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EXPERIENCES OF WILDNESS AND VALUE

By

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Philosophers have often failed to think of concepts in terms of how they are actually experienced. Specifically, two concepts in environmental philosophy, intrinsic value and wildness, are rarely considered in terms of our experience. Rather, they are often understood as qualities of a natural place, and not qualities of our experience. This thesis first advocates the importance of understanding intrinsic value and wildness as experienced. I then argue for a radical openness in life that can help us experience both intrinsic value and wildness often, and in places we didn't expect them before. Our inability to experience these things is not indicative of their lack, it is indicative of ours.

Introduction

This paper is about the centrality of human experience and how philosophers have often failed to think of concepts in terms of how they are actually experienced. Specifically, two concepts in environmental philosophy, intrinsic value and wildness, are rarely considered in terms of our experience. Rather, they are often understood as qualities of a natural place, and not qualities of our experience. This thesis first advocates the importance of understanding intrinsic value and wildness as experienced. I then argue for a radical openness in life that can help us experience both intrinsic value and wildness often, and in places we didn't expect them before. Our inability to experience these things is not indicative of their lack, it is indicative of ours.

In chapter one of this paper I write about the importance of intrinsic value to philosophy. Intrinsic value, or the notion that something has value in and of its own right, has been central to environmental philosophy since its inception. Unresolved questions about whether, when, and how the natural environment has intrinsic value and what that means for us have obsessed many well-meaning, nature-loving philosophers.

Recently, several philosophers have claimed that arguments about intrinsic value have acted more as a hindrance to actually preventing environmental degradation than as a helpful philosophical underpinning, and that these discussions have stopped being useful (McShane, 910 - 911). One result of this is the argument that the protection of nature should be based wholly on instrumental, anthropocentric values.

I argue that an experience of intrinsic value, as redefined by Katie McShane, is a necessary part of environmental philosophy and ethics in general. McShane argues that among

the many understandings of intrinsic value, the most useful to philosophy is one that takes intrinsic value to mean a simple claim about how we should *care* about things. She argues that we should keep intrinsic value in philosophy because intrinsically valuing is something we already and always will do. McShane argues that we experience intrinsic value through emotions and valuing attitudes. This transforms our understanding of intrinsic value from some abstract metaphysical quality in the world to something that we can actually experience.

In chapter two, I argue that wildness, too, is something that we experience. Our inability to experience wildness does not indicate its lack. Rather we have preconceived notions about where it is appropriate to find wildness. This brings to light well-established dualisms between culture and nature as well as self and non-self. I argue that though these boundaries are occasionally practical and necessary, they are overstated and harmful to our understanding of wildness.

Because of these dualisms, philosophers of wildness often champion experiences of wildness in some places but miss the wildness in other places. Because they defend wildness mostly as a quality of wilderness and natural areas, they restrict our experiences of wildness to those places. Wildness, I claim, is an always present, consistent, underlying possibility and the experience of wildness depends on the observer's ability to perceive it. I will introduce the philosophy of Gary Snyder, as it focuses on actively disassembling the dualisms that keep us separate from an experience of wildness.

In chapter three, I will discuss the implications of intrinsic value and wildness as experienced and how these experiences can inform our practice. While experiences of intrinsic value and wildness are considered experiences that demand our attention, this chapter is about

what it would mean to give this attention freely. It is about paying attention to how we already experience the world.

I bring in Tom Birch's practice of universal consideration, which proposes that a basic consideration and attention should be given to everything. I argue that Birch's universal consideration shares much with the practice of Zen Buddhism, which he implicitly and explicitly refers to. I view Zen through the lens of Snyder, who is not only a firm believer in wildness, but has been tremendously influenced by Zen and sees a connection between the two.

Zen is far from the only practice that has the capability to help us pay attention to the world and how we move through it. It is but one among many tools at our disposal for teaching that attention and cultivating it where it didn't exist before. To pay this kind of attention to our lives is not only to see intrinsic value and wildness, but it's to understand ourselves better and how we experience the world we live in.

The intrinsic value and wildness we experience in natural areas and wilderness refreshes and invigorates us. Though these places are incredibly important to preserve, we do both ourselves and our daily lives a disservice to think such experiences are restricted to those places. My ultimate goal in this thesis is to give a conceptual and practical way of living and experiencing our own daily, seemingly mundane lives in a fuller way.

Chapter 1

Since its inception in the 1970s, environmental philosophy has sought a way to explain that the natural world has intrinsic value, or value independent of instrumental, extrinsic value put on it by humans. This pursuit has resulted in years of conversation about how best to argue for the

existence of it. The inconclusive nature of the conversation has led many environmental philosophers to abandon it as a compelling reason to prevent environmental destruction.

It is not my goal in this paper to prove the existence of intrinsic value. Whether or not intrinsic value *really* exists, we tend to experience certain things as intrinsically valuable. This goes against most intrinsic value theorists, who tend to focus less on our experience of value and more on its metaphysical status or the moral implications of it.

One exception is Katie McShane. In her article “Why Environmental Ethics Shouldn’t Give Up on Intrinsic Value,” McShane differentiates four approaches to intrinsic value theory, claiming that some are more helpful to philosophy than others:

1. Views according to which claims about the intrinsic value of X are claims about the distinctive role that X should play in moral decision making.
2. Views according to which claims about the intrinsic value of X are claims about the distinctive way that it makes sense to care about X.
3. Views according to which claims about the intrinsic value of X are claims about which properties of X make it valuable.
4. Views according to which claims about the intrinsic value of X are claims about the metaphysical status of X’s value properties (McShane, 47).

She argues that the second category of intrinsic value offers the most promise specifically for environmental ethics and for ethics in general. In explaining this category, she writes that its proponents are most interested in differentiating between intrinsic and instrumental values of something (McShane, 48). According to McShane, if we experience something as intrinsically valuable versus instrumentally valuable we care about it in a different way.

McShane explains different valuing attitudes as how we experience the value of, that is care about, certain things. What she is arguing is that we do not and cannot experience intrinsic value directly as intrinsic value; she writes, “as many of the sentimentalists have pointed out, we rarely if ever just plain value things. Rather, we take some particular valuing attitude toward them - admiration, awe, respect, and so on” (McShane, 50). We experience it as a mediating

valuing attitude like an emotion through which we come to see the value of something.¹ This view has a couple of connected, immediate consequences.

First, by showing that emotions can be experiences of intrinsic value, those emotions are made more philosophically legitimate. As McShane puts this, “what we lose, then, in giving up the concept of intrinsic value, is the prospect of an ethics that can accept the structure of many of our most common valuing attitudes, rather than treating them as mere mistakes” (McShane, 54). If we say we are in love with someone, we don’t mean that we love them just when they make us dinner or when they’re there to support us, we mean that we love them for who they *are*. In other words, we love them intrinsically rather than merely instrumentally. Intrinsic value, which is usually considered something one arrives at through thinking, is also felt.

McShane’s understanding of value as experienced can give us insight into a well-documented conflict in philosophy between feminist care ethics and intrinsic value theory. In light of McShane’s understanding of intrinsic value, this split can be reconciled. To care ethicists, intrinsic valuation often comes across as a cold, unfeeling calculation that doesn’t recognize values and virtues traditionally associated with women. Among others, ecofeminist Marti Kheel writes in the introduction to her book *Nature Ethics*, “I believe that terms like ‘value’ connote an economic framework by which humans rate the rest of the natural world... I do not argue that my friends and family have intrinsic value; nor do I wish to make this argument for other-than-humans” (Kheel, 7-8). To its critics in mainstream philosophy, care ethics is perceived as not rigorous enough and relying too much on the emotions of the moral agent (Tong and Williams). Care ethics allows us to be partial to the things we care about rather than relying

¹ Throughout her article, McShane uses the word “attitude” to describe these experiences. I have opted to also use the word emotion, as it better captures some of these experiences. Attitude means one’s position, opinion, or way of being. Emotion etymologically means to be shaken up. For anyone who has been struck by an emotion like love, or as I argue, has experienced wildness, this seems appropriate.

on a universal code of ethics. But it would be absurd to argue that a person ever only relies exclusively on ethical theories *or* their emotions.

Holmes Rolston, III, one of the most notable defenders of intrinsic value, explains intrinsic value as an inalienable, metaphysical property of something independent of human perception (McShane, 49). His philosophy seems to say that it's not a matter of choice in what we care about so much as a matter of duty-driven, deontological fact. However, Rolston mentions care several times in his book *Environmental Ethics*, to the extent that he implies that experiences of intrinsic value are *why* we can care. He writes, "Places that stimulate an *experience* of the sublime warrant particular care, as that experience is infrequent in rebuilt environments" (Rolston, 305) and "If natural things have values, we cannot conceivably learn this without *experiences* by which we are let in on them. With every such sharing there comes a caring...[emphases added]" (Rolston, 28) These experiences are in fact the same as McShane's valuing attitudes. In this way Rolston corroborates McShane's point that intrinsic value must be experienced and as a result of this experience, we come to care for that person or thing. Though Rolston insists we have a duty to something because of its intrinsic value, it is only because of an experience of that value that we *can* care and *feel* that we have some duty towards something.

Among those who explicitly comment on the controversy, Christopher Preston argues that Rolston's approach is not incommensurable with a care-based approach. Rolston's philosophy relies not only on a metaphysical understanding of intrinsic value, but also the individual's relationship with something that has such a value (Preston, 253). Preston follows his students' intuitions about this relationship and comments on their dissatisfaction with this conflict, "While the students recognise a different emphasis they tend to see the two approaches as different sides of the same coin rather than incompatible moral theories. 'You could not value

something intrinsically unless you also cared about it' one student complained" (Preston, 244). This intuition may not be consistent with strict interpretations of the other types of intrinsic value McShane mentions, but it is consistent with hers.

While, as Kheel fears, some understandings of intrinsic value theory present the possibility of rating and ranking the environment and creatures in it in a way that may end up being overbearingly anthropocentric, a different understanding can alleviate this fear. What care ethics makes explicit is the role of the emotions of the moral agent, where intrinsic value theory rarely does. However, if we believe McShane's claim, and I think we should, that care is deeply entwined with what we experience as intrinsically valuable, these theories seem less combative and more complementary.

The second result of McShane's idea that intrinsic value is experienced is that it goes towards making intrinsic value more relevant to a broader public. Pragmatists have for a long time critiqued the superfluity of intrinsic value in environmental policy when, in order to protect the environment, the focus could remain on extrinsic, instrumental value. As Andrew Light argues, "the focus on somewhat abstract concepts of [intrinsic] value theory has pushed environmental ethics away from discussion of which arguments morally motivate people to embrace more supportive environmental views" (Light, 427). So according to Light, not only is intrinsic value more than we need, but it is also damaging because it does not mobilize the public to protect the environment.

However, if philosophers can accept that care and experiences of intrinsic value are linked, philosophy can relate to a public that already has the emotional capacity to care about the environment. It is here that McShane's understanding of intrinsic value becomes, if you will, instrumentally valuable. Not everyone will be well-versed in the intricacies of intrinsic value

theory, but everyone will be familiar with love or awe or any of a number of other valuing attitudes, and thus everyone will have experienced intrinsic value. Though it manifests in different ways - as McShane writes, she would not love or take care of her daughter and the *Mona Lisa* in the same way - it gives philosophers a common ground because an experience of intrinsic value is its root cause (McShane, 56). This seems to be what Light suggests as a focus “on making the kind of arguments that resonate with the moral intuitions that most people carry around with them on an everyday basis” (Light, 444). In other words, we make arguments that match most people’s experiences of value.

McShane argues for a plurality of valuing attitudes, which are familiar to us. Besides love, she argues for awe, reverence, and respect, and does not claim her list is exhaustive. This range of very different valuing attitudes gives us the opportunity to see intrinsic value through a wide variety of experiences and allows for other experiences to show us intrinsic value as well.

All the valuing attitudes that McShane names - love, awe, respect, and reverence - have the effect of decentering the observer from their self-occupied state. For example, when one arrives at the Grand Canyon, it’s a common experience to be completely awe-stricken. In that moment of looking out at something so grandiose, no one who is truly awe-stricken is thinking about getting to the hotel room. No one is thinking about the gift shop. Instead, they are completely occupied with the thing in front of them. They are valuing it directly just as it is. In a sense, this is the essence of intrinsic value; the needs and concerns of the observer are not relevant to the valuing. The experience of wildness, as I will argue below, is often the less glamorous way to experience something; it is the unexpected vertigo that comes after looking over the edge.

In this chapter I have argued that intrinsic value, as a way to approach how we experience and care about the world we live in, is still a relevant and important part of philosophy as well as something we already do. Using McShane's understanding of intrinsic value, I argued that it is consistent with feminist care ethics because it acknowledges the role our emotions and reactions have in determining what we value. It is also consistent with pragmatism because under McShane's configuration of intrinsic value, it becomes something that responds to our everyday ways of approaching ethical problems instead of some abstract notion.

I argued that what all of McShane's valuing attitudes have in common is a decentering of the observer. When something is being intrinsically valued, it is being valued for its own sake, independent of the needs or desires of the person experiencing it. Experiences of wildness are like McShane's other valuing attitudes insofar as there is a similar decentering of the human observer. Yet experiences of wildness do this both more unexpectedly and in more diverse situations, including the ones we hate to have to face. I will discuss what an experience of wildness is like and some of the barriers to our experience of wildness in our day to day lives.

Chapter 2

In the last chapter, I argued that intrinsic value, as understood as an experience we have and continue to have, remains relevant to environmental philosophy and our lives. This chapter is about wildness as an experience that we have restricted to certain places.

In this chapter, I first argue that experiences of wildness do not just occur in certain places, but can happen anywhere. Then I will discuss how philosophers of wildness often conflate experiences of wildness with wildness itself. In other words, they experience wildness in

the places they expect to find wildness. There is a preconceived notion about where wildness resides, and so any experience that happens outside of this place is already marked as not wild. Wildness, I claim, is an always present, consistent, underlying possibility and experiences of wildness depend on the observer's ability to perceive it. The focus on protecting wildness instead of cultivating our ability to experience wildness reaffirms this conflation.

I will argue that our ability to experience wildness is hindered by dualisms built into our way of thinking about what wildness is and specifically where we find it. One of the dualisms which western philosophy has, until very recently, taken for granted is the dualism between nature and culture. I will use Steven Vogel to discuss the relatively recent discussion of the social construction of nature. Nature, often considered pristine and distinct and far away from culture, is where wildness is considered to reside. Culture, within the bounds of a city, is orderly and ruled. Vogel argues against this understanding of nature and culture on the grounds that in reality we have so altered our environment that we can no longer distinguish between those parts that are affected by humans and those parts that are not.

Analogously, we make distinctions between self and non-self which keep us from experiencing our lives as wild. Even if we concede a degree of unpredictability within culture, we rarely consider our own bodies and minds as being outside of our own understanding and control. Similarly, we assume that we can exercise control over things that are not ourselves. However, as I will argue, both the boundaries between culture and nature and self and non-self are permeable and not as strict as we might want to believe.

I argue that while at times, making strong distinctions between nature and culture and self and non-self might be reasonable, these distinctions are not helpful in understanding and

experiencing wildness as pervasive. Rather, the boundaries keep us from realizing we are experiencing wildness.

Experiences of wildness are, by my definition, experiences where the world exceeds our expectations of it, temporarily disrupting any semblance of normalcy. Often this is surprising and shocking. If this definition of experiences of wildness seems general, it is because, as I will argue, experiences of wildness can happen anywhere. We typically consider experiences of wildness as happening only in a narrow range of places. Though the etymological roots of wildness may be tangled and wild themselves, they do not refer specifically to place. One meaning is to will, specifically self-will (Snyder, 11). The surprise of wildness happens when something ‘self-wills’ in a way that we were not expecting.

Consider the following situations. You are riding your bike downtown. In the split second where you look over your shoulder to see if a car is coming, you lose control of the bike and your face careens towards the pavement. This situation is not what the bike or the pavement were meant to do. Yet in this abnormal moment, you are forced to reckon with a world that you are not anticipating. Or perhaps you’re going for a hike, and you trip on a root on the trail and again your face goes careening towards a rocky surface. This also isn’t the purpose of the root or the trail. But this wildness leaps out at you and literally pulls you down to experience it. While I don’t argue that inanimate things are actually consciously self-willing, it is clear from these situations that the person involved is not successfully self-willing.

Though we tend to expect experiences of wildness walking through a forest or some other natural area, perhaps the most shocking experiences of wildness happen in the places that we consider and expect to be most tame. I have hiked many miles without having an experience with wildlife as wild as the several times I was bit by an unleashed dog running through the park

while the shocked owner looked on. Wildness is hardly something that is restricted to the quiet corners of wilderness.

Steven Vogel, a philosopher that argues that wildness is not restricted to nature, and that nature does not even exist, writes in his book *Thinking Like a Mall* specifically about the wildness of artifacts and the processes that create them. Vogel argues that the entire world, insofar as it has been so deeply affected by the actions of humans, is constructed and artifactual at this point. By that estimation, everything that exists is an artifact (Vogel, 96-97). Important for my purposes, Vogel says that this doesn't exclude anything from being wild. On the contrary, Vogel argues that everything is wild because there's always a gap between what we expect from something and what actually comes to be.

In an experience of wildness, the person expecting something is overtaken by what actually is. This is not to say that Vogel's gap disappears, but is acknowledged; we are no longer able to presume complete control once we have seen it. In that moment, our focus has completely gone away from a preoccupation with the self. The focus shifts outward and has moved to consider the thing we are having a wild experience with. These experiences of wildness, just like experiences of intrinsic value, have an element of decentering to them. Though usually we always see ourselves as the central point of our experiences - the one doing the experiencing - in our moments of total preoccupation with something else, that central point disappears. When that dog bit me as I was running through the park, I was no longer occupying myself with thoughts about doing laundry or paying bills. I came into a direct experience (in this case a confrontation) which I was unable to ignore. Yet too often, we refuse to see these as experiences of wildness. We draw lines to dictate what can be wild and what cannot.

Cities are one example of how we define and draw these boundaries. Cities are traditionally governed by laws, filled with law-abiding citizens, exclude most non-humans unless they are useful or unavoidable. The buses and businesses run on a particular schedule. Almost everyone has a job or designated place to be. The unpredictable things that happen in cities, such as muggings and people sleeping on park benches, are considered deviations from the norm. The city is an orderly place.

In writing about the conflict between the city and the wild, philosopher Martin Drenthen talks about his home country of the Netherlands, and the threat to control that migrating wolves pose: “The Netherlands is known as a country with one of the best organized and most well-ordered spatial planning in the world. Accordingly, each newly arrived species is also being met with planning, contingency plans, stakeholder meetings and legislation. Some believe that the Dutch reaction to the possible arrival of the wolf shows that the Dutch simply have lost the ability to tolerate disorderly things” (Drenthen, 329-30). The wolf here is one among many potential symbols that represent a threat to control and order. The infiltration of the city by something that symbolizes unusual wildness is met with the desire to control.

This understanding of the city, taken to its logical extremes, is the stuff of dystopian novels. Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* illustrates the perfect city built within the confines of a wall. Citizens have jobs, strict timetables (according to the narrator, D-503, when the city is finally perfect even the two hours of leisure time in the day will be occupied with something productive), and privacy only if it is given with the permission of the authorities. Smoking or drinking is an offense punishable by death. Development of a soul, conscience, or imagination is considered a disease as it makes citizens restless and unruly.

On the other side of their wall is “wild jungle.” D-503’s lover, I-330, not coincidentally shortened to “I” as opposed to “We”, breaks a hole in the wall allowing an unexpected flood of animals and greenery into the perfectly sterile city (Zamyatin, 203). Similar intrusions of wildness are also present in the later works *1984* by George Orwell and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. The novels should illustrate that in our imaginations, wildness is entangled with a kind of unrestrained freedom that means more than any legal freedoms of the city.

Since the beginning of human settlements, wildness has been cast out of the city in the minds of its inhabitants as dangerous and chaotic. But in the overwhelmingly ordered cities of these dystopian works the infiltration of wildness offers hope and highlights the problems of control and lack of genuine freedom within the state. They also show that all these dystopian thinkers conceive of wildness as something inextinguishable. Even though in all three novels the primary stimulus of rebellion is from outside the main character, it strikes a chord within him that resonates with latent doubts and inclinations toward freedom.

But this wildness does not need to be experienced as coming from the world outside of the city. Steven Vogel believes we live in a wild world both in and out of the city. It is wild because, regardless of which parts we intentionally created and which parts we did not, we have thoroughly affected the world and despite this, it continues to exceed our expectations for it. Vogel argues that it is the world *itself* that is actually, at least in part, materially constructed by humans, but this doesn’t prohibit it from being wild (Vogel, 34-36).

This also has effects on our ideas of the proper way to act in civilization. If we believe in a nature that only exists in places far away from us, and that we have a duty to protect and secure it at all costs, Vogel argues that we “have nothing to say about what happens on *this* side of the boundary (which is where by definition we actually live), leaving us curiously free to engage in

any environmental depredations we wish to undertake here. [original emphasis]" (Vogel, 13) To truly understand our causal responsibility for our world, we have to consider it all on equal ground. Protecting wildness as a component of nature out there and far away will not help us get to the roots of our environmental problems. Unlike some of the writers below, Vogel doesn't write about wildness as if it's a metaphysical quality. For Vogel, wildness is a material fact, meaning that forces in the world (such as gravity, time, etc.) work on things regardless of human beings, and for him this is wildness. However, all of the thinkers below share with Vogel an understanding of wildness as eluding human control and anticipation.

Tom Birch, in defending wildness against the control of the state, calls into question the efforts of American preservationists to set aside wilderness areas. He writes that this is an effort by the imperium to bring wildness under the realm of human control. Even though the wilderness areas are not governed by the same laws as the city, he describes them as an attempt to "bring law to the wildness" (Birch 1990, 7). "Self-determination is not permitted for nature" in these wilderness areas, which Birch sees as prisons (Birch 1990, 5). Still, Birch claims that it would be a mistake to take wildness' manifestations for wildness itself, even if means we lose sight of wildness when these manifestations are destroyed, wildness persists somewhere (Birch 1990, 9).

Birch writes that a body of power needs to maintain wildness as something to control to reify the necessity of the regulating body and the danger to the imperium if this is not accomplished: "When we see the real otherness that is there beneath the imperium's version of it, beneath all the usual categories of use and value, then we see an otherness that can never be fully described, understood or appropriated, and the entire edifice of the imperium is called into question..." (Birch 1990, 20). However if wildness cannot be contained, it is also present within

the imperium and can, as Birch describes in a later work discussed in chapter three, penetrate our experiences of wildness in the imperium.

If we are in fact all under the imperium, humans and wilderness areas alike, where does wildness hide when we lose sight of it? Even though manifestations of wildness can be exterminated, Birch says, “wildness, which contradicts any finalization in identification, is... at the heart of any *living* self or society [original emphasis]” (Birch 1990, 11). It’s hard to know what “living” means for Birch. If the efforts of the imperium to capture wildness are ultimately deceptive and illusory, it’s not actually that the capturing is harmful to wildness. If wildness is truly inextirpable, there’s little reason for Birch to pay any mind to the imperium’s desire to capture and rule it. What Birch really fears in the imperium is how it hinders our ability to *experience* wildness, not its hobbling of wildness itself. Yet he focuses only on the imperium’s attempts to contain wildness rather than any attempts it might make to keep us from experiencing it.

These fears are echoed and reaffirmed in the work of Jack Turner. In “The Abstract Wild: A Rant” Turner conflates wilderness and wildness, assuming that the loss of the former means the loss of the latter. He writes, “unless we can radically transform modern civilization, the wilderness and its people will be but a memory in the minds of a few people. When they die, it will die with them, and the wild will become completely abstract” (Turner, 32). It seems that Turner makes the category mistake that Birch warns of. He assumes that if we can truly extinguish the wild nature of any of wildness’ manifestations, that is if we don’t experience it in them, it means the extinguishing of wildness itself.

Turner is responding not only to a loss of wildness, but to a claim that wildness can be captured and visited whenever someone desires. This alleged capture of wildness deceives us

into thinking we need not worry about protecting the environment. Wildness is in a pen at the zoo, over there. Turner speculates that what we are trying to save, and what we have failed miserably in saving, is a sense of our home as wild (Turner, 35). Turner hopes for a radical transformation of modern civilization that will keep wildness from becoming abstract. Yet, contra Turner, wildness so eludes control that we really needn't fear its disappearance. Wildness could only become abstract if we totally and irreversibly fail to experience it. In both their defenses of wildness, Birch and Turner presuppose that the conflict is between an abstract civilization and wildness, rather than focusing on some inner conflict within the people who live there which keeps them from the experience.

Writer Jay Griffiths, author of *Wild: An Elemental Journey*, travels the world looking for wildness as she assumes it persists primarily in indigenous cultures. The only part of her story that takes place in her native United Kingdom is when she makes arrangements to get out of it. She writes of the cities she visits (merely as stopovers to the next wild place) as dirty and grotesque and bemoans the effects they have had on indigenous culture. Though this critique is fair, she refuses (to experience) any genuine wildness in the city. Griffiths writes, "We are animal in our blood and in our skin. We were not born for pavements and escalators but for thunder and mud. More. We are animal not only in body but in spirit" (Griffiths, 84).

Yet we are social animals, and in our numbers it is not surprising we have taken to living in these large, complex collectives. She does describe a few symptoms of wildness in human culture (meaning outside of the indigenous communities she visits): "It is the first 'fuck' on television, it simmers in the feral intoxication of jazz, it explodes exuberant in carnival..." (Griffiths, 85). These experiences read as momentary intrusions of wildness, rather than a

persistent existence of it. In her glorification of wildness in the indigenous settlements she visits, Griffiths disparages the lives most of us live.

But I think there's an alternative to this divisive notion that wildness only exists in wilderness or so-called natural areas. We can revel in wildness when we go for a morning walk through the city and something surprises us; we should also be glad when we have luxury to sit down on a bench or drink at a water fountain. Perhaps in the past it has been necessary to shun culture to show the importance of wilderness. However, the thinkers above have overcorrected and their love of wildness is assumed to be mutually exclusive with any love of culture.

There is inconsistency in these philosophers of the wild. They critique humans for destroying wildness with their culture, yet they describe wildness as something resilient that, despite the tremendous human impact on the environment, continues to survive. They critique human society for its lack of wildness yet provide no suggestions for its improvement. To answer both claims, I suggest that rather than keeping our focus outward on vast landscapes that we consider the last vestiges of the wild, we look inward and really examine how we can learn to experience ourselves and the world as wild.

Seemingly agreeing with other wildness philosophers, Gary Snyder writes, “the world”, with the exception of a tiny bit of human intervention, is ultimately a wild place,” implying that the places where there is human intervention are antithetical to wildness. He adds, “we can say that New York City and Tokyo are ‘natural’ but not ‘wild.’ They do not deviate from the laws of nature, but they are habitat so exclusive in the matter of who and what they give shelter to, and so intolerant of other creatures, as to be truly odd” (Snyder, 12).

Yet later, he softens this by saying, “civilization is permeable, and could be inhabited as the wild is.” Echoing Birch, he remarks on the inexorability of wildness, “Wilderness may temporarily dwindle, but wildness won’t go away” (Snyder, 16). It seems Snyder’s view of a full, robust wildness is to some degree truncated at the city line too. However, he writes that humans are more wild than they think. He writes that “to resolve the dichotomy of the civilized and the wild, we must first resolve to be whole” (Snyder, 24). The mere possibility of this resolution distinguishes Snyder from other defenders of wildness.

Despite his misgivings about civilization, Snyder states that we are always wild more clearly than others have:

Our bodies are wild. The involuntary quick turn of the head at a shout, the vertigo at looking off a precipice, the heart-in-the-throat in a moment of danger, the catch of the breath, the quiet moments relaxing, staring, reflecting - all universal responses of this mammal body... The world is our consciousness and it surrounds us. There are more things in mind, in the imagination, than ‘you’ can keep track of - thoughts, memories, images, angers, delights, rise unbidden. The depths of mind, the unconscious, are our inner wilderness areas, and that is where a bobcat is *right now* (Snyder, 17).

This claim differs from most of western philosophy. It states that not only is the outside world wild, but we ourselves are wild in both our bodies and minds. To resolve to be whole is to accept wildness as something familiar, literally in the family. It is something that does not exist exclusively outside the city.

There are practical, useful physical barriers which we maintain between ourselves and the stuff outside of us, whether those barriers are city limits or the bodies that need to be distinguished between other bodies to keep them from running into each other. Yet we would be mistaken if we consider those boundaries impermeable, immutable, and solid. The person who disagrees with this will have to reckon with the trillions of bacteria

inhabiting them. In a very real sense, our bodies do not belong only to us. Our minds, too, are like this and, as Snyder suggests, not completely within our control or understanding. Wildness can never be extinguished because our own wildness within us is so deep that it can never even be fathomed.

Even in seemingly tame, non-wild entities, there is wildness and capability to experience it. Snyder defines this as “perennially within us, dormant as a hard-shelled seed, awaiting the fire or flood that wakes it again” (Snyder, 14). The wildness is there, but we lack the eyes to see it. Snyder’s book *Practice of the Wild* is about exactly that - a practice that encourages the latent ability in us to see wildness to take root and grow, transforming the world around us.

What I have hoped to show in the preceding pages is that because of our inability to experience wildness in the world and in ourselves, because we view it as something that exists in some far away place, person, or other entity, we are not able to understand wildness as a possible quality of all our experiences.

I argued that past defenders of wildness have made arguments and expressed fears that only reaffirm these dualisms between nature and culture that Steven Vogel is arguing against by trying to protect a wildness that exists in nature that has been killed in civilization. They have assumed that wildness resides outside of city limits because they conflate wildness with experiences of wildness. Defenders of wildness, despite good intentions, are still operating within this paradigm. Similarly, the dualism between self and non-self tends to reify an understanding of the self as a known, controlled entity, like a city, cordoned off from the rest of the world.

Ultimately, the pursuit of protecting wildness is wrongheaded because wildness is so inalienable and uncontrollable that we never have to worry about it disappearing. This is not to say that the places we consider wild are not worth preserving. Wilderness areas are still worth protecting. They too are wild and can train our experience of wildness. But to appreciate wilderness areas only for a wildness that we can find nowhere else is a mistake on our part. As humans trying to connect to and learn to care for an increasingly troubled world, experiencing wildness offers us an opportunity to confront the things in life that are not us yet nonetheless demand our attention.

In the next section, I will discuss how we might learn to be more open to experiences of intrinsic value and wildness in our day to day lives. The nature of wildness is such that we can never anticipate when these experiences will strike. I will argue for and discuss the potential for consciously opening ourselves up to similar experiences.

Chapter 3

Experiences of intrinsic value and wildness will always be a possibility in our lives. They come to us unexpectedly and force us to reckon with something that we did not happen to notice before. There will always be the opportunity for wild experiences, because we will always find ourselves in situations we weren't paying attention to before. Startling, heart-stopping, adrenaline-fueled experiences of wildness demand our attention. But in this section, I will argue for the ways this attention can and should be freely given.

I start by returning to Birch, who should not be thrown out with the bathwater. Specifically, I review Birch's understanding of moral consideration. Birch believes that the

pursuit of an adequate criteria for moral consideration has been a pursuit of western domination, much like the goal of restricting wildness to wilderness areas. He offers instead the idea of universal moral considerability, which is to say paying attention to all things actively before we undertake any activities which would affect them. He offers the term “deontic experience” to describe an encounter with something which leaves us with the feeling of what we must do.

Birch is far from giving us concrete guidelines for understanding exactly how to become considerate of things in our daily lives. I expand on Birch’s philosophy by following his implicit and explicit references to Zen Buddhism. I view Zen through the lens of Gary Snyder, whose life and work have been immensely influenced by practicing Zen. I argue that he can provide a clearer understanding of what it means to undertake and fully commit to Birch’s deontic experience in everyday life.

I offer this practice of Zen as a way for us to live a life full of caring attention. Instead of the usual ethical propensity for constantly expanding on which beings we give moral consideration to, the approach of Birch and Zen is to start from the consideration of all things and consistently move inward towards those beings which we have ethical responsibilities to.

I will conclude this chapter by returning to Katie McShane and intrinsic value. I will argue that universal moral consideration is a way of understanding how best to care for the world around us. I argue that this care is the same care that Katie McShane talks about. By virtue of the fact that the world is able to call to us to take some action towards it is a sufficient condition for us to care for and experience it as intrinsically valuable. Though experiencing intrinsic value does not necessarily have anything to say about our ethical obligations to beings and things in the world, it is a reason to at least regard them carefully.

Tom Birch's article "Moral Considerability and Universal Consideration" is the sequel to "The Incarceration of Wildness" appearing three years later. It illustrates an optimism not seen in "The Incarceration of Wildness." While it still focuses on the imperium's attempt to corral and categorize the unfamiliar, it also offers a hopeful alternative in the form of universal consideration, which entails giving all things, including the non-sentient and inanimate, at the very least a basic consideration before acting in a way that would affect them.

Birch begins by critiquing the standard formulation of moral consideration, quoting Kenneth Goodpaster: "For all A, X deserves moral consideration from A.[..when X meets specific, preordained necessary and sufficient conditions.]" (qtd. in Birch 1993, 314). He writes that this formulation shows the inherent imperialism of the western philosophical project of designating moral value. It does this by virtue of the fact that the people assessing the moral value of something come up with the necessary and sufficient criteria before encountering the specific candidate for moral value thus effectively shutting off the possibility for some things before they're even encountered. The project presupposes that the criteria for moral considerability are right. Birch's goal in his essay is not to develop a new criteria, but to completely deconstruct the question of moral considerability itself (Birch 1993, 314).

He regards the question as completely nestled in a context of western thought, which denies moral regard to some beings for a variety of arbitrary reasons, for example sentience or rationality. This particular way of viewing the nonhuman world is not, Birch argues, necessarily the standard. He writes:

Certainly in many cultures moral considerability has been afforded to nonhuman beings of various sorts, and even in our own culture there are many people who do give consideration to nonhumans, such as wild animals, trees, mountains, wilderness, and farmland. Of course, their voices are generally marginalized. This essay may be viewed as an attempt to give voice to this marginalized sensibility in a way that mandates its being heard (Birch 1993, 317).

Not only is the predominant understanding of moral considerability culturally contextual; it is also historically contextual, as the range of beings and things considered worthy of moral consideration has continued to shift and expand. Where once we might have only (or at least most highly) morally considered rich, white men, we then began allowing poor, white men, nonwhite peoples, and women, among others, though this struggle continues.² And in some cases, we start making ethical room for the moral considerability of nonhuman animals and even entire ecosystems whether they include human beings or not. We seek finitude and completion; this pursuit thus far has proven to be wrongheaded.

Since, through the course of history, there have been so many beings up for reconsideration, Birch wonders why we even need to close the discussion about which beings (or even things) are morally considerable. The lesson we should learn from our history is that our comfortable self-assurances about which beings we consider objectively morally considerable are subject to change and not objective whatsoever. They keep developing as we are forced to reconsider other beings and things.

The crux of Birch's argument is that before we can ever even evaluate our moral obligations to another being, we must consider the being. This encounter comes first and foremost regardless of what ethical obligations we have formed because of them. Birch writes, "the most fundamental job of the entire business of ethical research is the discovery of our obligations. Nevertheless, it is not possible to discover our obligations to others, of whatever sort, unless and until we give them moral consideration" (Birch 1993, 322). Consideration is a necessary step before we can even evaluate our obligations.

² Birch writes, "wise and enlightened people already treat other people as *human beings* until it is proved otherwise - there is no a priori requirement for another person to prove his or her worth. Universal consideration requires the extension of the same attitude toward the nonhuman world." pp. 328 - 329.

Birch introduces the term deontic experience to define experiences where a person is drawn to someone or something, filling the person with the urge that they must do something. Birch writes that this experience, which is the point of origin in our experience of ethical obligations, is what inspires us to act according to our ethical beliefs. While the deontic experience could be strong, it does not necessarily determine our obligations towards something. Deontic experience is rooted in intuition and feeling, not just logic. This can be misleading and requires further philosophical inquiry, but is a necessary starting point. We can have deontic experiences without ethical obligations, but we cannot, Birch argues, have ethical obligations without our prior deontic experiences.

Birch describes these experiences as “generated out of a relationship with any kind of entity: persons, things, systems, ecosystems, other sorts of abstractions, even numbers” (Birch 1993, 323). And while it doesn’t imply that we necessarily have ethical obligations to any of these things, it does imply that we can have a relationship of some kind with all of the above things. These are relationships which may very well create ethical obligations where we may not have seen them before. They are what we turn to when “we are pressed to explain and justify, and prove to others, our ethical judgments and practices. We turn to them in the course of our own deliberations, to test and prove practical ethical hypotheses” (Birch 1993, 323). These very intuitive interactions and reactions to the world around us are the fundamental way we shape our future interactions with it.

Birch says that we usually do not grasp the implications of deontic experiences immediately and that they might take years to develop more fully. The experience is sudden, but what it means for the development of our ethics is unclear at first. At the moment of the deontic experience, however, we usually “know at some level that something has happened that will

have to be reckoned with sooner or later” (Birch 1993, 324). Ethics, as our way of thinking through the implications of our behavior, is that reckoning.

Birch advocates a refining of our capacity to consciously recognize deontic experiences as they happen. He writes, somewhat mystically, “Whetted to the point of the ideal, which we might call the point of perfect virtue - a flawless spontaneity - the practice of giving consideration would be the continuous realization of the epiphany of every moment” (Birch 1993, 324). He invokes Thoreau’s practice of walking and Zen’s practice of mindfulness as manifestations of this practice. Taken with those practices, what Birch means is far from mystical; he means only that in a perfect world, we would consider beings actively and selflessly at all times. He writes that when such epiphanic moments come as a result of deontic experience, we realize “part of what it is to be a human being” (Birch 1993, 324). Specifically, we realize things as not just part of the human world, but also humans as part of the rest of the world.

He states that if it were possible to cultivate this perfect practice that made consideration and attention central, we may be able to dispense with ethics. Ethics and how it tells us to consider other beings is, as Birch shows, an imperfect, constantly changing, historically and culturally contingent set of rules. Consideration and reconsideration always yields to these changes and therefore never falls into the problem that ethics does of moral backpedaling from strict, uncompromising ethical positions. Dispensing with ethics is, however, only possible “given a sufficiently honed practice of attentiveness to others, given the perfect virtue mentioned above, given the perhaps infallible spontaneity of enlightenment” (Birch 1993, 329). Again Birch seems to tread near to the mystical. However, his goal is not to abolish ethics as the perfection above remains elusive. His goal is to show that this attentiveness is at the root of any of our moral intuitions and if we persisted in such a state, we would be consistently considerate of and

attentive to other beings. He merely tries to point to the fact that ethics fails, time and again, as we begin to consider or reconsider beings that we didn't before.

Birch summons up, both explicitly and implicitly, Zen Buddhism through his discussion of mindfulness and enlightenment. This brings in an element of deontic experience that Birch doesn't explicitly focus on, but is consistent with the rest of his discussion of attentiveness. This element is a lack of focus on the self, and it is an explicitly Buddhist notion that is required for both mindfulness (or Birch's concentration and attentiveness) and subsequent enlightenment. The root of Birch's problem is not the lack of attentiveness; we are always attentive to something. It is that we are often attentive to the self that we define by its rational thinking mind and its collection of thoughts and ethical beliefs that we consider constant and unchanging. The proper attention that Birch is advocating cannot be achieved by a merely intellectual understanding or encounter with something. It is an encounter that does not put the thing apart from the observer.

Gary Snyder comments on this attachment to the thinking mind and its inability to let the rest of the world in. He quotes the *Genjōkōan*, a 12th century Zen Buddhist text by Zen master Dōgen Zenji. “‘We study the self to forget the self,’ said Dōgen. ‘When you forget the self, you become one with the ten thousand things.’ Ten thousand things means all of the phenomenal world. When we are open that world can occupy us. Yet we are still called on to wrestle with the curious phenomenon of the complex human self, needed but excessive, which resists letting the world in” (Snyder, 160). When we have Birch's deontic experience or a wild experience,³ it is a

³ Birch's deontic experience is different from the wild experience insofar as wildness refers to a quality of the experience (that it is unexpected, etc) and deontic refers to the implications of the experience (that one must do something). They are far from mutually exclusive. The wildness of the experience hits immediately while its deontic implications usually take time to develop.

moment where the world has occupied us, subverting the immediate interests we have in ourselves.

Our pigeonholing of which beings are morally considerable is closely linked to our pigeonholing of which places and things are wild. We presuppose the right criteria before we give something the opportunity to show itself to us. Snyder writes on this, and how best we should open ourselves to the world. “Mountaineers climb peaks for the great view, the cooperation and comradeship, the lively hardship - but mostly because it *puts you out there* where the unknown happens, where you encounter surprise [original emphasis].” This unknown, surprising encounter is, of course, an experience of wildness. We find mountains considerable because of, among other reasons, the wildness we easily experience there. Snyder continues, “The truly experienced person, the refined person, *delights in the ordinary* [original emphasis]” (Snyder, 164). By delimiting the bounds of what we can experience wildness in, we simultaneously do harm to ourselves and the rest of the world. To open the whole world up as something we can experience wildness in, and intrinsic value for that matter, means to be able to find those things in anything we encounter or are doing.

The epiphanic moments Birch writes about when we reach this union with reality, where we are no longer keeping it at arm’s length but embracing it as part of our bodies and minds, is enlightenment. Snyder writes, “What we didn’t perhaps see so clearly was that self-realization, even enlightenment, is another aspect of our wildness - a bonding of the wild in ourselves to the (wild) process of the universe” (Snyder, xi).

This all may sound very nice, but difficult. One need not commit to any complicated metaphysics to undertake the practice of paying careful attention to the world. Birch was right to associate Thoreau’s practice of walking with the Zen practice of mindfulness. These ways of

experiencing reality are not limited to these varieties of the practice of attention. These are not metaphysical practices, but rather they are rooted in the physical world that is actually happening around the observer. Snyder writes that Zen is mostly practice; he says that much of the theory that one associates with Zen in particular and Buddhism in general is hazardous insofar as it leads people to rely on something other than their direct experience (Snyder, ix).

This practice of mindfulness, which is freely giving our attention to things in our lives, allows direct experience of the world. This takes time to develop. One way to develop this is meditation. Meditation is central when beginning Zen practice. Sitting still, without much outside stimulation, allows us to more clearly observe our thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and sensations. These are things that separate the self from the world around it. The goal of mindfulness is not to stop seeing things in this way or to totally dismiss them, but to pay attention to the rest of the world as well. This is illustrated in a Zen story:

Nan-in was visited by Tenno, who, having passed his apprenticeship, had become a teacher. The day happened to be rainy, so Tenno wore wooden clogs and carried an umbrella. After greeting him Nan-in remarked: "I suppose you left your wooden clogs in the vestibule. I want to know if your umbrella is on the right or left side of the clogs." Tenno, confused, had no instant answer. He realized that he was unable to carry his Zen every minute (Reps and Senzaki, 52-53).

In this story, even the experienced Zen practitioner's mind was sufficiently occupied that he was not able to pay attention even to what he was doing himself. Privileging the thinking mind over the things we do in our day to day lives only continue to keep us separate from what Buddhists call the ten thousand things and the whole phenomenal universe (Snyder, 105). It certainly also shows a lack of universal consideration.

But we don't need to buy black robes and sit in full lotus posture all day chanting the heart sutra in a meditation hall in Japan for 12 years to experience mindfulness. We need to merely find ourselves capable of observing our reactions and realizing how we already move

through the world. As Birch said, Thoreau's process of doing this was walking, a literal moving through the world. To encounter the world and even have the opportunity to consciously morally consider it, we have to be in it, with it, and open to it. Birch quotes Zen master Shunryu Suzuki, "Mindfulness is... wisdom. By wisdom we do not mean some particular faculty or philosophy. It is the readiness of the mind that is wisdom... Wisdom is something which will come out of your mindfulness. So the point is to be ready for observing things, and to be ready for thinking. This is called emptiness of your mind" (qtd. in Birch 1993, 324). It's to come to something without the preconceived notions of what it's good for and how it matters ethically.

Universal consideration, whether as a practice derived from Zen or some other place, is the most basic amount of care we should give to the world we live in; it is, to use Katie McShane's words, a claim "about the distinctive way in which we have reason to care about that thing" (McShane, 43). And we need to care about the world, because we are part and parcel with it. Birch writes, "the nonhuman, as well as the human, world is *valued* and is preserved, in part, because it does make deep consideration, mindfulness, and attentiveness possible and meaningful [original emphasis]" (Birch, 331).

What Zen, universal consideration, experiences of wildness, and experiences of intrinsic value have in common is that they focus on experiencing the world carefully and just as it is, apart from the self and any of its concerns. Just as Snyder said Zen practice can often become the victim of too much theory, intrinsic value often does as well. If we understand intrinsic value not as some esoteric metaphysical property of the natural world but, as McShane does, as something that we do every day already, it can resolve many of its philosophical problems while also philosophically legitimating the way we already interact with the world. Experiences of wildness demand our attention whenever they happen. They bring things immediately, if temporarily, to

the forefront of our lives, shifting the focus from ourselves. These experiences of wildness are important and will always astound us with their unexpected suddenness. We can also give our consideration and attention to the world freely, whether it's through Zen meditation, or walking, or any of the other practices that encourage this consideration.

If we allow for the possibility of experiencing value through this careful attention, an inability to experience the value in something is no longer something lacking in that thing. The lack is in us. We can now reinterpret a quote mentioned in chapter one from Holmes Rolston, III: "Places that stimulate an experience of the sublime warrant particular care, as that experience is infrequent in rebuilt environments" (Rolston, 305). In light of what has been said here about experiences of wildness and intrinsic value, we can say that since the experience of wildness is infrequent in rebuilt environments, we should enact universal consideration and undertake practices that stimulate this experience. It is experience, not something independent of it, that causes an experience of intrinsic value and a basic level of care.

Conclusion

What I have sought to show here is that the role of our human experience in specifically environmental ethics and philosophy in general has been underappreciated. What Katie McShane's work has shown is that we experience intrinsic value only through the experiences that show us the value of something. What Tom Birch and McShane share is the idea that regardless of all of our ethical theories, before we think about the world we experience it directly and this experience informs everything else. This is invaluable to ethics because it means few, if

any, of our ways of valuing the world are unmediated. We can't help but value the world through some experience.

For the most part, we decide how those experiences happen. For example, we're unable to believe our world is wild. Because of our preconceived notions of where, when, and with what wildness happens we only experience it through the violent, demanding experiences described above. Experiences of wildness demand our attention only in situations where we weren't already giving it freely.

A world where we undertake practices that teach us how to give our attention freely have the opportunity to change our way of experiencing the world we live in. While as described these practices require a person's experience, they are decentering in the sense that they do not give the person a superiority over the thing they are encountering. The person may make ethical decisions after the fact, but in the moment of that the experience happens, the person is considering something just as it is.

We cannot just consider the world and the things in it when they are instrumentally valuable to us. Paying attention to all things, including the ones that are uncomfortable, inconvenient, or just undesirable, helps to make us more thoughtful citizens of the world, whose lives, as Birch noted, are made more meaningful by paying attention to the other things in it (Birch, 1993, 331).

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