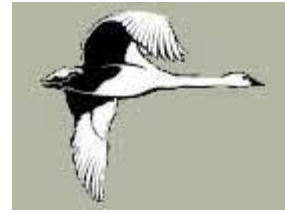


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Reinventing Nature, The End Of Wilderness?: A Response To William Cronon's Uncommon Ground



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At a Green conference in the late 1980s, I was discussing the global ecological/human overpopulation crisis with a leading Ecofeminist writer. Her response was to say she didn't believe there was an ecological crisis or an overpopulation problem. "Given the present intellectual climate," she claimed, "isn't it all a matter of how you look at it?" At the time, I felt that I had just stepped, like Alice, "through the looking glass"! In retrospect, I now realize I had come face to face with the views of postmodern deconstructionism, an orientation held by many academic Ecofeminists.

There are apparently many shades and versions of what is called postmodernism even including now an ecocentric postmodernist environmental ethics. But in its more extreme version, postmodern deconstructionism is a 1960s spinoff from Marxism; a contemporary form of anthropocentric humanism which espouses cultural relativism, an antipathy to science, and a preference for cities. Actually, the humanistic bias against both nonhuman Nature and a scientific understanding of the universe, extends back through Enlightenment humanism to Greek humanism with Socrates. For all his philosophical brilliance, Socrates, unlike Thoreau, rarely left the city, saying (in Plato's *Phaedrus*) that ". . . trees and open country won't teach me anything, whereas men in town do."

Most postmodernist theorists have a humanities or social science background which predisposes them to see reality exclusively through human social and cultural lenses. In order to gain an ecological perspective, the ecologist Aldo Leopold proposed in the 1940s that we learn to "think like a mountain." But for most postmodernists, there is no standpoint beyond human cultures. Postmodern deconstructionists hold that Nature is a social construction (or "social category"); that there is no genetically-based "human nature"; that there is no objective truth—all theories and statements (even by scientists) reflect only the interests of power elites; and that if Nature is a human social construction, then humans can "reinvent Nature" (and "reinvent humans" for that matter) in any way which suits our immediate interests and desires.

The top priority for anthropocentric postmodernists is promoting social justice and "multiculturalism." In the process, they tend to downplay the magnitude of the ecological crisis and the importance of protecting the Earth's ecological integrity. (For a more extended critique of extreme forms of postmodernism, see Sessions, "Postmodernism, Environmental Justice, and the Demise of the Ecology Movement?" in *The Trumpeter*, Summer 1995).

Anthropocentric Humanism and the Ecological Crisis

The anti-wild Nature orientation of anthropocentric humanism, in its various guises, led the ecologist David Ehrenfeld to write *The Arrogance of Humanism* in 1978. In his early ecophilosophy book *One Cosmic Instant* (1973), the Canadian naturalist John Livingstone also vented his frustration with the humanist mind-set:

No man [human] is so far removed from nature as the liberally educated humanist, because the cosmos centers on his mind, and the mind of man is the measure—and the envelope—of all things . . . The run-of-the-mill humanist is incredibly ignorant of, and thus indifferent to, his biological context; and he is even somewhat reluctant to be reminded of it. The liberal humanist is dangerous to the biosphere, and thus to mankind . . . He is the key to the entire supranatural pyramid, because he is ancient anthropocentricity in its most highly developed form (pp. 216-17).

In the 1960s, U.C.L.A. historian Lynn White, Jr. (the first ecocentric environmental historian) argued that Christianity together with various “post-Christian” humanisms, such as Marxism have provided the Western cultural basis for the ecological crisis as a result of their anthropocentrism and belief in perpetual progress through continued human domination over Nature. White pointed out that, as a result of these anthropocentric views, “despite Copernicus, all the cosmos rotates around our little globe. Despite Darwin, we are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim” (“Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis; *Science*, 1967). As a remedy for our religious/ecological problems, he urged a return to the ecocentric views of Saint Francis, who preached “the equality of all creatures.”

As a further counterpoint to Western anthropocentric humanism, some writers in the Western humanities tradition, such as D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Robinson Jeffers, and Gary Snyder (according to Del Janik) begin, in the 1920s, to develop an ecocentric “posthumanist” position (see *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, pp. 104-12). This ecocentric nature writing tradition has recently blossomed to include Edward Abbey, Barry Lopez, William Kittredge, Terry Tempest Williams, and many others. While academic literature programs around the country have begun to move away from deconstructionism and toward an ecocentric “ecocriticism,” the greening of most academic philosophy programs has yet to occur (for the new literary ecocriticism, see Jay Parini, “The Greening of the Humanities,” *The New York Times Magazine*, October 29, 1995: 52-53; Lawrence Buhl, *Environmental Imagination*, 1995). Given that most academic philosophers have been trained in Western anthropocentric ethical traditions, philosophy textbooks and anthologies designed for courses in ethics tend to reflect an anthropocentric social justice environmental bias. In sections on “ethics and the environment” in these textbooks the standard whipping boy used to be biologist Garrett Hardin with his “Lifeboat Ethics” paper calling for human population control. Now most of the sections in these textbooks close with the paper by the Indian Social Ecologist Ramachandra Guha (“Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique”) who also rejects concern for the Earth’s ecological integrity and argues that environmentalism ought to be concerned primarily with social justice issues (for an ecocentric critique of Guha’s paper, see Arne Naess, “The Third World, Wilderness, and Deep Ecology, “ in Sessions, *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, pp. 397-407).

Conservation Biology and the Postmodernist Attack on Wilderness

In the 1990s key postmodernist ideas have been used as a basis for questioning the rationale for protecting the Earth’s remaining wilderness and wild areas. For example, Donna Haraway’s postmodernist views (in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991) served as the inspiration for a three-year research project on Reinventing Nature, sponsored by the University of California Humanities Research Institute at UC Irvine. Conferences were held at UC Berkeley, UC San Diego, UC Santa Cruz, UC Davis, and UC Irvine from 1992-94. William Cronon (a professor of environmental history at the University of Wisconsin, and editor of Weyerhaeuser Environmental Books) played a major role in the UC Irvine conference. Long excerpts

from Cronon's paper in the UC Irvine anthology (Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*) have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine* (Aug. 13, 1995) and *The Sacramento Bee* (Sept. 17, 1995) with such provocative headings as "The Trouble with Wilderness," "Inventing the Wilderness," and "Is Wilderness a Threat to Environmentalism?"

Three key books which deal with the postmodernist/conservation biology/wilderness controversy are Stephen Kellett and E.O. Wilson (eds.), *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, Island Press, 1995; Michael Soule and Gary Lease (eds.), *Reinventing Nature?: Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction*, Island Press, 1995; and William Cronon (ed.) *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, Norton, 1995.

In 1984, the Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson published *Biophilia*: the hypothesis that there is genetic basis for the human need for, and love of, wild Nature. Paul Shepard had earlier claimed that there is a genetically based human ontogeny that involves bonding with wild Nature (see Shepard, *Nature and Madness*, 1982; M. Oelschlaeger (ed.) *The Company of Others: Essays on Paul Shepard*, Kivaki Press, 1995). This collection of fifteen essays (Kellett and Wilson, *Biophilia Hypothesis*) further explores Wilson's thesis as a scientific hypothesis. Further, Wilson claims in his essay that the most serious aspect of the ecological crisis is the loss of biodiversity (p. 35). Shepard's essay points to the negative consequences resulting from the breakdown in modern society of the distinction between wild and domesticated Nature. There is a long useful summarizing essay by the conservation biologist Michael Soule.

The genetic "human nature" theories of Shepard and Wilson have become the basis of the new field of "ecopsychology": as environmental education theorist David Orr explains in his provocative essay "Love It or Lose It," both Wilson and Erich Fromm agree "that biophilia is not only innate but a sign of mental and physical health." Developing some of the criticism of megatechnology in Jerry Mander's *In the Absence of the Sacred* (1991), Orr claims that "biophobia"

is increasingly common among people raised with television, Walkman radios attached to their heads, video games, living amidst shopping malls, freeways, and dense urban or suburban settings. . . . Serious and well-funded people talk about reweaving the fabric of life on earth through genetic engineering and nanotechnologies . . . still others talk of reshaping human consciousness to fit "virtual reality". . . . Biophobia is not OK for the same reason that misanthropy or sociopathy are not OK . . . [Now we have] whole societies that distance themselves from animals, trees, landscapes, mountains, and rivers? Is mass biophobia a kind of collective madness? . . . The drift of the biophobic society, as George Orwell foresaw . . . is toward the replacement of nature and human nature by technology and the replacement of real democracy by a technological tyranny now looming on the horizon (pp. 415-20).

Reinventing Nature? (edited by Lease and Soule) is the anthology which resulted from the UC Santa Cruz conference. The conservation biologist Michael Soule (chair of the Environmental Studies program) and Gary Lease (Dean of Humanities) are concerned that postmodernism's "relativistic anthropocentrism now sweeping the humanities and social sciences might have consequences for how policymakers and technocrats view and manage the remnants of biodiversity and the remaining fragments of wilderness . . . contemporary forms of intellectual and social relativism can be just as destructive to nature as bulldozers and chainsaws" (pp. xvi, 159). Most of the contributors are not sympathetic to postmodernist visions of reality, assuming instead that the world "really does exist apart from humanity's perceptions and beliefs about it" (p. xv).

Paul Shepard's "Virtual Hunting Reality in the Forests of Simulacra" is a thoughtful critique of the views of the deconstructionists Derrida, Rorty, Lacan, Foucault, and

Lyotard:

The deconstructionist points with glee to the hidden motivations in these “falsifications” of a past and perhaps inadvertently opens the door to the reconfiguration of places as the setting of entertainment and consumption.

Postmodern deconstructionists reduce the reality of the world to human language webs, signs, simulacra and semiotics; plastic trees and human spectacle; and the hyperreality of Disneyland:

It is as though a junta of deconstructionist body snatchers had invaded the skins of the planners, architects, and tour businessmen who are selling fantasy as history, creating a million Disneylands and ever bigger ‘events’ for television along with electronic playsuits and simulated places in three-dimensional virtual reality. (pp. 21-2).

Shepard is concerned that the world of the deconstructionist is a world of human solipsism.

The UC Berkeley philosopher Wallace Matson recently offered a new interpretation of the history of Western philosophy which sheds important light on these issues (. *New History of Philosophy* Vol. 11, Harcourt Brace, 1987, pp. 275-6). Matson calls Descartes’ approach to philosophizing, which begins with the data of human consciousness, the *inside-out* approach. When a philosopher begins with human consciousness as the starting point, there is no escape to the reality of a world “external” to human consciousness (Descartes cheated!): the philosopher remains locked inside the human cranium resulting in a philosophical solipsism. The other main approach in Western philosophy Matson calls the *outside-in* which “begins with an account of the world and, at the end, or near the end, explains mind and its knowledge in the terms developed in that account.” As a Spinoza scholar, Matson finds the “*outside-in*” approach the most philosophically defensible. It accords with a contemporary cosmological/evolutionary scientific understanding of the universe, and also with everyday common sense, for that matter. Ecophilosophers over the years have pointed to Descartes as a major source of our anthropocentric ecological problems. French deconstructionist epistemology, following the “inside-out” tradition of Descartes and continental phenomenology (and leading to a kind of human solipsism and denial of a real world existing independently of, and historically prior to, humans) is at best arbitrary, and, more likely, it is nonsense.

William Cronon and the UC Irvine “Reinventing Nature” Conference

Three of the environmental historians contributing to Cronon’s UC Irvine *Uncommon Ground* anthology (Carolyn Merchant, Richard White, and Cronon, himself) had engaged in a major prior debate over the proper tasks of environmental history with the leading environmental historian Donald Worster. Worster, in his paper “Seeing Beyond Culture” *Journal of American History* 76, 1990, 1142-47) accused Cronon and Merchant of attempting to turn environmental history into anthropocentric cultural history. They attempt to:

reduce environmental history to social history and to embrace the latter’s causal arguments and moral concerns—the importance of gender, race, class, and so forth. In so doing, Cronon would redefine environment as cultural landscape, a move that would encompass virtually every place on earth, even hospitals and military bases. And in writing about those cultural landscapes he would apparently have us concentrate far more on telling how each social group, and finally each individual, living in that landscape

saw it or felt about it . . . we might spend so much time distinguishing the different interpretations people have had of, say, the North American forest that we would forget about the forest as an independent entity. No landscape is completely cultural; all landscapes are the result of interactions between nature and culture (p. 1144).

The environmental movement has been the scene of an on-going ideological battle since the 1970s centered around retaining its primary ecocentric focus on protecting the Earth's ecological integrity for all species versus those who would shift the focus of environmentalism toward a narrow anthropocentric urban pollution and social justice agenda. It is well documented that Marxist/leftist intellectuals and activists had little or no interest in environmental issues—either urban pollution or wilderness/biodiversity concerns—throughout the Ecological Revolution of the 1960s. During this period they criticized the environmental movement for diverting attention from their anthropocentric preoccupation with social justice issues. However, after Earth Day 1970, as the environmental movement continued to gain strength and public support throughout the 1970s and '80s, leftist intellectuals and activists began to seize upon the public successes and high visibility of the environmental movement to try to co-opt it in the service of their social justice agenda.

For example, in the 1980s, activists promoting Murray Bookchin's anthropocentric Social Ecology position (a spin-off from the Marxist social justice movement but concerned, as well, with urban pollution problems) began joining, and attempting to dominate the agendas of, the Earth First! and U. S. Green movements. Bookchin claimed that the philosophy of Earth First! in the late 1980s had shifted from ecocentric Deep Ecology to a Social Ecology position. The New York Green activist Lorna Salzman pointed out that the Bookchin-inspired Left Greens, through high handed tactics, took over the U. S. Green movement during the late 1980s. She complained that the Left Greens developed a U. S. Green platform that "does not pay even lip service to the accelerating multiple global ecological crisis . . . it banishes ecology to the periphery (the word itself is hardly used)." Salzman warned that "what the Left succeeds at, all too well, is subverting any promising movement or philosophy for their own purposes" (for a discussion of the Leftist developments in Earth First! and the U.S. Greens, and the Salzman quotes, see George Sessions, "Radical Environmentalism in the 90s" *Wild Earth* 2, 3 (1992): 64-70).

Leftist journalist Mark Dowie (in his widely acclaimed book *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century*, MIT Press, 1995) applauds "the shift in emphasis from the natural to the urban domain . . . the central concern of the new movement is human health" and claims that the American environmental movement, by focusing on protecting the Earth's ecological integrity, has been racist. He proposes that the environmental movement of the future be led by people of color (exemplified by the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit) whose primary interests to this point have been equity issues involving toxic waste sitings in urban areas (for a critique of Dowie's book, see Sessions, "Political Correctness, Ecological Realities and the Future of the Ecology Movement," *The Trumpeter* 12, 4 (1995): 191-96). The picture that is emerging is of a social justice-oriented Leftist movement with no initial interest in environmentalism that is now attempting to co-opt and redirect environmentalism toward an urban pollution social justice agenda. Unable to overcome their narrow ideological anthropocentrism, together with their apparent fixation on social and political power and control, the Left seems determined to cancel out the emerging ecocentric sensibility.

As the only truly radical movement of the 20th century (as environmental historian Stephen Fox points out), it is perhaps understandable that the ecocentric Thoreau/Muir/Leopold/Carson-inspired environmental/ecology movement would eventually come under siege from both the left and the right ends of the political spectrum: the right denying that there is an ecological crisis, promoting continued economic growth and development "business as usual," while trying to destroy the

environmental movement; the left apparently also ideologically blinded to the seriousness of the ecological crisis and attempting to co-opt the movement towards its social justice agenda. Meanwhile world scientist's professional organizations, conservation biologists, the Wildlands Project, supporters of the Deep Ecology Movement, and many global, national, and local environmentalist groups try to stay the course. Of course, it is ultimately self-defeating for the international environmental movement to focus on social justice, or even urban pollution, if attention is thereby diverted away from providing realistic solutions to the various aspects of the global ecological crisis. It comes down to a matter of ecological perspective in which urban pollution problems are seen as a subset of the larger global ecological crisis.

As a way of heading off the Leftist social justice takeover of the environmental/ecological movement, as well as helping to insure that these movements cooperate constructively with each other, Arne Naess has proposed that the international Green movement be thought of as being composed of three movements: (1) the peace movement, (2) the social justice movement, and (3) the ecology movement. It promotes only confusion, he claims, to identify the Green movement (and its various component movements) with the ecology movement. While Naess (along with many other environmentalists and Deep Ecology supporters) is very concerned with issues of peace and social justice, nevertheless he claims that "considering the accelerating rate of irreversible ecological destruction worldwide, I find it acceptable to continue fighting ecological unsustainability whatever the state of affairs may be concerning the other two goals of Green societies" (see *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, pp. 267, 413-14, 445-53).

Most of the contributor's to Cronon's anthology are sympathetic in various degrees to the anthropocentric postmodernist approach. For example Richard White discusses the fight for protection of the last of the ancient forests of the Pacific Northwest in terms of those who work (the loggers) versus recreationists, ignoring the protection of the ancient forests for their own sake and for the protection of biodiversity; Giovanna Di Chiro promotes the conflating of environmentalism with social justice; Katherine Hayles discusses the convergence of virtual reality and simulacra with experiences arising from the nonhuman natural world.

It seems appropriate that this conference was held at UC Irvine, the heart of Los Angeles and Orange County. In a long rambling introduction to *Uncommon Ground*, Cronon describes the group's visits to Disneyland, Sea World, and the South Coast Plaza shopping mall with its Nature Company. Cronon likes cities, and he quotes with seeming approval, a tourist brochure which describes Orange County, and Irvine, as deliberately planned Disneyland theme parks. According to Cronon, the residents of Southern California have built their own artificial Eden. But even Cronon, it seems, cannot maintain the postmodernist's supposed neutrality of cultural relativism and has to describe this Southern California artifact somewhat with tongue-in-cheek, claiming that they can never achieve total control. The "otherness" of non-human Nature will ultimately assert itself.

It is not clear how postmodernists who champion universal human rights (including the rights of women and the poor) can consistently also maintain relativistic moral neutrality. It is, however, somewhat eerie to read the papers by Jennifer Price and Susan Davis describing the yuppie commodity visions of Nature promoted by the Nature Company, and the manipulative marketing of Sea World, while providing no criticism of these artificial visions. Cronon concludes by finding a rock in an artificial park on the UC Irvine campus ("Rock Outcrop1") and meditating in the way Thoreau taught him to do.

Cronin and the other Irvine participants seem largely oblivious to the rising tide of criticism throughout the academic world of the Disneyland theme park approach to "reinventing Nature," which goes hand-in-hand with the multinational corporate attempt

to create a world of universal consumerism (for such criticism see, for example, Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*). There is also little acknowledgment of the tremendous environmental damage caused by the continual expansion of these immense industrial cities, of which the Los Angeles complex is a prime example (Theodore Roszak, in developing the critique of Lewis Mumford, provides this kind of criticism of industrial cities in *Person/Planet*, 1978); not to mention the “biophobes” life in these cities is producing.

Papers by Candace Slater and Carolyn Merchant accuse environmentalists of trying to return to a lost Eden of pristine wild nature. But this kind of analysis largely misses the point in that it is insensitive to the biological need to protect and restore large areas of wild habitat for other species. Further, this is not the only possible interpretation of human Edenic impulses. Kansas State architecture professor Gary Coates has argued that the attempt to create a totally artificial world on Earth (a Disneyland theme park world) and to escape to outer space is actually a “distorted expression of our desire to return home to Eden” (see Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*, pp. 148-58).

Cronin’s paper “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” in *Uncommon Ground* (which was recently widely reprinted, in part, in major newspapers throughout the country) starts out by claiming that our concept of wilderness has to be rethought or “reinvented” in that it is a human or social construction. But by the end of the essay, the tone changes significantly and the various human “constructions” of wilderness that Cronin identifies at the beginning of the essay become largely irrelevant to the biological reality of protecting wild habitat. Cronin begins to vacillate between the more extreme postmodernist claims that there is no reality beyond our human words and signs (Nature is exclusively a human construct), and that there is a nonhuman reality apart from, and independent of, humans. While arguing that humans should pay more attention to the environmental concerns of the landscapes they inhabit (Cronin is mainly interested in human-inhabited landscapes), he nevertheless finds himself also sounding like more traditional conservationists and conservation biologists when he claims that:

By now I hope it is clear that my criticism in this essay 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. It is not the things we label as wilderness that are the problem—for nonhuman nature and large tracts of the natural world do deserve protection—but rather what we ourselves mean when we use that label . . . 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 be an indispensable corrective to human arrogance. (pp. 62, 67).

Cronin still fails, I think, to realize the full biological significance of protecting biodiversity and the ecological integrity of the Earth. Is he unaware that David Brower and the Sierra Club began arguing for the ecological significance of wilderness in the 1960s? And is he aware of the crucial role of current wilderness areas, together with interconnecting corridors, in protecting biodiversity in such plans as the Wildlands Project promoted by conservation biologists such as E.O. Wilson, Paul Ehrlich, and Michael Soule.

But by beginning to take ecological realities seriously, Cronin is forced to move a long ways from the postmodernist “reinventing nature” theme (derived from Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto*) which originally inspired these conferences. Haraway was a participant at the UC Irvine conference and had originally argued that humans should reject our organic origins and become “cyborgs”: a merging of humans with machines and megatechnology. Nature should be “reinvented” by collapsing the distinction

between the wild and natural, and human artifact; the very distinction Paul Shepard claims we shouldn't be discarding. For Haraway, we should "celebrate the merging of the organic with the mechanical, the natural with the artificial."

The Jesuit priest, Teilhard de Chardin (who has been the main inspiration for the so-called New Age movement) said almost exactly the same thing as Haraway does, but in the 1960s: that there should cease to be:

. . . any distinction between the artificial and the natural, between technology and life . . . the artificial takes over from the natural . . . [Human thought] suddenly bursts in, to dominate and transform everything on earth.

Teilhard's megatechnological vision of the New Age is merely a continuation of the modernist Christian-anthropocentric humanist vision of the total domination of the Earth by humans: of the total humanization and domestication of the Earth. It is not without significance that Greg Easterbrook, in his influential book, *Moment on the Earth*, has some good things to say about Teilhard (for the Teilhard quote, and an overall critique of the New Age movement, see Sessions, "Deep Ecology and the New Age Movement," in *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, pp. 290-310). The French postmodern deconstructionists, and their followers, seem to share this vision as well. As Paul Shepard points out ("Virtually Hunting Reality" p. 25), postmodern deconstruction "seems more like the capstone to an old story than a revolutionary perspective."

William Cronon closes his paper on wilderness by claiming that "wildness can be found anywhere" as if to temper his earlier remarks about protecting wild lands. Given his predilection for city life, perhaps here he is agreeing with Australian Ecofeminist Freya Mathews who has suggested that "perhaps here, in the heart of metropolis, Nature is at its wildest." Cronon quotes Gary Snyder as saying:

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 (p. 69).

Snyder has claimed that this quotation was taken out of context, and could be misread and misunderstood to mean that we could totally domesticate the planet and there would still be wildness. There probably would still be wildness, but with 80 to 90% of the Earth's biodiversity destroyed, it would be of little ecological significance.

The UC Davis "Reinventing Nature-Recovering the Wild" conference in October, 1993 featured Snyder's paper "The Rediscovery of Turtle Island" (published in Snyder, *A Place in Space*, 1995). Snyder criticized postmodern deconstructionists and faulted those humanists (of a "Christian, Marxist-intellectual, or semi[idi]otic" persuasion) who see the natural world as "primarily a building-supply yard for human projects." The argument has been made that few, if any, areas on the face of the Earth are "pristine" in the sense that they have not been occupied at some time or another by humans. Given this situation, the argument goes, then they should continue to be inhabited and developed. Snyder, on the other hand, makes the very important point that wilderness areas are not pristine in the sense that they have not been historically modified by humans. He suggests that "pristine" should "now be understood as virtually pristine." The wild flow of evolutionary processes and biodiversity remains in these areas, and they should be protected primarily for these reasons (for further arguments along these lines, see the exchange between J. Baird Callicott, Dave Foreman, and Reed Noss, "A Critique and Defense of the Wilderness Idea," *Wild Earth*, Winter, 1994/5).

Worster's 1990 exchange with Cronon and others of the new breed of anthropocentric environmental historians apparently has had some effect in modifying their more extreme

postmodernist positions. In the spirit of Leopold's ecocentric suggestion that humans learn to "think like a mountain," Worster concluded his "Seeing Beyond Culture" paper by claiming that:

The foremost philosophical challenge of this age, in my view, is to escape the state of nihilism, relativism, and confusion that modernistic history, and modernistic everything else, have left us in. That requires an ability to step outside ourselves, our dreams, artifacts, and domineering drives, to discover and acknowledge another, objective reality that we have not created nor ever fully controlled . . . One of humankind's oldest intuitions is that the realm of nature has an objective, independent order and coherence; that we are to some extent a part of that order . . . that, in any case, we ought to respect it (p. 1146).

Elsewhere, Worster agrees with Arne Naess, and E.O. Wilson and the other conservation biologists that "we must make our first priority in dealing with the Earth the careful and strict preservation of the billion-year-old heritage achieved by the evolution of plant and animal life. We must preserve all the species, sub-species, varieties, communities, and ecosystems that we possibly can. We must not, through our actions, cause any more species to become extinct" (in *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, p. 425).

The great debate that now has to be confronted, that will decide the fate of the Earth in the near future, is between a Disneyland theme park megatechnological consumer future with transnational corporations in control, or one in which human societies have been scaled back, humans live sane biophilic lives, and huge sections of wild Nature and biodiversity have been protected and restored.

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