy, practice, and experience? How might we properly differentiate these from the Received Wilderness Idea, and defend them against the serious claims of this chapter? That is the subject of the next chapter.

5.

WILDERNESS

AS

NATURE OUT OF CONTROL

In this chapter I argue the need to revise and clarify our understanding of wilderness in terms that reject the strict, “Purity” definitions of it as necessarily uninhabited and significantly unmodified by human beings (called by Callicott the Received Wilderness Idea), whilst embracing what more properly defines it: wherever nature is out of human control. I restrict the use of this crucial term, *nature*, to the sense in which it may be applied to environments within the Earth’s biosphere, whilst in the following chapters, I will explore how the revised concept of wilderness relates to the broader questions of *what* nature is and how conscious human beings arise from it, exist within it, perceive it, and transform it, all in these terms of control and the lack thereof.

I argue that this revised conception of wilderness is actually a conceptual clarification of much actual current usage of the term, scientific and non-scientific, that it has a strong historical precedent, and is logically coherent. I agree with the thinkers addressed in the previous chapter that the so-called (I say so-called, because it actually *lacks* historical precedent) Received Wilderness Idea is fundamentally a *misconception* about certain kinds of environments. But unlike Callicott and others, I shall not argue that natural environments are

misconceived in the very idea of wilderness, but rather that the *concept* of wilderness as a quality of natural environments has been misconceived. In fact, I will go through every point representative of the arguments *against* the received wilderness idea and show how none of them now hold for this revised understanding of wilderness. I will then argue that this concept of wilderness already in use, once adequately clarified and the distinction between the two made, is not only scientifically and logically valid, but gives even stronger support to all the arguments *in favour of* wilderness protection argued for in chapter Three. These arguments were: that it is important for preserving biodiversity (provided it is not equated with it) and planetary life-support, is rich with potential as an object of research and development, is a source of sublime insight into the human nature-relationship, and a source of ethical value and a profound potential for human freedom and creativity. Again, I shall go through each of them, point by point, and show the *difference* this revised conception of wilderness makes to their viability, and attempt to show why doing so is so important. Furthermore, I will argue that it might not even be *possible* to abandon this concept of wilderness, and why this lends even more importance to distinguishing it from the first. In concluding I shall pave the way for what is to follow in this thesis by arguing that this corrected notion of wilderness is necessarily conceptually much richer and further reaching than previously imagined.

In chapter Four, we were confronted by the following strong claims made against the received wilderness idea:

- (A) That the idea of wilderness is nothing but an elitist American cultural construction divorced from the reality of the human relationship with nature
- (B) That the idea of wilderness is destructive to human populations and can result in acts of genocide;
- (C) That the idea of wilderness is unscientific;
- (D) That in many cases, the idea of wilderness can be harmful to biodiversity preservation; and
- (E) That even if other, less destructive notions of wilderness exist, the concept should be abandoned because these more benign notions are too easily confused with the more

destructive concept, which is the dominant one that holds sway in public institutions, decision-making, and people's emotions.

I have argued that the received wilderness idea – that wilderness is necessarily devoid of human habitation and modification – cannot stand against claims A, B, C, and D. Claim E, however, still remains in question in relation to the alternative conception of wilderness presented by this thesis, and its historical and contemporary precedents.

Wilderness has its defenders, philosophically, as well as physically and politically. In 'Wilderness—Now More Than Ever: A Response to Callicott' (1994, in Butler, 2002), conservation scientist, planner and co-founder of the Wildlands Project Reed F. Noss, argues that Callicott's attack on the wilderness concept is a straw man argument "that is thirty years out of date" (ibid, p.188). He goes on:

No one I know today thinks of wilderness in the way Callicott depicts it. Anyone with any brain knows that wilderness boundaries are permeable, that ecosystems are dynamic entities, that humans are fundamentally part of nature (though arguably a malignant part), and that ecological management is essential in most modern wilderness areas and other reserves if we want to maintain biodiversity and ecological integrity. To "let nature run its course" in small, isolated reserves burgeoning with alien species and uncontrolled herbivores is to watch passively while an accident victim bleeds to death. (ibid pp. 188)

Noss agrees with Callicott in rejecting the notion of wilderness as necessarily devoid of human habitation and its potential for catastrophic consequences, as in the case of the Ik, without *also* arguing for the complete abandonment of the concept itself. He also argues that "it is not ridiculous . . . to exclude people living profligate, subsidized, unsustainable, industrial lifestyles (including Callicott and me) from permanent habitation in wilderness areas" (ibid, p. 190). He considers the idea of biosphere reserves being an *alternative* to wilderness preservation incorrect because, he argues, "wilderness is the central part of the

biosphere reserve model: the core area.” He continues, “Without a wilderness core, a biosphere reserve could not fulfill its function of maintaining the full suite of native species and natural processes,” (ibid, p.193). At the same time, the goals of the Wildlands Project include, he argues, a “gradient from wild to developed land, but encourages a continual movement towards the wild” (ibid), in opposition to Callicott’s claim that wilderness preservation exists in a powerless either/or dichotomy with industrial development. “We need no alternative to wilderness” (ibid, p.194), concludes Noss. “Rather, we need to incorporate the wilderness ideal into a broader vision of recovered but dynamic landscapes dominated by wildland but complemented by true civilization.”

This conception of wilderness as ecosystems *relatively*, rather than *absolutely* uninhabited and unmodified by humans—that is, relative *to* rural and urban areas dominated and more or less *controlled* by human infrastructure and cultivation, is not unique to Noss. In “Wilderness and the City: Not such a Long Drive After All” (2006), Scott Cameron argues that “‘wilderness’ is a relative concept: it exists in different degrees depending on its local context”, and although relative, nevertheless still determinate, indicating, like the concept “world”, “a kind of ‘outside’”, and locating “regions of experience where neither we nor anyone else is in control” (p.31). Another example, along similar lines, is that of Gregory H. Aplet and colleagues at The (US) Wilderness Society examined in chapter Two, who found that what makes wilderness wild is a question of the degree of control or influence humans have over an environment compared to what is out of human control in that environment. These definitions definitely differs from standard dictionary definitions, and also from the wording of the Wilderness Act of 1964, but may nevertheless *more* accurately reflect what the term has come to mean for many scientists and non-scientists alike, and the terms historical usage, as well. There is however, at least one dictionary definition that does seem to reflect *this* understanding, an extended definition from *Webster’s Online Dictionary*:

The mere presence or activity of people does not disqualify an area from being "wilderness." Many ecosystems that are, or have been, inhabited or influenced by activities of people may still be considered "wild." (<http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org>)

This is in accord with the definitions developed by Australian conservation biologists and used in Australian government policy, and recognized by the (Australian) Wilderness Society. Such definitions have been partly influenced by indigenous critiques of the American wilderness idea, such as that put forth by Deborah Bird Rose (1996) mentioned in chapter Two. Suddenly it makes more sense that wilderness areas may be inhabited and even intensively managed by indigenous populations, so long as the degree of their *influence* in their habitation and management of the area does not overwhelm the dominant non-human structural and dynamic tendencies and possibilities of that environment. In fact, by respecting indigenous rights to their lands and the value of such low impact land practices, we might learn a great deal more not only about wilderness, but about how we human beings might coexist with it. It also means that wilderness does not need to have always been free from human control, but that in fact, it can be created simply by removing that control, and, with or without our influence, allowing it to follow non-human directions of growth and process.

Now we have a relatively common concept of wilderness that, judging by the textual evidence examined in chapter One (and the study of the term wilderness over the last hundred years of Aplet et al. discussed in chapter Two), has a historical precedent as old as the English language itself and a continuity to the present day found in Australian and International definitions of wilderness. Furthermore, it *does not require the removal or non-existence of human habitation or modification*—only *degrees* of human control that make it the dominating feature of the landscape, as in cities and broad-acre, intensive farming. Let us be explicit, and define wilderness as the kind of environment where nature is out of human control as its dominant shaping feature.

This concept of wilderness as environments where nature is out of human control as their dominant shaping feature can hardly serve as the basis for claim **A**—that wilderness is merely a culturally specific—that is, recent, elitist American—cultural construct that does not reflect the realities of the human-nature relationship. Cronon recognizes the reality of wild nature, but like Mackey et al. equivocates between this and calling wilderness a cultural

construct. Of course, the so-called Received Wilderness Idea *is* just such a cultural construct, and nothing else, as these critiques have shown, but the same cannot be said of the concept now in question. But the problem with this equivocation of Cronon and Mackey et al. is that, as already argued, they on the one hand identify measurable *areas* of wild nature where even *what* makes them wild can be measured, whilst at the same time asserting that wilderness itself in the sense of wilderness areas is merely a cultural construction—and this makes no sense. Jackson, on the other hand, throughout his essay *already* refers to the kinds of idea of wilderness we are now considering by referring both to the physical reality of wilderness in history and its historical meaning as a means for establishing the borders of human dominion, by leaving some areas wild and others not, and claiming the rights of certain “sovereign” individuals over that wildness. However, we must not be too quick here to claim victory and say that his interpretation of history proves our view that wilderness *is not* a cultural construct.

We might read Jackson’s interpretation of wilderness in history as in fact saying that the concept of wilderness only appears *after* supposedly *wild* nature does in fact come under the control of human beings. Wilderness as a concept effectively appears *after* it disappears in this reading, romanticising this past with a creation narrative that identifies these human controlled environments with the (in reality) lost wild—much like we find in Cronon’s interpretation of Frederick Jackson Turner’s history of the vanishing frontier and its myth. Yet what this really shows us is the interdependent nature of how we define wilderness relative to environmental control. For even though an area is encircled, surrounded with non-wilderness and the human activities that maintain it, so long as the area itself is still not shaped *internally* on the whole by human activity—it is in fact *defined* by this bordering as wilderness. This definition also allows for encroachment of humans into wilderness, and wilderness into non-wild spaces, as suggested by Cronon, who loves the wildness close to home, even in his own back yard. In chapters Six and Seven, we will see that there is a sense in which for human existence itself, insofar as we have any control over nature or self *as* a natural being, this control is always defined against the ways nature continues to be *out* of our control on multiple levels. The real magic of our existence *is* always closer to home than some far off environment, even if it lives there, also.

The concept of wilderness as nature out of control also stands up against claim **B**, that in acts of protecting these areas, human populations will be displaced and damaged, where it can be shown that indigenous hunter-gatherers or low-level farmers can easily *inhabit* wild areas without reaching a degree of influence and modification of these environment where the singular dominating characteristic of them is that they are under human control. As has already been noted, such habitation may in fact help preserve regional biodiversity. This could be important, also, in allowing appropriate biodiversity hotspots *also* be recognized as wilderness, areas where bordering human activity exceeds its limits and encroaches by dominating them. It is precisely moderating the levels of human encroachment to a level that does not disrupt their *wilderness* value, as it is conceived here, that *will* preserve their biodiversity. Again, this concept stands up against both claims **C** and **D**, because it *can* be applied to areas like the American Western Wilderness, Amazonia, and New Guinea, and can *allow* for the kind of responsible human *management* that does its best to *preserve* any biodiversity. The notion of wilderness has been saved from the charge of it being fallacious – i.e. the idea that we always misname areas when we call them wilderness, because there is nowhere left on earth free from human influence and modification. Of course, this would be true if there were nowhere on earth free from human *control* – but we can hardly say that is the case. We may fish, and the fish may be disappearing all too rapidly—but we have established no traffic lights in the oceans.

The major claims against the concept of wilderness, made so convincingly by Callicott and others, appear to have collapsed in a heap—**A**, **B**, **C** and **D**. But what about claim **E**? What if, despite all of this, Callicott's argument that any revised notion of wilderness simply cannot compete with the deeply entrenched beliefs of the received wilderness idea, and is doomed to always be confused with it, is true?

Firstly, let us examine the most significant points *in favour* of wilderness preservation, and see if this revised notion of wilderness lends them further support. The first claim is that

wilderness preservation is important for biodiversity and the planetary life-support functions on which we depend.

Wilderness revised, biodiversity, and the life-support function

“Wilderness areas,” state H. Ken Cordell and colleagues, “are natural areas where natural processes dominate and the natural landscape and habitats created by those natural processes are sustained without human intervention” (2005, p.210). At the same time, they admit that “no land . . . is totally free from human influence”. But what happens if, as appears to have been the case with the Keoladeo wetland, human beings, though not dominating these processes themselves, contribute to them as a keystone species? To clarify the meaning of this phrase, its inventor, R. T. Paine, reflecting on his own work, wrote the following:

Paine (1969) described it narrowly for a marine rocky shore in which a starfish, through selective predation on a competitively superior prey, maintained resources for a host of other species . . . The original metaphor was intended to convey a sense of nature's dynamic fragility and the unsuspected consequences of removing (or adding) species. (1995, p.962)

Until very recently, human beings have not been considered as a possible keystone species within this framework. According to Robert O'Neill and James Kahn, however,

a keystone species, *Homo economus*, is artificially isolated from the ecosystems in which it functions because of limited paradigms in both ecology and economics. The ecological paradigm isolates human activity in a box labeled “disturbances.” The economic paradigm, in turn, isolates ecosystem dynamics in a box labeled “externalities.” (2000, p.333)

O'Neill and Kahn's focus is principally on the severe impact of current global levels of human activity on global ecosystems, however, their recognition of human beings and human

economic activity giving us the role of a keystone species could equally apply to environments where, like (some kinds of) starfish, much subtler and gentler levels of activity could help to preserve both biodiversity *and* the ability of the natural system to be *self-sustaining*, however fundamentally unstable, unpredictable, or impermanent they may be. Of course, if the ecosystem is sustained *solely* by human beings, then it cannot be wild, and on the other hand, it may be possible—though it seems unlikely – for humans to inhabit and modify an environment without even becoming a keystone species. My hypothesis here, however, is that human beings *can* act as a keystone species *within* a wilderness, and in so doing, can help to maximize its biodiversity. Fortunately, there is already plenty of evidence available to us that would seem to support this. This includes Sarkar’s example of the rainforests across Amazonia, where, in the previous chapter, he cited Hecht and Cockburn’s (1990) and Posey and Balée (1989), arguing *against* the received wilderness idea that there have been, I quote again, this time in *favour* of the revised concept of wilderness, “not only high densities of past human populations in many parts of the Amazon, but also evidence of intensive but stable modulation of forests” (1999 in Nelson & Callicott, 2008, p.239) and that “circumstantial evidence suggests that, in many cases, human intervention has been critical to the maintenance of biodiversity” (ibid, p.240). According to Edward O. Wilson, “The true great wildernesses of the world include the rainforests of the Amazon, the Congo, and New Guinea; the evergreen coniferous forests of northern America and Eurasia; and Earth’s ancient deserts, polar regions, and open seas” (2002, p. 144). The first five areas he mentions here have been extensively inhabited and modified by human beings for thousands of years, if the studies thus far cited as evidence against the *received* wilderness idea are to be taken seriously. However the 1.4 per cent of the world’s land surface, according to Wilson’s estimate – that holds 44 per cent “of the world’s plant species and more than a third of all species of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians” (ibid, p.145) can *also* be included in our definition of wilderness, no matter how surrounded or intertwined with human habitation and infrastructure.

The world’s biodiversity “hotspots” are not included in current global measures of wilderness that take as their standard the wording of the 1964 Act, and allow for only landscapes with

less than 5 people per km² and contain 70% of the species they did 500 years ago (which, by our definition, is irrelevant, so long as natural processes remain the dominant shaping factor—as we have discovered, ecosystems are highly unpredictable places, and a lot can happen in 500 years), and only larger than 10, 000 km² (supposedly for them to have global significance, which seems somewhat absurd, if we imagine 10 thousand separate areas 7000 km², we would be talking almost half the Earth's land surface area being ignored). Yet it is the small patches of wild nature being islandized and destroyed by human industry that humans have been modifying for centuries that hold this biodiversity, and it is the possibility of levels of human activity that do not destroy it and possibly situate us as a vital keystone species that we must pay attention to. Defining wilderness in terms of being out of human control as the dominant shaping factor is precisely the way we can measure these critical thresholds. The preservation of *this* wilderness, along with the levels of human activity compatible with it, *is* essential for preserving biodiversity, which, as argued by many in the biology community, may well be essential for preserving the global ecological life-support functions necessary for human life—or at least, a human life worth living. It simply needs to be differentiated from and prioritized for protection over other wilderness areas in terms of its biodiversity and endangered status.

Wilderness revised as a ground for scientific research and development

When human activity can play a central role in maintaining and even increasing the biological diversity and ecosystem health of a wilderness region, this affords a much greater potential for scientific research and development, and at the same time, a far more hands on, empirical approach to measuring what levels and kinds of human activity and population drive this health and biodiversity, and what levels and kinds destroy it. For the first time it makes possible a truly responsible integration of economics with ecology, as urged by O'Neill and Kahn, and the development of biomimicry, permaculture, industrial ecology, and sustainable economies along the lines suggested by Janine Benyus, Bill Mollison and David Holmgren, Robert Frosch and Nicholas Gallopoulos, Paul Hawken, and Amory and Hunter Lovins, amongst a great many others wishing to usher in “the next industrial revolution”.

Actual human participation in wild environments can maximize the possibilities for research and development in ways inaccessible if we stick to the received wilderness idea—ways that might be the key to preserving and even increasing the very biodiversity in question. It could also boost economic and cultural diversity and development in ecologically coherent ways.

There is much justifiable speculation of the possibility of the unique chemical structures of certain organisms in wilderness systems providing breakthroughs for modern medicine, and in general, enhancing our understanding of all aspects of biology and ecology. However, perhaps the most promising yet underexplored realm of possibilities lies in the domain of the future of food production for an increasing human population with less and less space. To start with is the sheer diversity of foods sources found in many, but not all, wilderness areas. But the question is not one of extraction and then broad scale cultivation – particularly if such cultivation is in the form of land denuding, toxin dependent monocultures that *replace* wilderness. Rather, the greatest benefit to be found is as a model for robust, food producing ecosystems that are *self*-sustaining beyond certain degrees of human influence and exploitation, but that still produce a yield that can either equal or exceed the yields produced by more traditional and destructive forms of cultivation. Lessons learned in wilderness may be applicable to non-wilderness rural areas to the extent that they bring their ecological qualities far closer to, and possibly overlapping these wilderness qualities. If such things are possible – and urgent, widespread experimentation is conducted beyond the charismatic efforts of the likes of Masanobu Fukuoka and Bill Mollison – who both claimed to be able to produced relatively self-sustaining systems capable of producing *higher* yields than industrial farming – then the future may not be so bleak after all. But action is required—urgently, but also, thoughtfully. These things *do* take time.

Wilderness revised as a source of the sublime and ethical value

Wilderness is the best source, argue its proponents, for an absolute absorption in the experience of both the sublime – that which thrills us with wonder with intimations of our own mortality – and the beautiful, in the forms of wild nature. In the wild is the constant, real danger of the elements of nature, or its wild creatures, turning against us, injuring or killing us. From one wilderness area to another, such dangers are more or less extreme, and the risk is very much dependent on the knowledge of those travelling through the area. In general, those with local expertise may be in far less danger, however, wherever nature is out of our control, there is bound to be some element of genuine danger. In wilderness, it is possible to experience a sense of rapturous wonder and awe at both the thrill of the wild being out of control and its sheer force and power in this regard, from the microscopic level of pathogens in the air, soil, water, plants, and toxins from spiders, ticks, and snakes, to the wild windy mountainside where the lightning strikes or the desert or ocean, where we are exposed to the extremes of temperature and the elements. Here the beauty and sheer pleasure of absorption in the complexity of its sensuous forms, the sublime and the beautiful are inseparable.

There is a difference between experiencing wilderness as a place through which we can only pass and never remain, and experiencing wilderness as a place of habitation. There is something romantic and ungraspable about the wilderness in which we cannot remain, but at the same time, the entire concept becomes a mere abstraction when we return home, and a mere means to that fleeting experience—effectively, an experience to consume for one's own ends, utilizing the environment itself as a mere abstract commodity: the experience and representations of the experience in paintings, postcards, and essays, become endlessly exchangeable, and what are being bought and sold are notions: “pristine”, “sublime”, “natural beauty”, “wilderness”. We gaze over copies of Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, or Peter Dombrovski's *Rock Island Bend*, read Burke, Wordsworth and Thoreau, and write essays for our own artworks as we explore this fetish of wilderness, like the so-called “nature-porn” that uses images of wild nature in advertising to sell everything from beer and soap to cars, or the fantasy landscapes in films like *Avatar*; the hyperreal wilderness,

infinitely removed from any event. For Kant, the sense of the sublime as coming from wild nature was a projected illusion, for the sublime was truly our subjective recognition of the limits of imagination, thought and its contradictions. Let us once again recall his words on this:

. . . true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the one who judges, not in the object of in nature, the judging of which occasions this disposition in it. And who would want to call sublime shapeless mountain masses towering above one another in wild disorder with their pyramids of ice, or the dark and raging sea, etc.? (2000, p.139)

For Kant, the true source of the wondrous thrill experienced in wilderness was entirely subjective, nothing to do with the kind of environment experienced.

For someone who actually lives in a wilderness, however, as this different understanding of wilderness allows, any sense of supposedly sublime wonder or thrill will always be far closer to actual dangers, and the possibilities of pain and death. One needs to take responsibility for one's own safety and that of others. The novelty and thrill of so-called "sublime terror" will cease to be experienced in such sharp contrast to the rest of life, but rather must be incorporated as part of its natural rhythm—it loses its superficiality, its abstract *Eros/Thanatos*. So too, the sense of wondrous rapture and sensuous pleasure at the endless beauty of wild nature must cease being beautiful *because* exotic and rare *as opposed* to the banalities of urban life, but must be understood as balanced, indeed, by the banalities and harsh realities and horrors of *wild* life. At the same time, possible in all this in a way impossible in the received wilderness idea, is a deepening sense of relationship *with* wild nature, relating those inner, subjective elements Kant identifies as the source of the sense of the sublime *back to* a wild nature that in itself lacks any subjective element, and is not *for* human beings, as recognized by Muir, but may still be a source of something sublime or not both *beyond* and *within* our own subjectivity. Specifically, there is the opportunity to develop a relationship not with an idealized nature, but with that wild other, as Rolston urges, as an end in itself, and by so doing develop the subtlest and deepest elements of the human spirit

further than was previously possible. And yet if we follow Murdoch's conception again, it is our own imaginations and love for the particularity of each other and nature that gives rise to the sublime. Again, this can only be an abstraction inviting endless manipulation unless actually, directly engaged in an ongoing, inclusive relationship.

If we allow the possibility of human habitation and modification of wilderness within appropriate limits, the chances for testing whether it has unique qualities capable of inspiring the very greatest works of the human intellect and creativity become much greater. Not only is it possible to survey *existing* works of art and literature for elements of wild inspiration, it becomes possible to allow artists and writers to participate in genuine, *extended* wilderness *residencies* (which may include travel to and from cities) where they can combine solitude and possibilities for inspiration from nature and from within, with the further research and development of the domain specific knowledge they need to spend years mastering in order to produce great works. In fact, artists and writers could even move, over time, *between different* wilderness areas and different cities, to increase the possibilities for inspiration and skills development.

In present research into the origins and conditions for the creation of great works that express what we call *genius*, there are two major conflicting theories: that of Simonton (1999) and others, on the one hand, with its emphasis on spontaneous, random Darwinian-like processes often induced by various forms of stress and tension verging on madness, and that of Weisburg (1993, 2006), that there is no such thing as inspired genius, and that rather, creativity comes as a result of time spent developing crucial domain specific expertise. Both use numerous historical examples and psychological experiments as case studies. It is my contention that both of these viewpoints are correct in their own ways, and that wilderness presents the optimal possibilities for developing both *together*, in their very contradictions, when the relationships between wilderness and human psychology, development and limitations are better understood.

The chance to inhabit and form a genuinely interactive relationship with wilderness allows for genuinely participatory research and an ability to measure different kinds of parameters over time, and the possibility of identifying those predispositions, if any, that can be genuinely enhanced by a sustained wilderness experience, as well as experimentations with different *kinds* of wilderness experience. With the possibility of human interaction with and habitation of wilderness, nature's laboratory is opened so we may observe ourselves. The capacity to spend significant time, from days to years or even decades, in wilderness allows for deeper study of the relationship between cognitive processes and specific environmental qualities. A continued presence in and interaction with wilderness allows the possibility of tracking links between health and wellbeing and relationship qualities and potentials for cognitive and creative development, and to compare these with urban groups, and establish adequate experimental controls.

But wilderness, as we have seen, also gives us access to something beyond such instrumental reasoning. In triggering creativity and "genius", it is worth reminding ourselves that for Kant, Novalis, and others, genius was essentially imaginative and intuitive, not something that could be held by any concept, but a wild play of ideas in the realm of lived experience as it happens. So too, the experience that triggers such profoundly liberating expressive responses in the works of art we might label as works of genius must be treated in a more than instrumental way, particularly when it seems to be instrumental reasoning itself that obscures the reality it reveals to us, most of all. Because wilderness areas are free from the physical structures that ground this instrumental reasoning, they allow for such an opening to what is both beyond and prior to it. This might be even more important than any essential ecological benefits wilderness provides us and the planet with, for only by recognizing such a possibility can we even think beyond reasons *for*, and have the freedom of consciously existing in and beholding the mystery that enfolds us, something that gives life a meaning beyond reason altogether, that reason only in its greatest moments, can *recognize* and allow.

These then—biodiversity and life-support, the potential for research and ecological development, and the sublime, ethically and creatively, even *erotically*—if we follow Murdoch, Bataille, and the scrawling on the cave wall—inspiring values of wilderness—seem, together, like extremely strong reasons for *retaining* the revised concept of wilderness, striving to protect what it represents, and unequivocally rejecting and abandoning the so-called Received Wilderness Idea. A very serious problem remains, however, that prevents this from being realized.

The problem with the revised wilderness concept, as it stands

Despite the extreme urgent and potentially positive reasons for a widespread adoption of the revised wilderness concept and a complete abandonment of the “Received” wilderness idea, there is a crucial element that the revised idea misses, that prevents it from standing against Callicott’s strongest argument in the current context, which I represented as “claim E” at the start of this chapter. This argument is that the received wilderness idea of “pristine, untouched, uninhabited nature” has such a strong hold over the hearts and minds of those fighting to defend wilderness, that any attempts to reform it will be doomed from the start, so embedded as it is in the historic struggle to protect it, and engraved in (American) law and most dictionary definitions. But this will only be true if the clearly communicated and understood need to correct this idea to the definition myself and others are working with fails to evoke emotions and thoughts with at least equal powers of conviction. And it is precisely here that the problem lies, for the “received wilderness idea” does have within it a crucial element evoking such passions and conviction, that our revised notion, as it stands, lacks.

There is an ongoing conflict between those seeking to protect wilderness, who often become responsible for legislative decisions in this regard, and those who have never believed in wilderness—or at least in the need to protect it – in the first place, and who will continue, as much as possible, to go on destroying it. These others are satisfied that they are right (as they

are) in thinking that the “Received” wilderness idea being defended is incoherent and not reflective of environmental or economic or political realities. There is something absolute in the Received Wilderness Idea – wilderness, by definition, is forever untouched, untouchable, pristine. There is something equally absolute in its outright rejection, a brash embrace of the economic and technological realities of the moment, as simultaneously the best thing we’ve got, and an unstoppable force that will destroy any environment it cannot commodify sufficiently and replace it with one it can. Here, between the two, is a true struggle.

In comparison, the idea of a wilderness that can be inhabited by humans and open to appropriate levels of sustainable economic activity that may not be incompatible with the drives of contemporary societies seems insubstantial, vague, and lukewarm, and smacks of the kind of bureaucratic compromise where neither side can win, and everything proceeds sluggishly, going nowhere. How can one be passionate about something so mundane, so ordinary? The idea of wilderness has lost its extreme, its untouchable, unknowable quality of a romantically religious absolute—has lost its wildness itself! Whilst this may not actually be true, there is something deeply entrenched within people that needs this *inner* conflict to act, that needs the *outer* environment to reflect this *inner conflict*—I want it, but I cannot have it, but we must save it, because we are destroying it! What is it in this received wilderness idea, that inspires such passions in people? The remaining two chapters of this thesis, in part, will attempt to answer this question.

It is an error to view the *specific* sense in which nature is out of control in wilderness environments as having no significance or consequence for the general, that is, *universal* sense in which nature is out of human control. For that matter, it is also an error to immediately discount it as irrelevant and inconsequential for the potentially innumerable other *specific* senses in which this is so. This becomes much clearer, as will be seen, when it is shown how some key different senses in which nature is out of human control relate to two other senses in which this is so. These initial two senses are, firstly, in terms of nature’s life-support capacity for human existence, and secondly, in terms of the tendency of human

behaviour to collectively destroy the capacity for this life-support. In fact, what I am arguing is that *only* when nature out of human control in wilderness environments is *consciously* related not only to these two senses, but to the way in which nature is out of human control *in general*, can the revised concept have the impact required on thought, emotion, and communicative action *sufficient* to *overthrow* and make redundant the received wilderness idea. Only then can it be *effective* as the basis for wilderness protection and the possible and positive values inherent within this.

Wildness, as applied to nature, means the degrees to which it is free from human control. Since on the fundamental level, nature is out of *everyone's* control, *all the time*—that is, in terms of the basics of what holds us together, of time and space, life and death, and things we either cannot predict or cannot avoid – human existence itself is fundamentally wild. The earth may be capable of sustaining human life *without* wilderness. Plantations and farmlands sufficiently rich might do the trick. But significant plantations may have to be free, in such a scenario, from excess logging in order to sustain the necessary life-support functions. Once established, however, what would be the sense in human beings *remaining* in control of their structure? The fact is that if allowed, with appropriate safeguards from a complete die-out, to return to a state of wildness, might not such reserves become *more self-sustaining*? Does not our existence depend on nature out of our control within us and outside of us? As a fundamental condition for human existence, it seems unlikely that it is even possible for us to *rid ourselves* of the concept *belonging* both to those environments crucial for our survival and to the very *facts* of our existence – wilderness, or at least, wildness. If we keep chasing the pristine, impossible wilderness as the holy essence of nature-in-itself, then those who cannot see it are justified in doing what they like with those environments we seek to protect, since they can see that what we seek *only exists for us*. But unless we can properly discern the relationship between the wildness within ourselves, our cities and towns, and how we behave within, outside of, and towards wilderness environments, we will avoid neither the ludicrous reifications involved in the received wilderness idea, nor the tragedy of the final destruction of the world's last wilderness areas, but only the potential for renewal and transformation.

It is crucial that when we talk about and make decisions about wilderness, we understand the difference between these two concepts, reject the first in favour of the second, and suggest ways we might ensure and promote this crucial conceptual reorientation in future thought and decision making. In order to make these steps, however, it will be necessary to enquire into what we mean by *nature*. Only by getting a clear idea of what we mean by nature, and the kind of relationship we have with it, can we then understand what it means for nature to be out of our control. Specifically, we must enquire into the what it is in the experience of the places we identify as wilderness that seems to give nature itself such an elusive and contradictory quality, and what it is in the perceptions of nature we already bring to wilderness that gives rise to the confusions of the Received Wilderness Idea. By clarifying the significance of nature and the human-nature relationship, we clarify just what it is that can be wild for us.

6.

THE PROBLEM OF NATURE

This thesis argues that the so-called Received Wilderness Idea constitutes an idealization of nature that is self-contradictory, reified and projected onto real wilderness environments. To help distinguish the received wilderness idea from our alternative conception, it is worth enquiring into what it is within the *experience* of the *reality* of wilderness environments as I am defining them that so frequently seems to then inspire the *fantasy* of the received wilderness idea. Intrinsic to such experiences for adherents of the received idea is the way it contrasts with experiences of human built or modified environments and human identity within them. Because of this, it is also necessary to enquire at the same time into how such experiences are *inhibited* or *prevented* by the forms of life in such human environments.

What is at issue is the problem of nature—its meaning and reality or non-reality as something that is not simply generated from human activity. If we are to define wilderness as natural environments out of human control, we need to know what we mean by nature and natural. At the same time, if we are to present it as a viable alternative to the Received Wilderness Idea, we need to be able to identify what it is in the actual experience of wilderness that can lead us to conceptualize nature in a self-contradictory way. The key questions are a) What is it about nature or the concept of nature that elicits such confusions, that makes its existence

so *questionable* in the first place? b) How does this questionable quality of nature arise in the context of the experience of wilderness and non-wilderness environments, such that it leads to the confusions of the received wilderness idea? and c) How might we conceive of nature in a way that leads away from such confusions and towards the concept of wilderness as nature out of human control?

a) The Question of Nature

Nature as Phusis

The word nature derives from the Latin *nātūra*, meaning “birth, constitution, character, the genitals, the creative power governing the world, the physical world, the natural course of things, naturalness in art” (*OED* 2012), and this itself derives from the Greek concept of *phusis* (φύσις). According to Gerard Naddaf, *phusis* “is derived from the verb *phuō-phuomai*” where *phuō* means “to grow, to produce, to bring forth, to beget” and *phuomai*, similarly, “to grow, to spring up, to come into being, to grow on, to attach to” (2005, p.12). The suffix *-sis* in ancient Greek denotes an action noun and its result, which Benveniste describes as “the abstract notion of the process conceived as an objective realization . . . established as accomplished from the fact that it is objective” (in *ibid*, p.11). *Phusis* therefore ought to have originally meant “the objective realization of a thing’s growth or process of coming into being”.

In book 10 of the *Odyssey*, Hermes gives Odysseus a special plant medicine to prevent him from being turned into a pig by Circe. He pulls the plant from the ground and reveals its *phusis* to Odysseus—it is described as having a black root and a white flower, of being called *molū* by the Gods, and as being hard to dig (*ibid*, p.13). What is revealed is how the plant is manifest, but also, how it *will* be manifest in combating Circe’s own potion. The *phusis* of

molū is not simply that it is a plant that grows from a seed into a structure with black roots and white flowers—what it is and does in itself, but what it is and does in relation to other things. It acts as an antidote to Circe’s potion, and neutralizes its magic, and in showing Odysseus its *phusis*, Hermes shows what those black roots and white flowers can *do* even at the point where their form has been entirely disintegrated by being prepared and ingested. As such, it is not merely its form, but also, its *effect* on other things—the causal capacity, power, contained within its form, that only through the form’s dissolution, ultimately fulfils its *action*.

φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ

This well known text is attributed to Heraclitus of Ephesus by Themistius [*Or.* 5, p. 69 D.], and is now known generally as fragment DK B 123 (following Diels and Krantz). It transliterates as *phusis kruptesthai philei*, and translates as

Nature loves to hide.

(in Sandwell, 1996 p. 234).

Nature loves to hide. What is meant here? According to Pierre Hadot, the word *philei* does not mean love in the sense of a feeling, but rather a “natural or habitual tendency, or a process that occurs frequently”, citing other examples from Heraclitus (“‘The wind ‘loves’ [is accustomed] to blow’”) and Democritus (“‘Thanks to these exercises [the efforts at learning reading and music] respect ‘loves’ to develop [is habitually developed]’”) (2006. p.7). We might say, “it is in the nature of the wind to blow”, also, and mean the same thing. We might then translate the phrase as “it is in the nature of the nature of each thing to hide”, with the first nature meaning the *general* nature. *Kruptesthai* means to hide, but also, to bury, says Hadot: “‘Calypso,’ the famous nymph who detained Odysseus, is ‘she who hides’ that is, the goddess of death”, citing Hyppocrates (ibid, p.9). Elsewhere in Heraclitus, he notes, however,

it has the meaning “to hide from knowledge”, giving Heraclitus’ reference to Apollo at Delphi: ““His discourse neither states nor hides, but it *indicates*”” (ibid, p.8). It is in the (general) nature of the nature of each thing to bury itself, hide itself from being comprehended.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to give a full account of the interpretative and translational possibilities of what Heraclitus means by *phusis*, since the 139 fragments quoting or paraphrasing his work all belong, according to Diogenes Laërtius, to a single volume entitled “On Nature” (*Peri phuseos*), divided into three sections on the Universe, Politics, and Theology (in Kirk & Raven, 1957, p.184). It seems that they *all* would seem to concern nature in the sense of the nature of each thing *in terms of* the nature of the Universe, the nature of Politics, and the nature of the Divine. Such a holistic inference of the nature of *all* things in the nature of *each* thing does indeed seem to emerge in Heraclitus. But within this is something extremely subtle and elusive, that at the same time, has an ultimately decisive, determining power. “The thunderbolt of heavenly fire pilots all things” ([DK B64, from Hippolytus, *Ref. haer.* ix. 10.] Crowe, 1996, pp.101-2), write Heraclitus. David Myatt translates this as “All beings are guided by Lightning” (2012). The *phusis* of each and of all things is in the immediacy of the effect and power of its action, which we see in the raw as the lightning bolt. But the lightning bolt not only *reveals*, it can also blind, and in revealing, it stands out against the darkness it also defines, from which it comes, which it can never reveal. The very ground of its illumination is darkness itself.

Nowhere does Heraclitus use the term *phusis* to mean, directly, the growth and origin of the universe as such, but speaks of the *phusis*, as we have seen, of *each* thing. In fragment DK B55, from Hippolytus (*Ref. haer.* ix. 9, 10), he says, according to Crowe’s translation: “Gaining learning [*mathesis*] from what we see and hear: this I do prefer” (ibid, p.97). At the same time, his focus on the *unity* of all things is made plain in the following fragment, DK B50, from Hippolytus (*Ref. haer.* ix. 9): “Listening not to me but to the argument [*logos*], it is wise to agree rather that all things are one” (ibid, p.101). In enquiring into the *phusis* of each

thing, we can discern how it is generated from this unity, establishing its very difference from other things by completing the action and consequences of its existence, and thus exhausting and ending it, defining its difference and limit. *Only* in the differences, can the unity be found. Yet most are unable to see this: “They fail to recognise how things can diverge while being brought together; it is a harmony that changes back, like that of the bow and the lyre” (DK B51, also from the same passage in Hippolytus, *ibid*, p.98). DK B72, from Marcus Aurelius [IV, 46] elaborates on this ignorance: “They are at odds with what they have most continuous involvement” (*ibid*). At what they have most continuous involvement with is this: “The bow has the name *bios*, life; its work is death” ([DK B48, from scholia of the *Iliad*] *ibid*, p.102). In the temporality of each thing, *including* one’s own existence, is its coming to be, its form, function, and passing away *in relation to* everything else. In the differences of these relations, in each *phusis*, is revealed *what* unifies all—the difference maker. But it is in the nature of the nature of each thing to *not* be revealed.

Heraclitus has since classical times been labelled obscure, “the dark philosopher”, and as the very first Ancient Greek writer on the nature of things, the original subject of philosophy, *phusis*, we might be tempted to either write him off as a poet or mystic, or trivialize his claims by reducing them to the proto-scientific idea that the nature of things takes a lot of investigation. But can we honestly say that today, the nature of things is so much clearer to us? Scientifically speaking, of course we can. But this raises the question—is there anything about the nature of things that science leaves unanswered and cannot answer, but that is still true? The most obvious answer is that science can tell us about the general nature of things and the general nature of each kind of thing, but it cannot tell us about how things are exactly for us in our experience of them, in which they are so much more. A naturalistic (in the sense of scientistic) reply to this would be, “yes, but this *extra* ‘how things are for us in our experience’ is simply a subjective experience caused *directly* by *measurable* physical factors in the environment and body—especially the brain—and can be reduced to those terms”. But the counter-reply to this, is simply, “yes, *but* isn’t the *cause* of something different from the thing itself?

When I speak of what it means for me to sit here and be writing this thesis, of what this computer means to me, of what this room, this house, my marriage, this whole experience means to me, it would be absurd to say that there is any *scientific*, general physical truth about the world being meant by me here, even though these truths are also entailed in my meaning. At the same time, it would be equally absurd to say that there is *no* truth to the meaning of these things and this experience to me. And would it not be monstrous, if *I* were to deny truth to the meaning of *another person's* experience and the significance of the things in it for them? The same kinds of things will feature between what is true for each of two people's experience of things, although in no ultimately predictable way, and at the same time, each is guaranteed to be different in its individuality. Without recognizing *both* such generalities *and* such differences, it is impossible to either live ethically and therefore respectfully of each other's similarities and differences, or even make sense of the world in terms relevant to other human beings.

When Heraclitus referred to the nature of things, he did not merely refer to the kinds of forms of things discernible through the senses, nor did he just mean the kinds of effects they have on other things discernible through the senses. He *did* mean the hidden harmony and unity in the oppositional differences of all things, but he meant this in terms also of the *psuche*, or human soul. *Psuche* (or *psyche*), in Homer, refers to "the 'breath of life' (and also . . . an individualized 'ghost' that lives on in an attenuated fashion after death) that escapes, normally, from the mouth of the dying hero" (Peters, 1967, pp.166-7). In the *Odyssey*, the *psuche* of Achilles is but a shadow in Hades of his living self. In Heraclitus it is the soul of divine reason that is simultaneously the breath, and the unfathomable nature of each human being and nature itself, as can be observed in the following fragments:

According to Heraclitus we become intelligent [*noeroi*] by drawing in this divine reason [logos] through breathing, and forgetful when asleep, but we regain our senses when we wake up again. For in sleep, when the channels of perception are shut, our mind is sundered from its kinship with the surrounding, and breathing is the only point of attachment to be preserved, like a kind of root; being sundered, our mind casts off its former power of memory. But in the

waking state it again peeps out through the channels of perception as though through a kind of window, and meeting with the surrounding it puts on its power of reason

(DK22 A16 from Sextus Empiricus [237] in Kirk & Raven, 1957, p.207)

And also, “You would not find out the boundaries of soul, even by travelling along every path: so deep a measure does it have” (DK B45, in *ibid*, p. 205 [235]). Nature loves to hide in the immediacy of the presence of each thing for us, for it is change—the birth, growth, death and action of each thing—but “In change is rest” ([DK B84, from Plotinus, *Enn.* iv. 8, p. 468] Patrick, 1889).

Contemporary Conceptions of Nature

When we speak in contemporary terms of nature, there are at least three quite different things we might mean. Firstly, nature can mean the universe itself and each thing in it including ourselves. It is the object of the sciences known through the senses and our customary ways of discerning its sensible properties. But nature also means everything that is *not* human, and everything that is *not* artificial, that is, *made* or even *modified* by human beings. A house may be made of wood, and the wood considered a natural material, but the wood is not in its natural state, and therefore, is natural, but no longer *nature*, but merely a natural part of the artificial. And finally, a third meaning of nature is simply what we mean we speak of the nature of anything—not only what it is and what it is like, but as with the original meaning of the Greek *phusis*, what the entire implications of its coming to be, the changes that might occur for it in its existence, the limits of its existence and what ultimately *happens* to it, and its ultimate effect on other things in its happening—the roots and the flower and the potion and freedom.

In recent times, the concept of nature has proved problematic. For example, Timothy Morton (2007) and Slavoj Žižek (2007) have both put forth arguments against the very idea of nature. In *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* Morton attempts to

deconstruct romantic ideas of nature inherited from art and literature. “[N]ature no longer exists in any meaningful sense except as nostalgia”, he writes, “or in the temporarily useful local language of pleas and petitions . . . We have a general feeling of . . . malaise and create nostalgic visions of Hobbit-like worlds to inhabit” (in Dodds, 2011, p.107). Žižek, following Morton, critiques the idea of nature as the balanced, stable ground of our existence which we have disrupted through our activity:

There is . . . no Nature *qua* balanced order of self-reproduction whose homeostasis is disturbed, thrown off the rails, by the imbalanced human interventions . . . what we need is ecology without nature: the ultimate obstacle to protecting nature is the very notion of nature we rely on.
(in *ibid*, p. 105)

Moreton and Žižek play on confusions and ambiguities between and within the different conceptions of nature I have articulated, but in focusing simply on the concept of nature as a balance and ground of our existence, Žižek ignores all the science that views *nature itself* as chaotic, and the suggestion as far back as in Heraclitus that there might not be any way we can conceptualize nature *as* ground of our existence. Nevertheless, and more importantly, this does expose that the central paradox revealed by Heraclitus in that in speaking of nature *qua arche*, the *phusis* of *all* things, as a nature that *loves to hide* and constantly evades definitive conceptualization, we might never be able to say what we mean when we speak of nature, even though we are attempting to speak of everything. These kinds of confusions in concepts of nature have been exposed and critiqued most clearly in recent times by Steven Vogel.

Steven Vogel on the Problem of Nature

In ‘Environmental Philosophy After the End of Nature’, Steven Vogel argues for what he terms “postnaturalism in environmental philosophy: for *environmental philosophy without nature*” (2002, p.23). He uses as his starting point Bill McKibben’s argument in *The End of*

Nature (1989): “We have changed the atmosphere, and thus we are changing the weather,” writes McKibben. ‘By changing the weather, we make every spot on earth man-made and artificial. We have deprived nature of its independence, and that is fatal to its meaning. Nature’s independence *is* its meaning; without it there is nothing but us”’ (in *ibid*, p.24). It is worth noting here that what McKibben means by nature—environments *independent* of human influence—is exactly what has been meant by most definitions of wilderness dealt with in this thesis. For McKibben, effectively, nature=wilderness—and in the strict, “Received” sense of pristine and primordial, absolutely free from human habitation and modification as stated in “Purity” definitions of wilderness, and advocated by philosophers like Holmes Rolston. Insofar as the word nature is used in this sense, the problem with wilderness is actually the problem with nature, *per se*. Vogel summarizes this nicely: “There is no wilderness, and in that sense no nature, left” (*ibid*, p.27).

The equating of nature with the non-existent idealization that is the so-called Received Wilderness Idea is one of Vogel’s reasons for arguing against the validity of a concept of nature for environmental philosophy, because in this sense, there is no longer any such thing. A mistake McKibben makes, however, is to speak of nature as though the primary meaning of the term is *non-human* environments in the purest possible sense, when in fact, as we have seen, it might just as well mean the artificial world in a simple, scientific definition. For Vogel, however, it is not just this purist idea of non-human nature that needs to be abandoned, but *any* idea of nature.

For Vogel, the problem with nature isn’t simply that there is no longer such a thing, but that the concept itself is fundamentally equivocal and confusing, as it seems to mean two quite contradictory things at once. On the one hand, environmental philosophers encourage us to realize that we are *a part of nature*, but on the other, that nature is everything that is *not human or human created*. Vogel explains the difference in the following way:

On the one hand, the term *nature* can mean everything in the physical world, which is to say everything subject to physical/chemical/biological processes; the contrast term to *natural* in

this sense is *supernatural*, meaning that which somehow escapes those processes. But, on the other hand, *natural* can also mean that which occurs without any human intervention, and here the contrast term isn't *supernatural* but *artificial*. (Someone with a taste for natural foods or natural fibers isn't someone who doesn't like his or her food or clothing to have a supernatural origin—it's someone who wants those things to have been produced with a minimum of human intervention.) (ibid, p.26)

Whilst both senses of nature make perfect sense in themselves, argues Vogel, in much environmental philosophy

the anti-anthropocentric assertion that we humans (a) are part of nature and (b) ought not to interfere with it (in McKibben's terms, ought not to "end" it) seems to equivocate between them. . . . The problem is that neither meaning allows us to distinguish between those human actions that "violate" nature and those that are in some way in "harmony" with it: either we violate it *all the time* or violations of it are *logically impossible*. (ibid, pp.26-7)

The rationale for realizing our unity with nature is that nature is *everything*, but if nature is everything, then we cannot destroy it. Yet the very same people arguing in this sense for realizing our unity with nature are also trying to *protect it*, because at the moment, we are *destroying* it. Furthermore, this seems to imply that *any* human action or creation stands in distinction to the natural, and effectively destroys any potential for nature by replacing it with the human. *All* human action destroys nature. According to Vogel,

the concept oscillates back and forth between at least two strongly evocative but mutually exclusive meanings, and to get an environmental theory out of it seems to require disingenuously trading on the ambiguity between them, or at least to pose such a danger of doing so that we would likely be better off simply avoiding the concept altogether. (ibid, p.29)

For Vogel, since there is no such thing as nature in the sense of wilderness, but at the same time, there is *still* an environmental crisis caused by certain kinds of environmentally destructive behaviours, one danger with *lamenting* the end of nature is a sense of resignation that ignores the real problems at hand.

The problem with referring to nature as the object of science, according to Vogel, is that this presupposes that there is some way in which we encounter the world unmediated by social practices, when scientific practices are precisely such mediating practices. In this, he follows the work of philosophers of science such as Latour (1987), Hacking (1983) and Rouse (1987) in arguing that “science is above all a matter of practice—that the laboratory is a *laboratory*, as Rouse puts it—and that the entities it studies therefore have to be viewed again in a certain sense as constructed ones” (ibid, p.31). “[E]ven *that* nature”, argues Vogel, “the nature described by biology and chemistry, is something to which we have access only through the practical and socially organized activity of scientists, so that even the supposed “substrate” requires transformative social practices in order to show up, and in this sense is no *ultimate* foundation either” (ibid, p.32). The problem with this critique of nature as object of science, however, is that it assumes that what is meant is nature as *foundation* of the sciences in some way not already evident in the subject matter of individual sciences, or as some kind of metaphysical essence of being itself. Yet in everyday and scientific usage, all nature means is the general case of things—what things are and how they work—and no metaphysical assumption whatever is made. Fundamental to the scientific and empirical perspectives is that we can never know nature in some ultimate way outside of what we observe and our customary ways of making sense of things. Most scientists are extremely happy to tell us this. And if we are clear that this is what we mean when we are talking about nature in this way, then what is the problem?

Ultimately, argues Vogel, the problem with nature is an epistemological one, because “nature can’t tell us how to act unless we first have a way of figuring out what nature is and what it’s saying – a way, that is, that gets to nature in itself and not to nature as interpreted in some social/historical context or other. But there is no such way; we have no access to nature in

itself, and never will. In fact, the concept makes no sense” (ibid, p.34). The trouble with applying this thinking to the concept of nature as object of science, however, is that in this general sense nature means nothing more than, if you like, “the set of all things and possibilities”. This entails that to have access to nature in itself would be a very extraordinary thing indeed—one achievable only by a supreme being, a God with the capital G. All that is meant in this sense of nature is that nature is *just* things, and real worldly possibilities, and therefore something we always have partial access to, as all this access is access to things and possibilities. This is how human existence can be conceived of naturalistically, without commitment to any idea of an “in itself” besides what there is in this world. Effectively, nature in this sense just means “World”, or “Universe”—but in the sense of *how* they work as well as *what* they are.

For Vogel, all concepts of nature imply some kind of epistemological given or foundation, or a metaphysical origin or *arche*. Such conceptions, argues Vogel, are simply incompatible with the critical approaches that characterize contemporary philosophy:

Poststructuralism, for example, has made us rightly suspicious of any appeals to an “origin” or “foundation” or “immediacy” underlying the linguistic or social processes of mediation within which we find ourselves enmeshed. From Heidegger’s critique of ontotheology through to Foucault’s genealogies, Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatics, Derrida’s notion of *différance*, and so forth, it has been marked by a strong antifoundationalism that rejects the very idea of a substrate on which and out of which social and linguistic processes develop. The deconstructive imperative that this suspicion engenders is an imperative to uncover, within everything that appears to be given, immediate, foundational—in a word, “natural”—the hidden processes of construction and mediation that produce that appearance. Such a deconstructive imperative inevitably moves towards what elsewhere I have called the “critique of nature,” for nature more than anything else serves, especially in a secular age, as the origin of everything that is—the *ultimate* foundation—and so if there is no ultimate foundation, there is no nature. (ibid, pp.29-30)

From a scientific naturalistic perspective, this is a straw-man fallacy that does us the disservice of doing away with the word we most comfortably use to describe the general case of what there is for us in our world and how it works that science enquires into (hence the title of the world's most cited interdisciplinary scientific journal, *Nature*). Even throughout the history of philosophy, as we find beginning in Heraclitus, the very concept of *archē* tends always to be treated as an antinomy defining the limits of thought itself, that cannot itself stretch beyond the limits of thought as such, and certainly cannot be found within the world. Vogel's argument might still apply, however, to critiques of concepts of nature used in environmental philosophy.

The problem for Vogel is that so much environmental philosophy appeals directly to nature—that we should have respect for nature, for example, and its intrinsic value, beyond our anthropocentric claims—and that nature ought, therefore, in some sense or other, guide our actions, form the very basis of an environmental philosophy. The contradiction inherent in equivocating between the two concepts of nature that guide arguments for recognizing our unity with nature at the same time as recognizing and protecting nature as the *opposite* of what is human, reflects an even deeper conceptual incoherence. Vogel effectively critiques the very idea that we have a “direct experience” of nature—the very idea that underpins the value of wilderness for so many, as reflected in the work of Shepard, Oelschlaeger, Abram, Turner, and Snyder (as discussed in chapters One and Three), to name a few.

“The deep problem for a naturalistic environmental theory remains the problem of the naturalistic fallacy”, argues Vogel “—which is to say, the problem of how it could ever be possible to read off from nature a set of ethical maxims for human action” (ibid). “Nature always appears to us mediated through language, concepts, world views, and personal and social histories that are particular and contingent; it never appears nor could it appear as it is ‘in itself,’ even if we could make sense out of *that* dangerous philosophical concept”, he argues

But then the appeal to nature as a source external to human thought and experience that is supposed to guide that thought and experience turns out to be impossible and even incoherent as such: when we say that such and such a policy is right because that's obviously what nature requires, we forget that the "obviousness" with which nature appears to speak to us is itself socially and historically mediated, and hence not quite so obvious after all. When the naturalist thinker persists, arguing that although, of course, when we *talk* about nature we do so in categories drenched in contingent history and sociality, still nonetheless behind that talk lies a "direct experience" of nature which itself can't be talked about but nonetheless must be immediate and true, we hear (as so often in these discussions) what Derrida calls the moment of deferral, as each failed attempt to get to the ultimate foundation produces yet another claim that it's just around the next bend. *No* experience is immediate; *all* experience only becomes possible on the basis of prior history, culture, thought—and on the basis, too, of prior human transformations of those landscapes we call "natural." (ibid, p.30).

A problem with Vogel's argument here is that he confuses the immediacy of experience with the idea of grounding metaphysics, any theory of how things ultimately are, within immediate experience. This is a crucial error. What is critiqued in Hegel as well as in Derrida, for example, is the possibility of the being present of some person in time allowing them to have a knowledge that comes directly from what is being experienced for the senses and the mind in that moment. Knowledge is never "just here" or "just there"—it has no location. But such critiques do not *deny* that there is such a thing as immediate experience, of having a sense of now at a particular time and in a particular place that reflects one's conscious *existence* in time—that would be absurd. If there were no such thing as the immediacy of experience, grammatical tenses in language—the difference between "I do," "I did" and "I will"—just wouldn't make sense. Rather, both argue, in different ways, that knowledge itself is never immediate, never given in the immediacy of experience, for in its mediations, the immediacy of its moment is always deferred. What is immediate in our experience is always mediated by our concept of it. Whatever is written or said or thought of immediate experience is obviously not the same as immediate experience, but rather such a mediation of it that cannot be located within it. In an important sense, mediation itself *is* immediate, for we cannot locate anything outside it. This is why Hegel said "substance is subject", and Derrida "*Il n'y a pas de hors-*

texte". This is fundamental to the temporality of human existence for itself, which is nothing if not intentionality.

Vogel describes his approach as a social constructionist one, where "*Construction* must . . . be understood literally, as referring to the physical practices of transformation that can always be discerned to have been at work in the enviroing world we inhabit", rather than just conceptually, as "discursive formations or paradigms or social imaginaries" (ibid, p.33). His justification for such an approach is that "it is preferable to recognize the social origin of one's practices and ideas than falsely to believe that they derive from mysterious extra-social forces, whether these be the forces of God or of custom or of nature" (ibid, p.35). Against the charge that such a social constructionist environmental philosophy entails a form of anthropocentric idealism that denies the reality of nature in the sense of denying the reality of a world utterly external to, other than the human, Vogel argues that

The moment of realness and resistance, of "otherness," so often appealed to in critiques of social constructionism is in fact a characteristic of practice—it is just that which distinguishes practice from theory. A postnaturalist environmental theory certainly does not deny that moment of otherness and reality; what it does do, though, is to resist the temptation to hypostatize that moment and call it "nature." (ibid, p.37)

If Vogel is asserting that there is no such thing as immediate experience, however, what exactly does he mean by this moment of realness, of otherness that is *practice, action*? The immediacy of experience as mediation is what keeps knowledge an open possibility that in never exhausted. There is always something more, something else, something other to what is known, already assumed in the possibility of knowledge. As such, the immediacy of our experience as mediation is what keeps us making inferences about how things are—what keeps us guessing. The immediacy of experience is that it is always *in* mediation. And mediation itself is a practice, an action, that we cannot help but find ourselves in. But unless we are to fall into idealism, in each case, there must be *something* that is being mediated, responded to, transformed—and what is this if not our being in the world, and *all that we encounter in it*? The immediacy of mediation in experience always entails and reaches for

something beyond itself, in everything—there is always more. Does not the world keep telling us that we do not know the whole story, that we are wrong and uncertain about so many things? Does it not reveal itself in our thoughts and practices to be something that both contains them and us, and is at the same time beyond them and us, irreducible to them? Rather than being something immediate or something entirely constructed by our mediating practices with the world, is this not the world itself and the things within it, *including ourselves* beyond the immediacy of experience and its mediations, as its limiting factors? Rather than some definitively describable substratum, or some paradoxical emptiness or nothing, do we not mediate by imagining what our concepts can never fully grasp, and therefore remain conscious to the possibilities of knowledge? Is not this *limitation* something immediate for our experience? Nature loves to hide, and has manage to hide itself from Vogel very well.

The importance of Vogel's critique in the context of this thesis and this chapter is that it shows us *two* critical ways in which the so-called Received Wilderness Idea stems from a conceptual confusion about nature. The first is that it tends to be understood from the paradoxical position that nature is both that which we are not and which has not been modified by us, which any human action upon destroys, which we must save from these actions, *and* that which we belong to, which we *cannot help but act upon*, and cannot destroy or save. But how might such a confusion arise in the first place? How does non-human nature get mixed up with the nature that is all things? After all, Vogel tells us that the two concepts make perfect sense in themselves, when properly distinguished. But the problem with Vogel's view is that he does not allow us to equate what is beyond our conceptual grasp at any moment in the world and its non-human made environments and their features with nature in itself, as it is in each thing. But we cannot help but imagine this, and without this imagining, the act of coming to know something isn't even possible. But what if one kind of environment allowed us to see this, and another didn't, because its mediating practices denied the existence of anything beyond them, and in fact also were in the process of *destroying* the first kind of environment, replacing it with themselves and their kind of environment?

The second way in which Vogel's critique helps illuminate the nature of the Received Wilderness Idea is that it shows in its failure to grasp the immediacy of our experience of nature as that which is always mediated for and by us, its insistence that there is *only* mediation and nothing immediate. If wilderness environments somehow reveal this immediacy of experience of nature as mediated—that is, if we can sense that we are amidst a being that our own modes of being encounter only within their own mediative limits, but that is beyond these—and human dominated environments obscure this with their mediative feedback, then it makes sense that we might make the mistake of reifying this awareness experienced in wilderness environments in the form of these environments themselves, as the exclusive source of pure, pristine, primordial nature, immediate for human experience yet somehow simultaneously unmediated by human action and thought. The wildness of human existence, starved of self knowledge through the din of its own feedback, projects itself on to the environment where it is quieted by meeting its maker.

b) The Problem of Nature as the Problem of the Received Wilderness Idea

In the Received Wilderness Idea, wilderness environments are defined as the *place* of pure, pristine, primordial nature, existing in ontological contrast to artificial human or human modified environments, where nature in this sense—nature *in itself*—does not exist. But in this thesis, I am arguing that there really is a thing called wilderness, it's just that it is not this. People only tend to get passionate about a false idea of a real thing when they have some experience of that thing, and often, the more intense the experience, the more passionately the false idea is entrenched. But we need not go far to see what kind of experience of wilderness might be connecting with this false idea and triggering this passion, for in chapter Three we found that wilderness, according to many of its proponents from Thoreau to Turner, seems to have the potential to trigger a profound experience of the sacred and sublime, and with it, a radical sense of freedom and potential. Critics of the Received Wilderness Idea like William Cronon and John Brinckerhoff Jackson have also related it directly to an idea or experience of the sublime.

It is worth recalling some of the different ways in which the sublime has been conceptualized that might relate to this experience. Firstly, there is Burke who sees the sublime directly in the forces and dimensions of nature as something that gives us an aesthetic thrill, an enjoyable terror beholding something which can overwhelm us but won't, whilst Kant sees it as something within our subjectivity that these forces and dimensions only reminded us of—its ability to think of something greater than its own limits when confronted with them. For Schopenhauer, this idealism remains, but the sublime can be experienced in the face of real danger and death, the very experience of being as what Heidegger called “a running forward into death” that allowed one to identify with being itself. Julian Young, in his analysis of Schopenhauer's view, puts forth what he calls Heidegger's magical realism as a better formulation of what is truly sublime in the self-presencing and self-concealing of Being itself, in Heidegger's concept of *Ereignis* which is the *ekstasis* – “transport and enchantment” experienced within the apprehension of involvement in being, in the being of some phenomenon arising. Within the possibility of experiencing awareness of this, for Heidegger, is also the essence of human freedom, and its manifestation as the presencing of place.

We recall that *ekstasis* is the term used by Longinus, in his book on the sublime power of nature and certain works of art to affect us that triggered interest in the subject in its 17th century translation. Thoreau, in his love of the wild, gives us exquisite descriptions of its particular details such as the patterns in the melting ice on the bank of the lake, and at the same time tell us that sublime wildness is what makes the works of Shakespeare great, gives them their genius, echoing Goethe. For Iris Murdoch, it is love, which she defines as the act of imagining the unutterable particularity of each other and nature that is sublime, and that gives Shakespeare's work its genius. And we recall that for Kant, genius is the free play of the imagination with its intuitions unbound by, transcending any concept, whereby “nature” gives the rule to art (where nature is in reality the transcendental ideal of our own subjectivity). Finally, this was related back to the interpretations of Bataille, Benjamin and Smith of the Lascaux painting known as *Scene of a Dead Man*, where it was posited that the human/wild nature encounter, even as the human being is in the act of seizing power over the wild through sympathetic magic, is also a scene in which the human is sacrificial. This is

revealed in a way that still strikes us in the immediacy of its image, that human identity and existence itself is still defined in terms of its sympathy with and difference from the particularity of the wild other. The *place* of the cave and its art, as with the rock art for Jack Turner, both conceals and reveals the sublime place of being wild other.

It is also worth recalling what related possibilities the experience of wilderness has been identified with by some of its proponents. We found in chapter one that the contemporary experience of wilderness has been directly related to speculations as to what a Palaeolithic experience of wilderness might have been like, and linked also to anthropological accounts of more recent indigenous communities. For Oelschlaeger, in the experience of wilderness is an experience of nature as a reconnection with the feminine, a nurturing within the cycle of life and death, which he speculates constituted the Magna Mater mythologies of Palaeolithic wilderness experience. For he, Duerr, Abram and Shepard, this also represents a radically different experience of time as a cyclic unfoldment of identity in the differences of *place* and the wild other beyond human life that establishes a human experience of wild being beyond any fixed rational conceptualizations. For Abram, radicalizing the late phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, this involves the sensuous embodiment of the landscape itself as animate, intentional, the realization that it is the earth itself that speaks and breathes through us *ecstatically*, intelligently establishing the wildness of time, place, body, horizon. Only in the direct embodied experience of wild nature, argues Abram, can the fullest potential of human existence and freedom be realized by embodying the subtle, elusive, ecstatically wild intelligence around us that constitutes us and that we cohabit with. Everything that surrounds us has the power to transport and enchant us, but what has come to dominate is the spell the written word has over us, and the associated forms of life and their own magic that make us forget this spell. For Abram and all of these thinkers, the experience of wild nature stands in contrast to the experience of modern industrial civilization, which traps us in falsely fixed concepts and behaviours that alienate us from our true wild existence and the wild other, and leads us on a nihilistic and unconscious path of environmental and self-destruction.

The Origin of the Received Wilderness Idea from a Heideggerian Perspective

Critiques of technological modernity are extremely common in environmental thought (for example Leiss, 1972; Merchant 1980; Plumwood 1993; Smith 2005), but some of its most penetrating critiques occurred prior to the full emergence of this intellectual, cultural and political movement that identifies itself as “environmental”. One already mentioned in chapter Three was that of Heidegger, who we find Jeff Malpas interpreting as showing us that the modes of being in technological modernity obscure the presencing of place, and therefore Being. We have already seen that Julian Young interprets Heidegger as relating such an experience to that of the sublime as an oceanic transportation and enchantment into this self-concealing and self-revealing of Being, and Heidegger himself identifies the possibility of this as the essence of human freedom (2002, p.205). In his 1939 essay on the concept of *phusis* in Aristotle’s *Physics*, Heidegger also argues that in Ancient Greek thought—first and foremost in Heraclitus, *phusis* which we now translate as nature, actually meant Being in precisely his sense of its self-presencing and self-concealing. He translates the fragment of Heraclitus (DK B 123), *phusis kruptesthai philei* which we translated as “nature loves to hide” as “being loves to hide itself”. He gives the following interpretation:

Self-hiding belongs to the predilection [*Vor-liebe*] of being; i.e. it belongs to that wherein being has secured its essence. . . . Only what is in its very essence *unconceals and must unconceal itself*, can love to conceal itself. Only what is unconcealing can be concealing. . . . Being is the self-concealing revealing, φύσις in the original sense. . . . Unhiddenness is called ἀ-λήθεια. Truth, as we translate this word, is of the origin, i.e., it is essentially not a characteristic of human knowing and asserting, and still less is it a mere value or an “idea” that human beings (although they really do not know why) are supposed to strive to realize. Rather, truth as self-revealing belongs to being itself. Φύσις is ἀ-λήθεια, unconcealing, and therefore χρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ. (ibid, pp.229-230)

For Heidegger, traditional interpretations of *phusis* in Aristotle have falsely conceptualized it in ways which fail to adequately distinguish it from a mode of being Aristotle does indeed distinguish it from—that of *technē*, the knowhow of what things are appropriate for as finished, *made* objects, rather than realizing the disclosure of being within *phusis* is prior to relations of being “appropriate-for” finished works. *Phusis* is the “movedness” (*kinesis*) within the appearance, that is, the self-presencing of original, transformative being in things in their changes and rest, the stability of which is also a form of change, as it appears to us already in the language of things (*logos, legein*), wherein word and being are one. The problem with contemporary conceptions of nature and contemporary modes of being as such, is that they fail to see that being in its essence does not equate with “stuff” that exists as a substratum of relations of being appropriate for the making of a multiplicity of equally instrumental forms and the predicable possibility of their relations. The truth of being is to be found in its original resting in the elusive changes of its appearing and self-concealing in things *for* being qua human beings (*Dasein*, the being of beings for whom being is an issue). This is intelligible through the pre-predicative involvements of its being intelligible *for* predication—the immediacy of being’s self-mediation, prior to subject-object predication. But as we have seen, the thinking of nature *qua* being is the possibility for the presencing of *place*, a sublime *ekstasis*, a “transport and enchantment” into this, and is the possibility that interdependently defines the essence of human freedom. According to Heidegger, the modes of being of modern technological rationality annihilate these possibilities. For Heidegger, the problem of nature is that we see it as the object of science and the mere form of the unmade and the made and their possible trajectories and effects, rather than the actual being of things as it occurs for us. It is no *archē* prior to our practices of the mediation of what is, but the immediacy of this mediation itself, *prior* to and establishing this sense of “our” and “what is” as the self-presencing and self-concealing of being to itself. It therefore escapes Vogel’s charge of nature being a reified other, a reified *archē* outside of language, as it remains other to itself in its *arche within* language: *phusis kruptesthai philei*.

In *The Question Concerning Technology* ([1954] 2007), Heidegger describes human history in terms of the actions of human bringing-forth (*poiēsis*) of the essence of things from the self-concealment of their being into presencing. This entails *technē*, which in the original

Greek sense is to be understood, argues Heidegger, as the knowledge, the skill of bringing forth what was concealed as merely possibility in things, in works by craftsmen and artists and even philosophers, rather than simply the skill of the *making* of them as such. Modern technology is a mode of revealing, he argues, but it does not bring forth *qua poiēsis* in this way, but is a challenging (*Herausfordern*) which “puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy which can be extracted and stored as such” (p.320). It is a “setting-upon, in the sense of a challenging-forth” (ibid, p.321) of the energy of nature that has as its chief characteristic a “Regulating and securing” of it that puts it into a state of “standing-reserve” (*Bestand*) where in this standing by the thing in question “no longer stands over against us as an object” (ibid, p.322). This challenging is an enframing (*Ge-stell*) of all things into standing-reserve. Yet we ourselves are challenged to do this, ordered to do this by this ordering power of technology, such that we *too* belong in the standing-reserve, are enframed. Heidegger gives these examples: “The current talk about human resources, about the supply of patients for a clinic . . . The forester who measures the felled timber in the woods and who to all appearances walks the forest path in the same way his grandfather did is today ordered by the industry that produces commercial woods, whether he knows it or not” (ibid, p.323).

Enframing and *poiēsis* are both modes of *destining*, putting things on their way to revealing, and in this is the essence of human freedom, not in the will or causality of human willing, he argues again. Within technology is the possibility for freedom, but also the greatest danger. Technology springs from the instinctual tendency of human beings to reveal and appropriate the nature of things: “When man, in his way, from within unconcealment reveals that which presences, he merely responds to the call of unconcealment, even when he contradicts it” (ibid, p.324), he argues, “Thus when man, investigating, observing, pursues nature as an area of his own conceiving, he has already been claimed by a way of revealing that challenges him to approach nature as an object of research, until even the object disappears into the objectlessness of standing-reserve” (ibid). The danger is that although “man” is threatened to become standing-reserve in being ordered into this ordering by the narrowness of its process,

man, precisely as one so threatened, exalts himself and postures as lord of the earth. In this way the illusion comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: it seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself. . . . *In truth, however, precisely nowhere does man today any longer encounter himself, i.e., his essence.* Man stands so decisively in subservience to on the challenging-forth of enframing that he does not grasp enframing as a claim, that he fails to see himself as the one spoken to, and hence also fails in every way to hear in what respect he ek-sists, in terms of his essence, in a realm where he is addressed, so that he *can never* encounter only himself. . . . Above all, enframing conceals that revealing which, in the sense of *poiēsis*, lets what presences come forth into appearance. (ibid, p.332)

The saving power within this danger, however, argues Heidegger, is the possibility that we may heed this tendency of technology as part of our own essence to order us into such a state of ignorance, where true cannot be known. We might actually begin to grasp the unfolding of technology in this process, rather than being beguiled by the technological as an instrument to master, and look to that more primordial form of bringing forth in *poiēsis*, that is the mystery of the essence of art that was found in the Greek world and

was called simply *technē*. It was a simple, manifold revealing. It was pious, *promos*, i.e., yielding to the holding sway and the safekeeping of truth.

The arts were not derived from the artistic. Artworks were not enjoyed aesthetically. Art was not a sector of cultural activity.

What was art—perhaps only for that brief but magnificent age? Why did art bear the modest name *technē*? Because it was a revealing that brought forth and made present, and therefore belonged within *poiēsis*. It was finally that revealing which holds complete sway in all the fine arts, in poetry, and in everything poetical that obtained *poiēsis* as its proper name. (ibid, p.339)

There is a very real sense in which, according to Heidegger, the essence of technology as a compulsion within us to enframe everything in standing-reserve that ends up enframing us within it too and in its very mode of revealing, conceals everything, makes impossible the freedom in bringing things forth on their way of presencing and concealment into the poetic,

the only way, according to Heidegger, we can experience truth or freedom. It conceals the possibilities of all places, all things, all human beings, nature itself. Like Vogel, Heidegger is deeply concerned with our ignorance and lack of responsibility for the acts that shape our world. Only by being mindful of what we are doing with the technological view of the world and what it is doing to us from within, can we creatively bring forth the “transporting and enchanting” possibilities of nature, and our own freedom, he argues. But these practices occur, for the most part, in the physical spaces that have this technological activity as their dominant shaping feature. Is it any wonder, then, that the illusion arises that only in nature outside of these spaces—*wild* nature, wilderness—does being in its original form of self-presencing and self-concealing, *phusis*, unappropriated, exist at all? And is it not obscured again entirely from view, except for those who remain aware of the power of technology over them, and express what they have experienced poetically, in the only way they can?

The Received Wilderness Idea via Karl Marx's Critique of Idealism

Another critique of modern industrial society that preceded the development of environmental thought proper is that of Karl Marx. For Marx, the idealism of Kant, Hegel, and philosophy in general is idealism precisely because it is incapable of realizing its ideals. Philosophy effectively plays the same kind of role as religion—it creates an ideal, edifying vision of how things *could* be as a way of dealing with what is intolerable and intractable in what is. The contradiction between the ideal and the immediate is not sublated in the form of a society with a division of labour based around the ownership of private property and the needs of colonial expansion. Contrary to what Hegel argues, in the symbolic individualism of a constitutional monarchy at war with other states, individual human beings have not reached their fullest potential or realize the possibilities of their freedom through self-sacrifice. The ethical represents what ought to be, not what is, and thus remains impotent. All idealizations of how things are, all positing of something infinite that transcends *what is lacking* in the immediacy of sense and thought, are projections of the still unrealized possibility for human freedom in response to the intolerable conditions that still restrain it. Such conditions are

rooted simultaneously in the human relationship with nature and in human relationships with one another.

For Marx in the *Grundrisse*, the capitalist mode of production came about through a change in the way human beings relate to their natural environments. He argues that private landownership “by the one . . . implies lack of ownership by others” (Marx & Engels, *CW*, vol.37, p.798, in Foster *et al*, 2010, p.283) and represents “the historical dissolution of . . . naturally arisen communism” (1973, p.882, in *ibid*), and equates with “*dissolution* of the relation to the earth—land and soil—as natural conditions of production—to which he [the human being] relates as to his own inorganic being”(1973, p.497, in *ibid*); “the negative of the situation in which the working individual relates to land and soil, to the earth as his own” (1973, pp.498-9, in *ibid*). This process “tears the children of the earth from the breast on which they were raised, and thus transforms labour on the soil itself, which appears by its nature as the direct wellspring of subsistence, into a mediated source of subsistence, a source purely dependent on social relations” (1973, pp.498-9, in *ibid*). In ultimate value terms, Marx explains that “In bourgeois economics . . . this appears as a complete emptying-out . . . universal objectification *as total alienation*, and the tearing-down of all limited, one-sided aims as sacrifice of the human end-in-itself to an entirely external end” (1973, p.488, in *ibid*, p.284).

For Marx, the immediacy of sensuous experience *is* the reality of nature. One of Marx’s earliest writings is his dissertation on Epicurus. In it, he writes “Human sensuousness, . . . is . . . embodied time, the existing reflection of the world in itself”, and “In hearing nature hears itself, in smelling it smells itself, in seeing it sees itself” (in *ibid*, p.227). Since, under conditions of private property, it is one’s own immediate sensuous experience in naturally belonging to *nature itself* that becomes annihilated, through an uprooting of one’s *place* within it, then the tendency to idealize in response to these intolerable conditions must be a tendency to posit an ideal but now unfulfilled and unrecognisable reality of nature and belonging to it that both recalls an ideal past, and posits an as yet unrealized overthrowing of all the conditions that prevent it. And what do we have in the idea of wilderness as a

posthistoric primitivism? At the same time, as it is the fundamental experience of human existence itself, as a natural being, that is alienated from itself in such conditions, freedom from such conditions is idealized as the human end-in-itself that is the fulfilment of human possibilities and self realization *in* nature. What is idealized in nature is also idealized in the potential for human freedom and self-realization, against the contradicting reality of human enslavement and alienation from self and nature. Wilderness thus also becomes the pure scene for an idealization of the possibility of human freedom—but necessarily with no association whatever from the human home, human world, and human thoughts that constitute its contradiction in the realities of our enslavement.

“Private property made us so stupid”, argues Marx, “than an object is only ours when we have it, when it exists for us as capital or when it is directly eaten, drunk, work, inhabited, etc., in short utilized in some way”, thereby replacing “all the physical and intellectual senses” with “the simple alienation of all these senses; the sense of having” (*Capital III*, 1959, p.245 in Fischer & Marek, 1970). However it is not just individual human existence that is alienated from itself and nature under capitalism, for Marx, but human beings who are fundamentally alienated from their interdependent relationship with one another in individual and collective human *action* in nature. Idealizations projecting beyond such conditions are therefore not only idealizations of nature and individual human freedom, but social, *utopian* idealizations. We do not belong to things, to nature, to each other or even to ourselves, because the only values we can see are either *use* or exchange values. Instrumental rationality becomes the totality of the world, such that we become alienated subjects and objects unable to establish the reality of our immediate sensuous or cognitive experience. It is in utopian visions that an idealized nature outside of the realm of human misery becomes our teacher.

The Received Wilderness Idea—of pure nature-in-itself as uninhabited and unmodified by human beings, a sacred place which human being can only visit and protect from their own destructive impulses, is the ideal place where we can see that we have lost our way, and be relieved from all the burdens associated with civilization. But to say this is not to trivialize it,

for these burdens are *real* burdens, even if many of the adherents of the received wilderness idea *do* belong to particularly privileged social classes. Sometimes the guilt of the privileged seeks to atone itself in the noblest and most humbling of causes. At the same time, if we take seriously the problems raised by Heidegger and Marx about our ways of being in modern industrial societies—which *do* turn everything into commodities and reduce everything to its mere exchange value, and do alienate people from the direct experience of things and each other by the imperative to *consume* and sell one's labour and time on the marketplace, make one's *own* value ultimately only that of *exchange*—and which *do* order and enframe things and ourselves as merely for the exchangeable possibilities of their technical utility as “standing-reserve”—then we have every reason to see how a reality that gives us sublime experiences outside of these societies might be idealized once we are back within them as the *sole* source of access to true reality, true nature, precisely with the idealized form that whitewashes them of any human (all too human) involvement. It could just be that in some respects, despite all the wondrous advantages and possibilities offered by technology and capitalism, and even the possibility for genuinely poetic and sublime experiences within them, things have become so bad that we cannot bear the thought of ourselves anymore, and despise all things human. This would make our idealizations of wild nature as devoid of humans (and yet the impossibly endangered saving power) beckon to us all the more evocatively, seductively, and convincingly.

c) From the Received Wilderness Idea to Nature Out of Control

For Heidegger, there lies a possibility to escape the denial of truth and the being of self, others and nature in modern technology's essence of *enframing* that lies within our own tendencies towards appropriating and dominating nature for our own ends. It begins with simply being mindful of what is happening in this, as a mode of revealing and obscuring, and somehow, in this possibility, the alternative possibility of a freedom in *poiēsis* as “that which conceals in a way that opens to light, in whose clearing shimmers the veil that hides the essential occurrence of all truth and let the veil appear as what veils” (ibid, p.330). Pierre

Hadot, in *The Veil of Isis*—an entire book devoted to interpreting Heraclitus' *phusis kruptesthai philei*, describes his view of its interpretative transformations through history:

we have seen how Heraclitus' three little words meant successively that all that lives tends to die; that nature is hard to know; that it wraps itself in sensible forms and myths; and that it hides occult virtues within it; but also that Being is originally in a state of contraction and non-unfolding; and finally, with Heidegger, that Being itself unveils as it veils itself.
(2006, p.315)

Friedrich Nietzsche makes his own allusion to the Veil of Isis in *The Gay Science*:

one will hardly find us again on the paths of those Egyptian youth who make temples unsafe at night, embrace statues, and want by all means to unveil, uncover, and put into a bright light whatever is kept concealed for good reason. No, we have grown sick of this bad taste, this will to truth, to 'truth at any price', this youthful madness in the love of truth: we are too experienced, too serious, too jovial, too burned, too deep for that. ... We no longer believe that truth remains truth when one pulls off the veil; we have lived too much to believe this. Today we consider it a matter of decency not to wish to see everything naked, to be present everywhere, to understand and 'know' everything. 'Is it true that God is everywhere?' a little girl asked her mother; 'I find that indecent!' – a hint for philosophers! one should have more respect for the *bashfulness* with which nature has hidden behind riddles and iridescent uncertainties. Perhaps truth is a woman who has grounds for not showing her grounds? Perhaps her name is – to speak Greek – *Baubo*? (2008, p.8)

There are two “veiled” references in this paragraph Nietzsche is making that the editors of this edition of *The Gay Science* have noted: the first is to the veil of Isis. According to Plutarch, in a temple in Sais in Egypt, was a veiled statue of Isis with the inscription “‘I am everything that is, was, and will be, and no mortal has <ever> lifted my veil’” (ibid, n.5). Schiller wrote a poem ('Das Verschleierte Bild zu Sais'), notes Nietzsche, of an Egyptian youth who was especially eager to know the truth, broke into the temple at night and raised the veil, but who was unable to communicate what he had seen and died as a result. Novalis,

he also notes, wrote two different versions: in one the youth leaves his lover to find the truth, only to find her fall into his arms when he lifts the veil, and in the other, when he lifts the veil, he finds himself (ibid). The second reference is to the witch Baubo from Greek mythology: “When the goddess Demeter was grieving for the abduction of her daughter by Hades, god of the underworld, the witch Baubo made her laugh again for the first time by lifting her skirts and exposing herself” (ibid, n.6). Nietzsche’s point seems to be that truth simply does not remain truth “once we have pulled off the veil”. When we seek knowledge of *everything*—ultimate truth – we cannot find it. Yet to dwell on this, or persist despite this, reveals nothing but the absurdity of self delusion in the face of unconscious bodily needs. Rather, the philosopher reborn as artist has “more respect for the *bashfulness* with which nature has hidden behind riddles and iridescent uncertainties”. This is the nature of this “second innocence”—a relinquishing of the need to know everything, to know “what lies beneath”.

The view in Heidegger of freedom being defined by the possibility of allowing a concealing that itself reveals in one’s own acts of bringing forth, *poiēsis*, as opposed to the endless exposure of enframing things in standing-reserve that blinds us to truth and being, is what Hadot calls the Orphic attitude to nature as opposed to the Promethean, the attitude of respect towards nature and existence as a sublime mystery that holds and reveals its own secrets, and the attitude of the wilful mechanization and domination of nature, exemplified in the attitude of Francis Bacon, whom Hadot writes “declared that Nature unveils her secrets only under the torture of experimentation” (2006, p. 35). This attitude bears a significant resemblance to that of Jack Turner, who we recall draws on Benjamin’s concept of the aura of the work of art and argues the need for its presencing to have its own discrete and sacred place. He does this to describe not only the value and experience of wilderness, but of human art created in a state of relative harmony with it, in the example of the Native American rock art he once unexpectedly beheld around a twist of rocky canyon in the wilderness. Turner argues that only by preserving the possibility of and *actually experiencing* this absolutely *intimate* kind of encounter with wild nature in the presence of its place can we truly know what is wrong with its removal from our lives, and have the inner power to act to prevent it. The enframing even in the artistic sense of photography still in Turner’s words, *abstracts* from it. Only in the

direct encounter can its truth emerge, for Turner, away from the civilization that enframes. But it is not Turner's *experience* that reveals wild nature *qua poiēsis*, but his *prose*. Turner does, however, appreciate that the *experience* of wilderness is exactly what allows him to do something about the fact that it is being ignored and destroyed, by poetically and philosophically *expressing* precisely its nature as both intimate revelation and concealment. For Heidegger, however, the desired possibility is not to abandon the human and human-modified sites where the challenge of enframing to human beings and nature gathers in order to gather an experience of *phusis* outside of them, to then be transformed into their *poiēsis* back within these sites, as Turner suggests and practices, but to enact *poiēsis* by remaining within the system of technology and becoming mindful of how it challenges and compels to enframe and obscures being... somehow. This possible saving power may not be enough to permanently transform the relentlessness of technology's enframing and obscuring of Being into this *poiēsis*, but it might save the being of beings from it in some way, nevertheless. This is Heidegger's simple hope.

For Marx, the problem of modern industrial society is what he characterized in his earlier writings as the alienation stemming from the division of labour and private property, and later described in terms of a system that reifies genuine socially human productive relations between one another and nature into the mere objects of nature in trade on the basis of their exchange value as commodities for the accumulation of capital. The only remedy is action that will overthrow the status quo and establish a more egalitarian order based in the solidarity of associated producers, rather than private ownership. But the possibilities for such action are conditioned by the particular historical stage at which the society has reached—if it has not reach a sufficient point of crisis of self-contradiction between the self-awareness and demands of its opposing classes, no such struggle can erupt to full blown revolution or reform. In countries with the most authoritarian systems, such a conflict is bound to be violent, whereas in more liberal and democratic places, Marx believed the transition might be a little smoother. Thus far things have not worked out how he anticipated. Again, however, what is important is that in Marx, as within Heidegger, possible solutions to the problems posed must come from within the industrial society itself, not from some retreat to or indeed,

appeal to wild nature. But we have already seen that the projective idealism of the Received Wilderness Idea has already divorced itself from social realities it has such an aversion to that it is incapable of dealing with them on their own terms, because its singular focus is on these idealized regions, and the fact that our human ways are considered so rotten that we must look away from them and turn to nature as teacher.

Another way in which both Heidegger and Marx differ from the thinking inherent in the Received Wilderness Idea is that they see the problem of technology and capitalism, from their different perspectives, as one not simply arising from the failure of human beings to relate to nature, but as a natural emergence within human being, and for Heidegger, being itself. In a sense, *nature* is just as much to blame for these problems as human beings are, because they arise from human tendencies to attempt to appropriate and dominate nature and one another which are ultimately out of the control of any individual or group of individuals. For both Heidegger and Marx, nature insofar as what there is, is not a what there is in terms of objects of the sciences, but something that comes to be for human existence, *within*, *through*, and by *transforming* what human existence comes to be for itself. In a certain sense Marx simply wants us to complete the process of the domination of nature so that we can look after our physical needs easily enough to be able to relate equally and freely to one another and express ourselves through creative appropriations of nature. For Heidegger, it is about being more aware of our compulsion to attempt to dominate nature, and to realize that this process itself is actually *out of our control*, for as quoted above, he argues that man “exalts himself and postures as lord of the earth” such that “the illusion comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct”, whilst in fact “Man stands so decisively in subservience to on the challenging-forth of enframing” that “he” can’t even see it, or see that through it, the true of being, others, nature, and even his own existence is totally obscured from “him”.

In some ways, Heidegger’s presentation of Being abstracts and idealizes it whilst at the same time claiming equivocally that it *only* is the appearing and concealing of what is in things for conscious beings, and nothing besides. However, he does stress the importance of the *action*

of *poiēsis* in this for the essence of human freedom to express itself, and for the truth of things to be revealed to human beings. His *lack* of focus on the importance of relationships between human beings and *with* a nature that already stands as other to us, together with his lack of focus on the possibilities of *politically* transformative action or the kind of creative *praxis* that entails the transformation of *technē* via *poiēsis* still leaves his work open to the charge of impotent wishful idealism Marx is concerned to tell us is not enough. On the other hand, Marx's mistake seems to be that on the one hand he speaks of how human relationships, labour and the human experience of nature need to be more than an experience of the "having" of objects, and more than an experience of their mere *use* value, and yet on the other his entire diagnosis, predictions, and suggestions for action all seem to be so thoroughly mired in these kinds of instrumental enframings and their ideology (in fact, he argues for a return to the *prioritization* of use value). As Marx himself argues, thought beyond such ideological modes, in the fact of its material contradiction must remain mere idealizations. But from a Heideggerian perspective, this idealized instrumental materialism still treats nature and human beings as objects of the sciences, and so still obscures the very truth of authentic relationships Marx wishes to speak in terms of. Marx would need to relinquish the need he argues we have to master and control nature to the degree that equality, freedom and creative self expression and fulfilment are possible, a central argument of his. On the other hand, Heidegger, in belonging to a certain elite class with the leisure time to philosophize and poeticize as he pleases, can be charged with claiming universality to his esoteric narcissism. We need not abandon what is true in each thinker, however, truths which we have seen are not entirely incompatible, and not entirely unrelated to the kinds of situations that give rise to the idealism of the Received Wilderness Idea. They both show us possible ways out of this predicament from within that focus on becoming aware of the degrees to which we live under illusions of control over nature and ourselves, when in fact nature and ourselves within it remain all the more out of our control the more we believe these illusions.

Ecofeminist critiques of modern industrial civilization tend also to be critiques of patriarchy and the entire *history* of civilization. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to give them

any kind of adequate treatment, they contribute an essential element that has been mostly overlooked in the critiques examined so far, but which itself is one of the most significant streams of contemporary environmental and social, political and economic thought. What they reveal, however, is that throughout history, human attempts at the exploitation, devaluation and subjugation of nature have gone hand in hand with the exploitation, devaluation and subjugation of women to such a degree that women have been viewed as part of devalued nature, rather than as proper subjects in their own right. Susan Griffin (1978), Carolyn Merchant (1980), Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (1993), Val Plumwood (1993), and Ariel Salleh (1997), amongst many others, have all delivered powerful critiques along these lines, from different perspectives. From the perspective of this chapter, their arguments offer us important antidotes to the assumptions of universality in the focus on “Man” as the subject of philosophy and history, as “the one” of “destining”, the grand narrative, who must either complete the domination of or relinquish the illusion of control over nature we find in Heidegger and Marx. As such, they are also an antidote to the very problems they are attempting to address, for as Marx so rightly argues, the problem is the degree to which the ordering of our social relations makes us see each other only as objects of ownership, exchange or use. Within the male-female relationship they expose a profound power asymmetry rooted in our responses to the sexual differences of our own bodies, and the way each person is already located in a history of such relations that places them in a relationship to the practices that establish these asymmetries in a way that is to a significant extent beyond their control. Such divisions are at the same time based around the division of labour and therefore the kinds of mediating relationships each of us is already expected to have with the human and natural worlds. It is always an open question how much of this is out of our control, as it is an open question how much of our current social, economic and environmental predicaments are so, and how much each person’s life is out of their control.

Ecofeminist critiques also bring to our awareness tendencies within certain ideas of nature and wilderness to idealize the female and feminine and identify it with an idealized nature. In Oelschlaeger’s idea of the Palaeolithic wilderness, he not only idealizes Palaeolithic and to some extent contemporary indigenous peoples (along with Abram and Shepard), but also women and the feminine as intrinsic to wild nature, the missing source of our connection to

nurturing and the wisdom of the cycles of nature, of birth, life and death. The very modes of modern industrial societies and historical societies in general which have and do devalue and at the same time exploit and control female experience, sexuality, the female body, the experience of pregnancy and breastfeeding, and female labour, thought, independence, solidarity, creativity, and identity, are also the ones in reaction to which we develop the tendency to *idealize* women and the feminine. At the same time, too much focus on images like the cave art at Lascaux gives an impression of a human identity formed entirely in the figure of the male hunter/magician and his appropriative/sympathetic acts and sacrifice, forgetting that extraordinary and mysterious wealth of Palaeolithic art found in the diverse multiplicity of female or sexually ambiguous figurines found by archaeologists known as “Venus figurines”, from the obese to the literally stick figured. It is perhaps Iris Murdoch’s view of the sublime as the love of the unutterable particularity of the other in the act of imagining it that comes closest to coming to grips with that which evades the appropriative nature of our categories and recognizes the realities of difference. But even Murdoch idealizes, for in all this love fuelled imagining and imaginative loving, we perhaps idealize one another to Shakespearean proportions, and indeed experience something quite obviously sublime. Perhaps it is worth asking what, instead, might be the value of just being there with someone, in all the ordinary subtlety and intimacy that might entail, and perhaps it is worth asking the same about our experience of ourselves and the nature of the existence and world we inhabit.

Control, as the potential for *self*-control, can have positive connotations, just as in the case of exploitation and subjugation, it can have negative connotations. Self-control can mean *freedom* from the control of others, from other humans. At the same time, to control oneself in the sense of exploitation and subjugation is also negative. But there is a sense of self-control and even possibly, to some degree control of others and nature, that is not in the mode of exploitation and subjugation or devaluation. Rather, it is the mindful and skilful regulatory behaviour that allows freedom from the extremes of dominating and subjugating control on the one hand, and the negative wildness of being out of control for oneself or others that itself

enslaves and harms. But there is also a sense in which control over anything—even *self-control* in the sense of *free* will—is an illusion, a sense that we can never quite shake.

The central argument of this thesis is that only by realizing and expressing the ways in which nature is wild, out of our control *within* ourselves and our societies, can we properly understand what it means for nature to be out of our control in environments where we are not the dominant shaping factor—wilderness. At the same time, only by experiencing and attempting to grasp and express the way nature is out of our control within these environments, can we grasp the ways in which it is wild within us and in our societies. What is meant here by nature, it should be clear by now, is not only the universe and all things in it, including ourselves, in their form and relationships to other things conceived as objects. It is also the direct experiential mediations of these we find ourselves engaged in, in *all* the modes of our experience, and the fact that beyond them, it continues, irreducible to but conditioning them, even within us.

The final chapter will attempt to explore the meaning and limits of control in terms of these different ways nature and human existence within it remain *out* of our control. Rather than attempting a definitive exploration, it will be a rehearsal in asking the kinds of questions we need to ask if we are to enquire into what it means for nature to be out of our control, in and out of wilderness environments, in a way that will hopefully begins to make the nature of these environments clear to us, that does not reveal too much, but just enough to tell us something.

7.

RECOGNIZING WILDERNESS:

THE MEANING

AND

LIMITS OF CONTROL

In this chapter I will examine the different kinds of ways in which nature is or can be out of human control, I will show how this is so in both the objective and the subjective nature of human existence itself, and in the forms and development of individuals and societies. I will also show how this relates directly to our experience and understanding of environments where nature is out of our control as the dominant shaping feature—wilderness. I will explain this in terms of the difference between it and the Received Wilderness Idea, where it will be shown that an adequate awareness of the ways nature is outside of our control outside of wilderness environments might help prevent us from idealizing nature in this form, and allow us to recognize its wildness better. Such a recognition reaffirms the importance of wilderness in our understanding of the biosphere, the kinds of environments we depend on, and the kinds of qualities unique to these environments that can positively reshape human experience and human environments to be in greater harmony with these wild environments. As such, the values associated with wilderness and rationales for protecting it will be related to this awareness.

The concept of control

The word “control” originates from the medieval Latin, *contrārotulus*, where *contrā* means against, or counter and *rotulus* means roll or scroll, meaning literally, a counter-roll, which became in the French *contrerolle*. *Contrerolle* is defined in Cotgrave’s 1611 French/English Dictionary as “to control; observe, oversee, spie faults in; also, to take, and keep a copie of a roll of accounts; to play the controller any way”. A *Contrerolleur* is defined as “A Controller; observer, overseer, properly, an Officer, that takes notes, or keeps a roll, of another Officers accounts, thereby to discover him if he do amisse.” In English, control means both to check and verify and therefore regulate in this sense of scrutinizing and keeping copies of accounts to prevent unwanted or unchecked expenditures, and also to exercise power by restraining or directing the free action of some entity or phenomenon. However this second, broader meaning of control still entails an essential aspect of the first: the necessary act of observing, taking account of and verifying *what* and *where* the free entity or phenomenon is, *identifying* and *locating* it and its properties relative to one’s own capacities and abilities, in order to be *able to* restrain or direct its free action (whatever it does *before* such restraint or direction). Control is power, a power that entails and relies upon knowledge through observation.

Knowledge affords us the kind of continual, checking, directive and restraining power that constitutes control. It gives us control over nature, specifically, through our ability to harness and determine the physical world—to determine for ourselves its objects and their properties to the point where we can manipulate and control their generation, destruction, arrangements and trajectories in time and space, and the forces themselves that determine these trajectories. The domain of science, as knowledge, affords us the power to control nature that is our technology and infrastructure. At the same time, it also gives us control over ourselves, in that we are a part of nature, through, firstly, medical science, and secondly, behavioural science (which of course significantly overlaps with medical science in the medical models of clinical psychology, psychiatry, and cognitive neuroscience). There is, however, a non-scientific mode in which knowledge also gives us power to control not only our own

behaviour, but also, especially collectively, that of each other. Furthermore, this mode has been with human beings much longer than science has been. It manifests in the individual as self-awareness. Socially it manifests as that class of behavioural types we call norms, customs, values, ethics, and morals, which in some cases can take the powerfully regulative form of laws and sanctions. In its most general sense it is the forms of knowledge and power that give each society its particular structure that *may* include but is never restricted to scientific and technological practices. This mode of knowledge and power can be *accounted for* in scientific terms—specifically, at the point where the biological and behavioural sciences meet. It is, in itself, however, separate, in that its domain of discourse is not restricted to or even necessarily inclusive of such accounts, and more importantly because it *relies* on (and does its *best* to control) what is irreducibly individual in human subjectivity.

What complicates matters, however, is that scientific discourse itself, whilst restricting itself to empirical phenomenon, is always situated *within* such a broader normative structure. Its value, apart from either the purely theoretical or from medical and technological innovation and the boons they bring, is that it can establish matters of fact in objectively testable and theoretically predictable ways that the overall system of knowledge, and the individuals within it, can rely upon, and judge other claims against. There is, however, a certain extent to which scientific explanations are themselves dependent on non-scientific terms for their explanation, past mathematics and specifically theoretical terms. Science itself can bring us closer and closer to the physical facts that are the basis of such terms, and as such give us increasingly greater clarity as to their objectivity or lack thereof, but at the same time, there continues to be a sense in which scientific and non-scientific terms must finally be accounted for in these broader, everyday terms, for science to function socially, be intelligibly significant for people, and thus build upon itself in this way.

Finally, there is the question of reducibility. Ethical and aesthetic judgements certainly seem, at face value, to be irreducible to any scientific mode of explanation, perhaps because each new judgement of this kind has the potential to alter the very possibilities for expression

within these realms, and though judgements of fact, are not themselves facts, but expressions of imperative and more refined preferences. Logic and mathematics, which by definition are utterly devoid of empirical content, are also therefore irreducible to it. All things *in principle* can be explained by and *accounted for* by science—we could, for example, work out exactly how the human brain works in this way that we call logical, and with better and better degrees of observation and modelling, come up with a theory that is empirically falsifiable and demonstrable, such that logical sense and reasoning is caused by a particular brain process. And we could then account for how this particular brain process is itself accounting for the logic in this account of logic, and an account for how this particular brain process is accounting for the logic in the logic of this account of logic, and so on, *ad infinitum*. But there is absolutely *no* (and cannot be any) empirical test for this potential infinity itself. This is precisely what makes infinities factored into science problematic: for science is here relying on (in the case of quantum physics) or at least revealing a *quality* it can *never* ultimately account for. And such is true also of the most basic ethical notions, as revealed by one of the ultimate questions of Ancient Greek philosophy, and of human existence: what is (the) Good (or the best, or the ultimate form of things)? Yet everyday *behaviour* – not just ancient philosophy—is utterly guided by such questions itself, and just like the *aporiae* of (Plato’s) Socrates and Parmenides, is never satisfied with a final answer.

If what I mean by nature is the world *as a whole*, the universe itself and human existence within it, then the question of degree that defines control over it, and so defines human behaviour and conscious existence, becomes problematic. The degrees of control we, either as a species, as differentiable groups, or as individuals have over nature are most certainly finite, and so, in principle, measurable, determinable, it would seem. Yet if we ourselves are mere elements of nature, the question of free will comes into play—can we have any choice in controlling nature when it is nature that determines us? A compatibilist approach such as that of Daniel Dennett would argue this is possible because nature’s patterns and functions coincide with the range of choice available to human beings relative to the beliefs and desires that make its action, through them, intentional (see Dennett, 2004). The question of the degree of control an individual or group or the species has over nature then is a question of the extent of this coincidence. The problem is, if this really is the case, then the following

point made by Galen Strawson would also seem to hold: “One does what one does entirely because of the way one is, and one is in no way ultimately responsible for the way one is” (1994, p.17). How can we be morally responsible in terms of having genuine freedom of choice when that freedom is nothing but an environmental function of a greater process? But Strawson is arguing in ultimate terms, Dennett, relative ones, and so never the twain shall meet. What is important here is to acknowledge that control is indeed a *relative* concept, relative to different perspectives or frames of reference, even if it, or the lack of it, has an absolute determining power for how individual human lives unfold.

This question is complicated by the difference and relationships between psychological self-control, bodily self-control, and environmental control. Do we have *any* self-control, and to what degree is this so? If we seem at least to have psychological self-control, it does not necessarily mean that we have control over our bodies. Control over thought is not the same as control over action. And just because we have control over our bodies, it does not mean that we have control over our environments, or over each other. We may have psychological self-control and so attempt to choose how we will control our environments, but there is still the question of how our degree of self control affects the degree of control we have over environments, and how this relates to the degrees of control we have over our bodies and actions. Or, we may have no psychological self-control, but *still* have control over the environments we inhabit, in that we continue to determine its dominant characteristics, preventing other elements of nature from so determining them in ways that contradict this dominance. But could we still then be said to have control over our bodies?

To the degree that nature limits us, it is always out of our control. In ultimate terms, the degree to which it is *out* of our control is unquantifiable, infinite. However, to the extent that the degree nature is out of our control actually limits us, in those very limitations, it is, to some extent, quantifiable. Quantification itself is effectively the most minimal form of control, a checking of one’s shared environmental mediations, yet it entails always inferences of possibility, a questioning that entails what is beyond yet containing it as the potential

source of all answers. Nature, out of our control encroaches and shapes us as the differential changes in that vanishing point where control ceases, for each, as they occur and wreak unavoidable consequences for our existence. Control in this sense, as already noted, is necessarily a *perspectival* concept, dependent on the contexts in which it is understood, and the reference frames relative to this. Nevertheless, again, for the individual, it has an absolute determinacy. It is the way that we find the answer to be “yes” or “no”, true or false in our positing of and acting upon what is, was, or will be.

What are the most basic ways nature limits us? It limits us in at least five ways that might be of interest to us here:

1. *physically*

2. *temporally*

3. *mortally*

4. *cognitively*

&

5. in terms of *relationship* and *self-fulfilment*.

***Physically*,** nature limits us first and foremost by our bodies, their needs, the range of their abilities, and the biosphere on which we depend and what it affords us—that is, the resources we depend on for life, food, shelter, and the fulfilment of our most basic impulses. In cosmic terms, that biosphere itself and we within it are profoundly limited in the possibility of discovering and connecting with some other biosphere with similar compatibilities for human life, and totally dependent on cosmic processes and principles beyond our reach, which may or may not be predictable. In biological terms, we are also dependent on the male body for insemination and the female body for fertilization, gestation, and feeding, and dependent on

the bodies of carers in general for the first years of our lives. In fact, this physical dependence on each other never really ends. In the organization and infrastructure of our economies, we all have to work together to control the elements, other organisms such as rats, wolves, insects, and importantly, microorganisms, to ensure food supply, adequate housing, access to medical treatment for the unpredictable fortunes of our bodies, and adequate distribution of goods, for a start. Our heartbeats themselves are wild, in the sense that they grow increasingly regular only as we grow old and approach death (like our hormones). We also need to control those unpredictable and sometimes destructive parts of our behaviour, and those in each other, at every level from inner conflict and self-control to international treaties and armed conflicts.

The entire nexus – and what makes it a nexus is precisely nature’s constant immediacy as other *to* us—of human physical relations is always already oriented within the dynamic balancing act of bringing the uncontrollable under control. The limits of this control, on every physical level, from the deepest quantum level within our bodies to our shifting horizon of the cosmos and the nature of physical existence, define the degrees to which nature is out of our control, within us and external to our senses. In so doing, they determine the physical reality of each one of us, of each group of us, and of human beings as a species, and every aspect of the worlds we might inhabit. Importantly, at those limits is always to be found what is physically *at stake for us*, as against what is never *for us*.

On a physical level, determining whether we actually even *really* control our own existence or not—on the simplest level of daily movements, our thoughts and intentions, our actions—always seems to have two aspects. Of course, on the one hand, we must take responsibility for our actions, and have certain limited powers of deliberation and choice over what we do. But on another level that exists at exactly the same time, our thought just come to us, and we just do what we do, such that it is possible to observe oneself as though a character in a movie, or a marionette being guided on strings. This is the emergent, relative freedom that nature affords us, as Dennett argues, contrasting with what Strawson observes to be, simply,

the way we are, the way we cannot help but be as we are, in what we do. As Kant observed, causation is already a fundamental category we bring to all experience, such that everything we do and experience has a physical cause that precedes it. His transcendental philosophy would have it that what we are as beings within this causal determinacy has the potential to see that it ought to posit itself as free from the mere push and pull of sensibility, and posit what is causing it to do this as the divine cause and purpose of life, the universal good—and by so doing, opens up the true possibility of freedom. But even within this freedom, what is free is the positing of a universal imperative as a *self-causing* ultimate Good identified with, posited as *causing* its own positing and subsequent ethical action. Free will then, is a surrender to the Idea of a divine good as ultimate cause within oneself, a surrender of all *personal* choice, effectively. Nature, as the pattern of order we can see in things that seems to have a purpose, is *just* the recognition of this self positing in our aesthetic judgements about the world, and so *is* this divine self-positing good we can only, with the power of reason, surrender to. Freedom then, is an *abandoning* of personal self-control and control over the things before us in nature, in favour of the universal imperative that is what we see as the purpose and good of and that *is*, for us, nature.

For Heidegger, as we have seen, the Kantian situation is reversed: freedom is not a problem of causation, of having to posit an ideal and therefore universally ethical cause in the face of the senselessness of sensibility in its causally determined reactions to phenomena. Rather, human freedom is simply what allows being to presence itself and conceal itself in its presencing for thought, and is *blocked* by attempts at bringing forth this presencing that attempt to ultimately place it under control, enframed in standing-reserve. As with Kant, then, the condition of freedom is the *surrendering* of control over nature *qua* being, again along the poetic terms whereby it guides the imagination. However, rather than this being a means to realize the ethical good as transcendental causation, what is realized in this surrendered freedom—which is still an active human *transforming* of nature in poetic making that reveals *place*, no *passive* surrender—is simply the possibility of truth itself, as the action of nature *qua* being that is *both* the human being for whom it comes to presence, and the rest of being itself, as that which presences, *and* conceals itself. It is the wildness of being within and without us that, as that which transforms and conceals and reveals, is both the immediacy of

change itself, and what does not change within what is presencing, the form of movedness (*kinesis*) that resembles rest and stability. *It* establishes the very appearance of control for us, *within* our actions and the world. But it is for this reason that it is the source of the sublime, for it has that power to establish what is, that is also the power to “transport and enchant”. For Heidegger, effectively, we might say that human freedom is only realized in realizing the truth of nature *qua* being, when we stop trying to control nature *qua* being and, rather than surrendering to its wildness, work with, not against it, in all its elusive and contrasting aspects. The limits of control are no fixed traceable boundaries, but are ecstatic in that they take us out of ourselves and return us to ourselves environmentally (as also suggested by Helmuth Plessner) as the world draws them for and from our being within it, ever anew in each moment whereby being is established for us, and conceals itself from us, as simultaneously our own, and other than our own.

Temporally, we are dependent on predictable and unpredictable events as they unfold for us and the occasional indistinguishable nature of the two. We depend on the specifics of the time and place we were born and live in and where that stands in terms of the evolution of human possibilities. We depend on the time it takes to establish control over anything, including those things on which we depend on for survival and meaning, and the limited windows of opportunity that time affords us for such action, given the very nature of change in circumstance. Our existence is fleeting, and time, precious. Temporality means that although we can control certain things, from our sense of personal identity and how we behave to whether a person is allowed to take off their clothes in public or not and whether we can *travel* to the moon or not or change their gender—the degree to which anything, within or outside of our control, remains the same is always relative to the constancy of change. Anything we *control* is necessarily *impermanent* in every aspect of its relative and dependent stability. Our conscious experience itself is constantly subjected to its own fleetingly temporal nature.

Everything we are and everything we can take hold of is constantly slipping away from us. The physical necessities of our lives are temporal ones. We must eat regularly, sleep regularly, exercise regularly, and do the things we require of each other, when they are required. We set alarm clocks, get to work on time, hand in the dole form on time, pay the rent on time, meet deadlines more or less on time. We attempt to control our lives through *time management*. At the same time, we attempt to predict what will be needed of us. But societies and nature are complex and often unpredictable, and so require flexibility, experimentation, and reciprocal interaction. Put simply, we can influence the future by preparing for contingencies and opportunities, but it will always be fundamentally unpredictable, and therefore, *qua* future, out of our control. Much of our behaviour is in part directed at positively influencing our futures, as it ought, in part, to be. However, once again, compulsive attempts at control ultimately *fail*, and lead to dysfunction. Life through time is dynamic and unpredictable, and one needs to be dynamic, flexible and forward thinking to deal with its vicissitudes, survive, and thrive. And perhaps, above all, lucky. But it is hard even to modulate or anticipate one's *moods* in time, let alone the events that affect us. When the need to remain dynamic, flexible and forward thinking becomes a compulsive sense of urgency, things reveal themselves to be *obviously* out of control. We are not working with time, but against it. Yet this is precisely the kind of attitude that utterly gears and dominates contemporary global political economy, to such devastating effects.

Mortally, all our limits, including our spatial and temporal ones, are finalized. We *have to* gain control of certain aspects of nature if we or those dependent on us are to live at all, although we may live in societies automatically regulating this in a spontaneous fashion. The degree of control we have over when we will die can vary enormously in its range of predictability, which still, at the end of the day, of course, never *guarantees* anything, and whilst we may successfully control many things in order to prevent certain kinds of death, death is certain, and the nature and timing of it is still totally out of our control. Our mortality, then, gives the degrees to which nature is out of our control an absolute determinacy over the extent of our lives, and gives an inescapable urgency to *how* we control the degrees *where it affords us that we can control it*. There may not necessarily be anything given or predictable in the human response to this, but in its absolute nature it gives the

degree to which nature is out of our control absolute, in the sense of definitive *for us, significance*. This is what Heidegger, in *Being and Time* called the existential primordality of our “running-forward into death”. Again, as Schopenhauer shows us, to recognize this without fear is to experience the sublime, and as Thoreau and others reveal, the sublime is none other than the wild. Our existence is utterly defined in every moment, from beginning to end, by its wildness, where nature *qua* being is already out of our or anyone else’s control.

Cognitively, the degrees to which nature is out of our control start where our own thinking is limited in self awareness, awareness of the world, awareness of each other, and the abilities to communicate such awareness. When we contemplate our own nature, try to discover ourselves, what we are, and how this is manifesting itself consciously, no matter how much we control our minds and how deep our insight, as *conscious of* ourselves, we are always also *other than* that consciousness. In other words, the appearance of control we have over our *conscious awareness* of ourselves is strictly limited, and all the more-so in its temporality and in the dependency of our awareness on our bodies and the perspectives available to the senses in each moment. The same applies to other people, other beings, the world itself, and everything in it. Yet if we have no awareness of the limitations of our own awareness, then we cannot even have the only degree of freedom possible for us to exercise over our own awareness – the awareness of the *other, of each other, of the otherness in ourselves to our own consciousness, in the significance of each otherness*. This is the essence of awareness itself—the ability to draw distinctions, to see differences, to know relationships of things and beings to each other and to themselves *as others*.

A step into a library, or a browse through an academic journal, can be very humbling, for today, we all exist lost within a wilderness of knowledge, where we must always try to balance the value of general and more specialized knowledge, and where professionals in exactly the same field might not even be able to understand *each other*, so complex and specialized have our knowledge systems become. And yet cognitively, we crave and need *connections*, forms of synthesizing the knowledge we are exposed to. This thesis attempts to

navigate the part of that sea that runs through the channel of wilderness and come out the other side, without drowning in it, getting diverted up tangential waterways, or getting shipwrecked on its rocks.

We cannot fix our concepts, something in them always resists finality, however much assurance we assert and grasp it with. It is in the very nature of knowledge, of cognition, to be an ongoing enquiry, something never finally resolved, where what is meant by any one of us at any one time, in thought, speech or action, still remains up for grabs in how it will subsequently, as this enquiry continues, be grasped. As Heraclitus reminds us, it is within the mind itself that we find nature loves to hide most fathomlessly. The Mahayana Buddhist Pragnaparamitra Diamond Sutra ends with telling us the nature of things is like a lightning flash, a cloud, a drop of dew, a bubble in a stream, a flickering lamp, an illusion, a dream. Thought itself is wild, out of our control, and freedom can be experience only mindfully, through its self-recognition.

In terms of *relationship and self-fulfilment*, the kinds of practical utility control over ourselves, others, knowledge and physical objects affords us cannot in itself produce or convey the highest kinds of values or qualities most commonly sought in relationships or for oneself. At the same time, there are deep seated tendencies within us to merely treat not only physical objects and knowledge, but other human beings and even ourselves, as merely means to some end, whether it be pleasure, profit, or some anxiety numbing oblivion. The qualities most valued in relationships, in the world, and for ourselves tend to be ones we are fundamentally *incapable* of controlling. As co-creators and relaters, we may produce and partake in these qualities with the world and each other, for ourselves, but we can only ever produce, discover, convey, and reflect upon them, never control them. Yet empirical evidence suggests that relationship and the emotional sense of self-fulfilment are not only amongst the highest of our aspirations, but are necessary in the early stages of child development, for rudimentary cognitive development and social ability to occur. Intimate, playful human relationships are unique in that they give us a sense that they themselves are of *intrinsic*

value, and we develop, through them, a sense of the *intrinsic value* of each other, which, as Kant observed, is essential for a genuine ethical life and the freedom that affords us.

At the same time, the cultivation of this sense of value is entirely *instrumental* in such moral and cognitive development, as we each serve as means to that end, between us. In developing the awareness of the *intrinsic* value of another, one becomes aware of how one is in fact instrumental in *bestowing* this value on the other, just as the good parent does with the child, and the child, hopefully, learns to do with the parent. One of the most essentially liberating skills for any organism is the ability to navigate, and this is precisely what the sense of intrinsic value in each other, in relationship, and in ourselves does. It allows us to accurately navigate and benefit from the social, ethical realm of others in relation to ourselves with much greater freedom than those unaware of the value of others, and at the same time, is crucial to our general cognitive development, which is also impaired in those who lacked closely interactive and exploratory parental bonds in early childhood.

Our very senses of our concepts, whether of physical objects or abstract ideas, are not only context dependent, but deeply *value laden*. Relationships, ourselves, each other, and things, even are already of intrinsic value for us, and yet, at the same time, they and we are also instrumental in *creating* this value, and it is precisely in this creating, that the value is truly intrinsic, that is, belonging to us ourselves, and to the things themselves. It is through this multileveled, reciprocal, co-instrumentality that the intrinsic value and uniqueness of all things can be found to be limitless—perhaps the kind of qualitative infinity Duns Scotus posited for the individual *haecceitas* of each thing, as opposed to its mere specifically quantifiable relational properties, which in contemporary terms reveal themselves to be contextual. Since we are speaking of value, however, we need not take this in any metaphysical sense, but can take it in purely a semantic and pragmatically relational one.

When we try to control things merely instrumentally, and make them *mere* means to ends, they simply disappear. That, for example, is the difference between the value of a natural and spontaneous physical beauty in a person, and those same characteristics photographed and used to sell something—only the original biological imperatives remain, and nothing of the quality that was most highly valued, save perhaps a futile attempt to control or recapture it a resistance to this that still reveals itself in the immediacy of the image through time. It is not that this ideal of beauty sought belongs to some other, Platonic realm apart from nature, but rather that precisely this aspect of nature in human experience can be known but never captured, expressed and spontaneously created, but never controlled or manufactured according to any plan. Being so absolutely out of human control, and yet one of the ultimate ends we aspire to in nature, already belonging to things and people and ourselves within nature, we find such an ideal fundamental to and definitive of our very experience of nature, wherever it is truly significant for us. Beauty is itself sublime, and mocks our attempts to capture it.

To be self-fulfilled then, to recognize oneself as an end-in-oneself other than one's consciousness or body, and to have relationships with others, relationships that are also ends-in-themselves, that are self-fulfilling, it is necessary to abandon instrumentalism – the view that anything or anyone can exist *solely* as a means to any of these ends without also being an end-in-itself – altogether. What is required is that we grasp the reciprocal, relational nature of what we most desire, such that the value of each and all in the constantly shifting contexts and causally circular network we inhabit and embody can truly emerge for us. It thus requires multiple levels of individually contextual interaction to come into effect, but it is already, effectively, there. The shift required is actually a subtle one. Co-control (to borrow a phrase from Kevin Kelly) can only be established on a broad scale through a vast, global complex of differential relations and events. It is, effectively, a slow experimenting with all different kinds of relationships, values, and the achievements that empower them. In a sense, it is a coming to awareness of how things already happen, one capable of transforming this. But some things stand in the way.

There are a great many situations in which nature merely *appears* to be in our control, when, in fact, it is out of our control, as Heidegger argued in ‘The Question Concerning Technology’ as discussed in the previous chapter. Wherever we view *anything or anyone* solely as a means to an end, nature is out of our control in a manner of which we cannot at that time be aware. Today, this instrumentalism in ignorance of the true degree nature is out of our control is everywhere present to the extent that it seems to be leading us towards environmental and human catastrophe. Inherent in the logic of contemporary capitalism and economic activity, if it were simply removed immediately, the global economy would grind to a halt, and even worse chaos might ensue. In human life, means-ends relationships must still function, but when they function with respect for nature in each of its particulars, and other human beings, for that matter, only then can we react realistically and efficiently to the problems of our day and find solutions appropriate to the enhanced capacity for solving them this respect can give us. Until we can see the wildness within us, and the degree to which this means-ends behaviour has been out of our control—the true meaning of the concrete jungle – until we genuinely reckon with this wildness, our prospects for fulfilling lives, relationships, insights, and even survival will be extremely limited. But this is something that is spreading, and needs to keep spreading, across the networks of human cultures and economic forms, and realizing itself in diverse and contradictory ways. There is no revolutionary solution, and certainly no top down solution, but neither is it all grass roots. Rather, if it is to really change human culture and nature, it must spread through individuals, cultures, organizations, at all different levels, as it appears to be spreading. It may take a long time to happen, and we may never get there. But what is essentially ecological and cultural change, can only happen at the ecological and cultural levels, if it is not to have the devastating and ultimately counterproductive consequences of a Mao-style “cultural revolution.” The first thing that is required is a broader shift in viewpoint from one of idealizing our desires and subjective experiences after the manner of traditional metaphysics in various objects of thought and experience, to one where we can recognize these desires and experiences in their own right, relative to the reality of the relevant phenomena they have been related to, in their own right. It is, like the best philosophy, about discerning differences.

In coming to know the realities of our relationships with each other, with ourselves, and with nature and anything and everything that constitutes it, we can know something beyond the functions and therefore utility of facts for us, within them. This is the very fact that gives them no ultimate empirical point or points of reduction, and that at the same time is both the irreducibility of conscious experience to fact, *and* what is necessarily and sufficiently definitive of and determinate in empirical fact. In this, a direct experience of the real entails no *realism*, but naturalism pure and simple. It represents not just *what* things are, *what* there is, but the *way* things are, the way nature and conscious experience are one for us. This is something *already* grasped by many of those most moved by the experience of wilderness. At this point, it seems worth quoting again the following phrase from Robert Greenway, which recollects his group wilderness experiences:

We had gone out alone like heroes on grail quests in search of dramatic and important visions ... Instead, we found in tiny scale and modest simplicity *perfection all around us*. (in Roszak, 1995, p.122)

Aristotle's identification of those activities which are not *for* achieving any other outcome, but which have value just in themselves, fulfilling the purpose of their action as ends in themselves, implies that there is nothing beyond them to be sought. That is, they are the *best* possible actions. As such, they represent *perfection*, as there is nothing better that they could lead to. In such experience of wilderness as described by Greenway, the same kind of value is found in beholding the wilderness environment and each thing in it, in itself. But in this action of beholding, what is found is the value of the things themselves and the environment itself, as ends in themselves, as perfection. This perfection, Greenway finds, has a profoundly enhancing effect on the wellbeing and sociability of the participants involved. There is nothing at all wrong with this. However, it reveals something else: the extreme difficulty (or perhaps just unfamiliarity) of having such an experience of *non-wilderness* environments, of human dominated spaces, and ourselves in human dominated spaces. Furthermore, it is an experience of selective and projective idealization: the wilderness, as exotic other with just the right proportions of danger, beauty, diversity, and outright challenge, is the way the world and human experience *could* be. Yet the real challenge is to find perfection in the imperfect, to find not a divine, but a human and natural *sympatheia* both in wilderness *and* human life,

not just in their romance, their exotic and erotic and ideal ecstasies, but amidst their pity and squalor, their violence and alienation, and finally, their ordinariness. The Buddhist tradition has long known that in *mindfulness* of *all* experience, not just the good bits, the interdependent quality of mind and nature emerges in the immediacy of relationship, where the antinomy of freedom and control dissolves.

Recognizing Wilderness as Nature Out of Our Control

The idea of nature being out of our control is fundamental to *any* concept of wilderness. In the myth of the pristine and primordial wilderness, this is absolute. Nature within them, as pure nature, becomes ontologically distinct from nature touched by the realm of human activity. As the cause of all things, nature in its pure, ontologically distinct form takes on the quality of that most magical of metaphysical entities, the *archē*, the thing or principle that is the key to *everything*, the ground of being. Being absolute, nature in these environments takes on the guise of “Absolute Other”. How might the spell of the received wilderness idea be broken? The answer is really quite simple. Although being aware of the fundamental incoherence and metaphysical tendencies of the received wilderness idea can certainly help if you’re the kind of person who worries about those kinds of things, this probably won’t be enough. This is because the degrees of commitment already present in the silence of its adherents and heard by them in the echo of the wild, transcends the kind of compulsive control involved in bothering to take account of such things and decide what is logical and sensible and what is not. What really needs to be understood is how wild, that is, how out of control our human world is, and how wild and out of control we ourselves are, even in the irony of being out of control by being always compulsively *seeking* control.

We seek control, and create the illusion of control, and hide from the fact that it is so often an illusion, because this is necessary to perpetuate the compulsive economic imperative that keeps the world going. We cannot help but behave and see things in this way, thrown as we

are, in Heidegger's terms, into a totality of involvements with things that obscures the nature of being to us, how the nature of our own being cannot help but be this way. But by realizing just how wild and out of control we really are, we can see that ontologically speaking, although the co-control of wilderness elements is a (non-conscious) being out of control for each of its parts that has in its dissipative organic unity a superior spontaneously organizational capacity making for rich and robust environments, we and the wilderness are really not so different, but part of the same system, wild nature. Only this way, can we properly recognize our dependence on wild ecosystems and their importance for us. Only this way can we just allow ourselves to be out of control by remaining spontaneously open to giving and receiving without pre-determined goals, and balancing this with practical necessity, instead of compulsively seeking either control or release. This could allow our own human systems to develop along lines which emulate the spontaneous organizing richness and complexity of wild natural system precisely as we transform and innovate on them. Within this, within *human* infrastructure and community, we might start having the kind of peak experience that makes us want to keep perpetuating this mimicry and interaction with wild environments, in just how liberating we find the experience of letting go of control. Life is a wilderness, after all.

In chapter three reasons for protecting wilderness were explored. The first was the idea that protecting wilderness might be important for preserving biodiversity. This became immediately doubtful, however, when wilderness was defined as needing to have less than five people per km² and at the same time was required to be larger than 10, 000 km². But defining wilderness in terms of size, rather than simply treating its size in terms of its own significance seems a mistake. The question is, *how much* human habitation and activity (as well as, of course, what *kind* of activity) is *enough* to make that habitation and activity the dominant shaping feature of that environment? This remains an open question, and one which must be experimented with rigorously, but also, very carefully, for it is part of the nature of self-organizing ecological systems that the effects of actions in any one part can have unpredictable wider scale consequences. At the same time, concerning those areas recognized as biodiversity "hotspots" under serious threat from human activity, as it was argued in chapter Five, whilst their diversity remains, there is presumably some significant degree in

which these areas do *not* have human activity as their dominant shaping factor, though they may be inhabited and to some extent modified by this human presence. In this way, it makes sense to look to biodiversity first as a measure of wildness, rather than to look to wilderness to find biodiversity, which you won't *necessarily* find. Of course, if human beings through *controlling* an environment can *sustain* high levels of biodiversity too, then well and good—although it is generally far easier and more economical to let things take care of themselves as much as possible. The second reason for protecting wilderness examined was its value for scientific research and development, particularly in biologically diverse regions, and allowing appropriately moderate and mindful degrees of human habitation and modification in this sense was argued in chapter Five to be advantageous for developing forms of technology and industry more in harmony with the workings of these systems. In general, the more *people* can resist or be released from forms of domination, the more they can also learn to see the degrees to which our behaviour is still out of our control in a destructive way, and work collectively and individually to do something about it. Whilst top down governance has an important role to play here, grass roots activism is just as crucial, as the history of wilderness preservation has shown us.

The third reason for protecting wilderness was its capacity to generate feelings of the sublime, feelings of creative imagination that both give us artistic power and the capacity to love and sympathize with others, a profound sense of unity and embodied interaction with wild nature that unfolds senses of place, time and relationship in ways revealing the wonder of nature and the particularity of our place within it, that can be more compelling than the experiences we have in modern industrial societies. One of the advantages of having a more liberal definition of wilderness that actually resembles many of the environments around us is that we don't have so far to go to experience these things, for it has been found that the experience of intimately surrendering our sense of being to a place where nature is out of our control as its dominant shaping factor simply requires us to remove ourselves from places where modern industrial society is the dominant shaping factor. But the challenge remains for us to transform our daily practices and landscape in these modern industrial societies enough

for us to experience a similar kind of wonder, sensuous embodiment of and interaction with the nature we find here, also, in ourselves, each other, and our works.

Conclusion.

We have seen that wilderness is a term that has been used to describe natural environments that have been characterized as both potentially dangerous and places of refuge, freedom and the gathering of power, and that wildness in human beings has been seen to manifest in both positive and negative ways, and can even play a role, together with the landscape, in the formation of states. Wilderness has also become a symbol of inner transformation, sublime experience, and a place from which to renew society by developing one's individuality there.

In contemporary terms, views of wilderness alternate between the technically scientific and an extreme idealization of wild environments. It has lost both its practical historical advantages as a boundary and frontier for those seeking or evading power, and at the same time its lyrical, mythic qualities which were the music that accompanied these harsher realities, for they have gone in opposite directions, the practical becoming technical and strategic, the lyrical and mythic become the radical other that is vanishing but must not have its purity tainted, and holds the key to our freedom and survival. Wilderness becomes on the one hand a management category, on the other an esoteric utopian cult. Occupying the middle ground are unbelievers and constructivists. But somewhere in amidst this, the actual relationship human beings have with earthly environments gives rise to both the fantasies and the reality in question. The problem is there is no absolute standard, only experience and observation to guide us. But the line of wilderness is drawn between the environments of modern industrial societies, and environments which do not have human activity as their dominant shaping factor. In this sense, control is real, even if we are not in control of our controlling, or the way we control. The spaces are inhabited, the places are the shape they are, with the features they have, because every day, we work to make it so.

Protecting wilderness may be part of protecting biodiversity, in we are able to move beyond rigid and not entirely coherent definitions of wilderness that depend on some arbitrary factor like size, or whether it has retained at least 70% of its species from 500 years ago, for whether an environment is wild or not. It seems those small pockets identified as biodiversity hotspots are extremely important, and is not the thing that keeps the ones that remain alive something that has thus far resisted or been free from human domination, and is therefore wild? Recognition of wildness is seeing things that are out of control, and allowing them and that to be—recognizing what is *other*. Its value for scientific research and development, when recognized in such environments, could be immense, but only if we keep learning all the different ways it eludes our control. It is the fact that wilderness experiences open something up in those susceptible, something that cannot be closed easily, cannot be denied, that keeps opening up, but at the same time, conceals itself. It seems absurdly romantic, and indeed in absurdly romantic adventures, the kind of environment we identify as wilderness tends to feature very heavily. It is as though something unspeakable speaks to us, a true spell. It seems an end in itself. These are the places that are no place known to us, but which lead to a place that remains hidden most intimately within us. What is particular in place—the *topology* of being—makes that being somewhere, as experienced, like no *known* being anywhere in the way it places human being within itself, and itself within human being. Herein lay the wildness of being and place. The particularity of the wild place makes *topia* like *utopia*.

The spell wilderness casts can deceive so easily, make us think *this* is the sacred, pristine wild that has *escaped* most miraculously what is viewed, with *some* justification, as the utterly deadening machine of our infrastructure and debasing rules of life, that coup us up in our boxes within boxes watching boxes and only let the lucky, fit ones out for the glamour of extreme sports or the primal meditation of fishing. The rest is the concealment of nature worship in football guernseys, where every totem is still available for worship. The only thing that has escaped, and yet we seem utterly bent on destroying it! But that is just it—it represents what we have lost, what we wish we could regain—that primal freedom beyond this moribund sausage eating and teeth cleaning! But then, when society hears the wild call to protect wilderness—things go wrong, so long as we define wilderness in this way. Sometimes there is a real human cost, thanks to some literal minded bureaucrat or other combined with

opportunistic politicians who think they have sensed the public pulse and know what kind of a show to put on, even for themselves. When the spell of wilderness tells us something that is not true, human beings and biological diversity can be destroyed by the actions of governments with supposedly good intentions. All life and positive wildness *within* our infrastructure, lives, jobs and recreations is ignored or treated with embarrassment and ambivalence, whilst our negative wildness is not faced, but avoided by our escapes into the wilderness—or this *idea* of wilderness. The so-called pristine wilderness becomes a symbol of political and cultural enlightenment, something set aside because we thought even of that.

Yet whilst we want to demystify wilderness, we do not want to dewild it, nor ourselves. There is something that curves within the human being that also curves in the shape of the tree root. When we see a tree in the garden, the roots do not compel us, because all around is a world we have created and maintained, fenced off, controlled. But when we see the tree roots in the wild, they keep going, for the trees are what shape the forest, what shape this entire landscape, and with it, us. In this landscape, we realize how much we are always, already shaped by our landscape—that other domestic, industrial landscape of human trammelling. We need to connect, but we cannot. The essence of the received wilderness idea is compulsion and alienation, in reverse—all we have is the space of being present, the freedom of being both enclosed and in the open at the same time, engulfed, overwhelmed, but alive, ready for being. The wilderness is a drug, but do we want to make it our opium, or our remedy? When we speak of nature, we speak on the one hand of an assemblage of arbitrary facts and things, mathematically quantifiable things, a grid spectrum of being, to which we belong, a universal vivisection. On the other hand, we speak of something that we can't alter without destroying, something primordial, ancient, that every facet of modern human industry destroys. We abstract nature into extremes, and get confused when people tell us we are not talking about the same thing, but two different things, for we still treat them as one. Why do we treat them as one? Because *in us*, they *are* one—they are the alienation of *our* being to itself, that nevertheless keeps reconciling itself to us, making us feel comfortable. For what is it to do what comes naturally, to allow ourselves to be, to have the intimacy with ourselves that we allow what is to simply move, to open and close?

If we take for granted the political and economic realities we live within, we do indeed become like machines, like redundant machines forever exchangeable, who can only speak in machine language. But it is the wildness within us that tells us there is nothing *given* in this. The machine will not yield, and yet we insist attempting to reshape it. We know there must be something better. But perhaps one day we will learn to push and wield this machine with a little more finesse, and realize that it is controlling us as much as we are controlling it, and that the machine is, in fact, wild nature, coiled up within itself and us. And here, precisely here, in this finesse, we might find freedom.

By recognizing wild nature as the place where nature is out of our control, we can begin to recognize how this is the case everywhere, and perhaps learn to work with it, not against it. Wildness is abandon, freedom, and yet it stands robust and strong, ancient, beckoning but hiding itself, more profound than any secret. It is that hiding, and we too. The way to find that which evades all attempts at control, the way to find our wildness, is not to try to expose it, lay it out on a table, delineate it into sections. It already does that.

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