Walk on the Wild Side: Teaching pragmatism, deep ecology, and local exploration

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I.   INTRODUCTION

Given the recent and well-deserved public attention to issues surrounding anthropogenic global climate change it should be obvious that teaching environmental ethics is one way professional philosophers can make a valuable social contribution. At the same time, environmental ethics is a relatively new branch of moral thought, one that has seen significant development and diversification. The urgent need to teach environmental ethics and the rapid development of ideas in the field combine to make it imperative that, on occasion, those who teach environmental ethics revisit ideas about how and what they should be teaching.

Ongoing environmental degradation and the idea that academic philosophy has not contributed as much as it can to the resolution of practical environmental problems has been reflected in a movement known as environmental pragmatism. In this paper I argue that environmental pragmatism has pedagogical implications, I describe what those requirements are, and argue that engaging students in a deep ecological practice of ecological identification, through exercises of local exploration, is an attractive way of meeting them. To set out this argument, I follow a line of thinking that connects ideas from the environmental pragmatist Andrew Light, the landscape theorist William Whyte, and the American deep ecologist Gary Snyder.

If we understand environmental pragmatism, generally, as motivated by the idea that philosophers ought to make useful contributions to finding practical solutions to pressing environmental problems, then we can recognize different ways an environmental philosopher could try to do this. First, he or she could try to provide good normative arguments in support of protective environmental policies. The right ethical theory of why parts of the non-human world deserve standing in human deliberations about what we morally ought to do could ground appropriate policy as, for example, the moral dignity of all humans underpins social legislation like the Civil Rights Act. A first generation of environmental ethicists, including J. Baird Callicott and Holmes Rolston III, can be understood this way, as struggling to identify and articulate a conception of the intrinsic value of nature for the purpose of justifying protective environmental policy. In fact, it was a perception that this strategy is failing that led to the movement known as environmental pragmatism (Light and Katz, 1996).

Second, an alternative conception adopts a pluralistic view about environmental values and aims to produce a less theoretically oriented but decidedly more practical environmental ethics. This form of environmental pragmatism has come to take two forms, an *historical* environmental pragmatism devoted to the metaphysical and epistemological views of American philosophers such as Dewey and Peirce, and a *methodological* environmental pragmatism that embraces value pluralism for the sake of policy convergence. The work of Andrew Light exemplifies the latter, while Ben Minteer and the recent work of Bryan Norton exemplify the former. (Light 2009, Minteer 2005, Norton 2005)

Finally, an environmental pragmatist could advocate actual practices that are connected with the promotion of a healthy or sound relationship between human beings (collectively and individually) and Earth's ecology. The *experience* of intentionally participating in environmentally sound practices – practices designed to promote the health and stability of the Earth's natural environment – could be connected with promoting the success of those practices. Although this third version of environmental pragmatism is not aimed directly at advancing protective environmental policy, it does contribute to a conception of sound ecological citizenship and thus promotes moving toward the establishment of a sustainable relation between human beings and the broader community of life in which we live. One place for deep ecology and the thinking of Gary Snyder in this third form of pragmatism, that is, a pragmatism focused on the idea of an ecological practice, is explored herein.

If environmental pragmatism should not be just another subtopic on the syllabus of a course in environmental ethics because, in fact, it puts requirements on the structure and content of the course, what are those requirements? To explain what I believe these implications are I will briefly outline two themes of Andrew Light's environmental pragmatism: a program of meta-theoretical value pluralism and a model of ecological citizenship. As a pragmatist, Light must intend that his ideas about ecological citizenship be useful toward real solutions to today's environmental problems (just, as he must, believe that value pluralism can be useful). One place they could be so useful, of course, is in a philosophy course on environmental ethics. The environmental practice that Light himself advocates (i.e., volunteer participation in projects of ecological restoration) is attractive for many of the reasons he argues, but also involves challenges in meeting the pedagogic requirements of environmental pragmatism, as I will explain.

Drawing on the work of William Whyte and Gary Snyder, I present what I call a practice of *ecological identification* as an alternative to volunteer participation in ecological restoration and defend it on two grounds. My

position is that a philosophy course in environmental ethics incorporating ecological identification can be a good way to meet the pedagogic implications of environmental pragmatism. Further, it can provide a surprisingly effective foil for leading students through a critical engagement with many of the important landmarks developed in philosophical environmentalism over the last thirty-five years.

The structure of the class I advocate has three main pillars: (i) a history of mainstream environmental ethics, (ii) a study of two critical responses to mainstream environmental ethics (deep ecology and environmental pragmatism), and (iii) the student's introduction to and participation in a practice of either ecological identification or ecological restoration. The heart of the class is a recognition that environmental pragmatism and deep ecology, which are sometimes thought to offer essentially different critical responses to the perceived failings of mainstream environmental ethics, can be mutually supportive. In the next section I provide a short characterization of mainstream environmental ethics and the more recent development of environmental pragmatism.

II.   THE DEMANDS OF PRAGMATISM

According to Light, "the principle question that has occupied the time of most philosophers working in the filed [of environmental ethics] is how the value of nature could best be described such that nature is directly morally considerable, in and of itself, rather than only indirectly morally considerable, because it is appreciated or needed by humans." (Light 2002, 446) This metaethical project -- to articulate and justify claims about a non-anthropocentric source of value in nature -- has dominated the field so much so that Gary Varner has called the rejection of axiological anthropocentricism one of the two dogmas of environmental ethics. (Varner 1998)[1] Well-known examples of holist theories that also attribute intrinsic value to parts of the non-human world are found in the work of Holmes Rolston III and J. Baird Callicott. (Rolston 1994 Callicott 2003)[2]
Environmental ethics was originally motivated by the idea that philosophy could make valuable contributions to resolving the growing environmental

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[1] Varner identifies the rejection of views that restrict the scope of direct moral considerabilty

to individual living organisms that are sentient, and instead of embracing some form of

"holism," as the second dogma of environmental ethics.

[2] The work of both Rolston and Callicott is volumous and widely reprinted. These are only

two of many possible examples.

crisis. For several of reasons, Light argues, if theoretical environmental ethics is dogmatically committed to non-anthropocentricism in value, then it will not be able to make such a contribution. More broadly, much of the work in mainstream environmental ethics has concerned antipodal conceptual issues, such as intrinsic versus instrumental value and anthropocentricism versus biocentercism. These theoretic discussions, often carried out in an arcane and technical language, have only isolated environmental ethicists from participating in and contributing to collaborative and interdisciplinary work aimed at finding solutions to real world environmental dilemmas. "I believe," Light writes, "that environmental ethics is, for the most part, not succeeding as an area of applied philosophy." (Light 2002, 427)

By contrast, philosophers who reject non-anthropocentricism and who tend to embrace a "practical" version of value pluralism have been working to develop views that do not "push environmental ethics away from discussion of which arguments morally motivate people to embrace more supportive environmental views." This group of theorist is referred to collectively as environmental pragmatists.[3] Concerned that a commitment to value monism (especially versions attributing an intrinsic or inherent value to parts of the non-human world) is preventing philosophers from contributing more to solving environmental problems, Light and others have been defending a kind of "practical pluralism," designed to take an advantage of the fact that the broad spectrum of people, working in different disciplines and out of different cultural contexts, are morally motivated by many different conceptions of value in nature.[4] Such a methodological environmental pragmatism, as Light calls it, aims to provide a coherent framework for the kind of pragmatic pluralism that Bryon Norton, Andrew Brennan, Anthony Weston, and others have been developing.[5] The purpose of this framework

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[3] See for example (Weston 1992, Ferre and Hartel 1994, Marietta and Embree 1995, Light and Katz 1996). Other environmental pragmatists (or at least pragmatic pluralists) include Bryon Norton, Christopher Stone, Andrew Brennan, Gary Verner, Peter Wenz, and Eugene Hargrove.

[4] Light and Katz explain how an environmental pragmatist can recognize two different kinds of value pluralism, theoretical and metatheoretical. See (Light and Katz 1996, 4).

[5] See the distinction drawn between a methodological environmental pragmatism and a "philosophical" environmental pragmatism, which more explicitly draws from the American tradition of philosophic pragmatism in (Light and Katz 1996, 5).

is to enable, according to Light, "almost any environmental ethicist to embrace [a version of "practical pluralism"]…toward the goal of promoting greater coherence between activity of formulating moral theories and the production of useful ethical tools to promote better environmental practices." (Light 2003c, 236) Methodological environmental pragmatism has two central themes: (i) the development and defense of *practical pluralism* and (ii) the philosophical articulation of environmentally sound *behavioral practices*. For now I set aside pragmatic pluralism (returning to it later) and focus on the promotion of practices that are ecological sound.

"It is an old wag among environmentalist," Light writes, "that humans have become disconnected from nature." (Light 2004, 1) To this it can now be added that much of environmental ethics has become disconnected from the cross-disciplinary and political dimensions of the broader environmental movement and has thus become incapable of making viable contributions towards finding solutions to the ongoing environmental crisis. (Light 2002A, 427) If part of the solution to this second problem is a turn away from value monism in environmental axiology (which also tends dogmatically toward non-anthropocentrism and holism) to a methodological environmental pragmatism, then what is part of the solution to the first problem? I've been outlining Light's critical views. To explore his views on reconnecting people with nature, I now turn to a brief discussion of Light's constructive work, specifically his development of a model of *ecological citizenship* and his advocacy of volunteer participation in projects of *ecological restoration.*

Citizenship, in Light's model of ecological citizenship, is more than legal membership in the population of a modern nation state.[6] Light's conception of ecological citizenship has more in common with the ancient notion of republican citizenship. Citizens of a republic, in this ancient sense, essentially belong to a body politic, which not only affords and protects their rights but also requires of them services in the ongoing life of the republic; republican citizenship requires participation in of a form of life that supports and, in cases, even constitutes the shared life of the people. Analogously, ecological citizenship is understood as a form of active membership, complete with the accompanying entitlements and obligations, in a complex system of interrelated and interdependent entities (living and non-living) that

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[6] In this thin sense, immigrants often struggle to achieve the status of citizenship that native-born individuals acquire automatically (at least in the United States.) Citizens can have a right to vote, they can be rightfully issued a passport, etcetera.

constitute both the local ecosystem in which one lives and, in turn, the larger biosphere that supports all life on Earth.[7]

So, if we were to accept that one ought to be a good citizen of an ecosystem, we might wonder: what kinds of practices would be part of a person's life *qua* good ecological citizen? Light's work here has focused on the environmental values that tend to be promoted by volunteer participation in organized projects of ecological restoration. Basically it is Light's position that volunteer participation under professional guidance in restoration ecology (i) reconnects people to the land that is within their own community and (ii) provides a basis to strengthen ties between fellow citizens thereby empowering a more active and robust democracy.[8]   One large restoration project which involved many volunteers, known as the Chicago Wilderness, has been the subject of several studies and provides empirical evidence in support of the idea that participation in ecological restoration indeed promotes the these environmental values.

Philosophic contribution to debates about the practice of restoration ecology raise questions about the value of a pristine ecosystem (would this be, for example, pre-Columbian America?) and the value (if any) of an ecosystem that is the result of intensive human intervention, aimed at reproducing features of the "original" ecosystem that was damaged or destroyed by pervious human agency. However, Light's defense of ecological restoration as a model of ecological citizenship allows him to avoid the conceptual puzzles lurking here; particularly, difficult questions about the axiological nature of restored wetlands, or watersheds, or riparian ecosystem, etcetera. If participation in restoration ecology promotes distinctly human values (e.g. strengthening not only normative relations between people and the land but also the civic relations within society) which are valuable in affecting environmental protection, then it simply does not matter about how much of the intrinsic value of an "authentic" nature may (or may not) be lost or threatened by the production of "artificial" nature through practices of human ecological restoration. (Elliott 1982, Katz 1992, Light 2003A, and Light 2003B)

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[7] Some good work on ecological citizenship can be found in (Dobson and Bell 2005, Dobson 2007, Dobson 2004, Barry 1999, and Light 2005).

[8] This is an environmental benefit by enabling citizens resist "top-down" pressures by outside, often economic forces, toward the development and other commercialization of the local landscape.

Of course, there will be many practices in addition to restoration ecology, which are part of the life of an ecological citizen. It should be obvious that simply being an advocate for environmental protection, that is, by being informed oneself and working to inform others about the many ways that values in and of the natural world are today under sever and persistent threat, is a part of being a good ecological citizen.   If this is true, then actively *teaching* environmental philosophy (for those of us in the position to do so) is an opportunity to be good ecological citizens. In fact, it seems likely that ecological citizenship will place special duties on those who teach environmental ethics professionally. If this is right, we may ask: will simply teaching environmental ethics *in anyway whatsoever* be sufficient to satisfy these duties? I believe the answer is "no." The demands of ecological citizenship have yet further implications, implications for *what* should be taught in an environmental ethics course and for *how* it should be taught. Specifically, I claim the special duty required by ecological citizenship on those whose role is to teach environmental ethics is not only to introduce, analyze, and argue about the *idea* of ecological citizenship but also to actually engage the students in a practice appropriate to good ecological citizenship. This pedagogic requirement, I claim, is an implication of accepting the framework of methodological environmental pragmatism.

I think Light offers compelling reasons to believe that participation in restoration ecology can foster values that contribute to developing sound ecological relations between people and the land and also to promoting democratic participation by strengthening civic ties between the members of a community. My position is that if environmental pragmatism involves the notion of being a good ecological citizen, then environmental educators have a special obligation to actually engage their students in a practice consistent with sound ecological citizenship. So far the only such practices that have been mentioned are (i) participating in restoration ecology and (ii) teaching environmental ethics (in a way that engages the students in a practice of ecological citizenship). Of course there will be many more practices of sound ecological citizenship (identifying them is a suitable project, on my analysis, for a pragmatically inclined environmental ethicist and her students). While Light may not have envisioned the practice of restoration ecology as a way to meet this special duty of environmental educators, none-the-less engaging students actively in a practice of ecological restoration indeed is *one way* to satisfy this duty. But ecological restoration faces several logistical difficulties from the perspective of an environmental educator, as I explain in the next section.

III.   TREMENDOUS TRIFLES
To set the stage, I want to draw attention to some influential ideas that Light attributes to William H. Whyte, a distinguished scholar of the human habitat.

In *The Last Landscape* Whyte argued how skillfully designed population density could be better for us and for the land around us than the plague of urban and suburban sprawl. (Whyte 1968/2002) His view is not aimed at dismissing the importance of wilderness preservation or the protection of endangered species but rather, as Light writes, "to raise awareness of the fact that just as important [as these environmental goals] is our relationship to each other as it is mediated by the nature closer to home…For Whyte, the brook by the side of the road was just as important, if not more important, than the grand plans for regional parks. This focus speaks to a fundamental insight by Whyte that most philosophers working in environmental ethics have forgotten, or indeed never paid heed to at all: *that our relationship to nature is ultimately shaped locally*. It is therefore in our immediate backyards – streets, parks, stream banks, and remnants of woods, prairie, or desert" where we must begin to engage in the practices of ecological citizenship. (Light 2005, 3)

Attention to local "open space" is just as important, if not more so, for fostering a sense of land stewardship and engaging in practices of ecological citizenship. Whether it is big or small, in terms of acreage, Whyte tells us that the significance of an undeveloped space, "depends on where the space is, what it is like – range, hill, woodland, marsh – what the surroundings are, how many people use the space or see it, and when." (Whyte 1968/2002, 65) Whyte, of course, is talking about planned, public spaces but it is important to remember that there is often a fair amount of local "leftover" bits of nature that have yet to be developed, are temporarily abandoned, possess a topography unsuitable for development, or are by-products of development, etcetera, which are already existing within the human dominated landscape. I think that these places are important and can be useful to the environmental pragmatist, as I discuss in the forthcoming paragraphs.

Whyte continues to hold our attention to fragments of local nature, "tremendous trifles," and Light follows him in attributing two kinds of reality to such spaces: "One is the physical open space; the other is open space as it is used and perceived by people. Of the two, the latter is the more important – it is, after all, the pay-off of the open-space action." (Whyte 1968/2002, quoted in Light 2005, 3) The pay-off here, for the environmental pragmatist, is the promise of beginning to reconnect people with nature. Light's aim is to foster an appropriate ecological perception of local bits of nature, and thus to promote the pay-off, by advocating volunteer participation in restoration ecology. But from the perspective of an environmental educator, who is also trying to foster the ideas and practices of ecological citizenship and respect for nature (under the umbrella of value pluralism, that is, for both anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric reasons), participation in traditional ecological restoration has two substantial drawbacks. First, the opportunities

available are limited in number. Large projects undertaken with public money, like the Chicago Wilderness, are relatively few and far between and frequently are carried out by professional contractors without significant opportunities for volunteer participation. Second, to the extent that such projects may be available, they are not likely to begin or end within the timeframe of the academic calendar.

Of course, there is one obvious solution to these problems: the instructor can make arrangements to initiate and carry out a much smaller-scale project of restoration ecology, for example, converting an abandoned lot into a community garden or cleaning-up trash and removing non-native vegetation from some local track of land. My purpose is to propose and argue in favour of an alternative solution -- another method for engaging in the ideas of local, hands-on environmental education, aimed at strengthening the moral relationships between people and their local environment -- a practice of ecological identification. To present the practice of ecological identification it will be useful to briefly discuss the work of Gary Snyder.

IV.   ALWAYS ALREADY WILD
In his collection of essays, *The Practice of the Wild,* Snyder provides thought-provoking consideration of many things, but his basic idea is fairly simple: when we struggle to respond to the environmental crisis, we should not conceive of the problem in terms of how human beings can coexist with the rest of non-human nature but rather we should try to think how the forces of *civilization* can coexist with the *wildness* of the natural world. (Snyder 1990) Snyder borrows this fundamental distinction from Henry David Thoreau, especially from Thoreau's essays *Walking* and *Wild Apples*, but has done much to develop and apply it in his advocacy of bio-regionalism. To make sense of this distinction I need to follow Snyder's discussion of the meaning of some key terms.

Snyder starts in an unusual place, with that "American dream-phrase," as he calls it: the dream of being "wild and free." (Snyder 1990, 5) If we are grateful for being metaphysically free, then we ought to be grateful for impermanence for, as Snyder (like William James) points out, "in a fixed universe there would be no freedom." How does this idea connect with the idea of nature? "The world is nature, and in the long run [it is] inevitably wild, because the wild, as the process and essence of nature, is also an ordering of impermanence." (Snyder 1990, 5) Were does this leave us? The essence of nature is the wild, which is an ordering of the impermanence that is necessary for being free. If we value being free, then we should value the wild, which is the essence of nature.

When Snyder turns to investigate the meaning of the word *nature* we find two distinct, but familiar, meanings. The first sense is that of the non-human: " a norm of the world that is apart from the features or products of… the human will. The machine, the artifact, the devised…is spoken of as 'unnatural'" in this sense." (Snyder 1990, 8) The second meaning is that object of our natural sciences (or what used to be called natural philosophy) and this meaning is broader: "It is the material world or its collective objects and phenomena including the products of human action and intention…[its extension is] the physical universe and all its properties." (Snyder 1990, 8) Snyder prefers to use the word "nature" in this second, broader sense.

So, if the process and essence of nature (in the second sense, which includes human beings) is the wild, we wonder: what does "the wild" mean? "*Wild*," Snyder tells us, "is largely defined in our dictionaries by what – from a human standpoint – it is not," (Snyder 1990, 9) Consider entries from the Oxford English Dictionary:

> Of animals – not tame, undomesticated, unruly.
> Of plants – not cultivated.
> Of land – uninhabited, uncultivated.
> Of food crops – produced or yielded without cultivation.
> Of societies – uncivilized, rude, resisting constituted government.
> Of individuals – unrestrained, insubordinate, licentious, dissolute, loose.
> Of behavior – violent, destructive, cruel, unruly
> Of behavior – artless, free, spontaneous.

"But it [the *wild*] cannot be seen by this approach for what it *is*." So Snyder turns it around:

> Of animals – free agents, each with its own endowments, living with natural systems.
> Of plants – self-propagating, self-maintaining, flourishing in accord with innate qualities.
> Of land – a place where the original and potential vegetation and fauna are intact and in full interaction and the landforms are entirely the result of non-human forces. Pristine.
> Of food crops – food supplies made available and stainable by the natural excess and exuberance of wild plants in their growth and in the production of quantities of fruit and seeds.
> Of societies – societies whose order has grown from within and is maintained by the force of consensus and custom rather than explicit legislation. Primary cultures, which consider themselves the original and eternal inhabitants of their territory. Societies which resist economic and political domination by civilization.

Societies whose economic system is in a close and sustainable relation to the local ecosystem.

Of individuals – following local custom, style, and etiquette without concern for the standards of the metropolis or nearest trading post. Unintimidated, self-reliant, independent.

Of behavior – fiercely resisting any oppression, confinement, or exploitation. Far-out, outrageous, "bad," admirable.

Of behavior – artless, free, spontaneous, unconditioned. Expressive, physical, openly sexual, ecstatic. (Snyder 1990, 9-10)

And what of wilderness, then? "Wilderness," Snyder tells us, "is a *place* where the wild potential is fully expressed, a diversity of living and nonliving beings flourishing according to their own sorts of order." (Snyder 1990, 12) So, pristine wilderness, on this understanding, is not those areas completely free of human presence. From this view, when we work to preserve wilderness we are not working, necessarily, to protect it from coming to evidence the presence of human beings. Snyder insists, "There has been no wilderness without some kind of human presence for several hundred thousand years." (Snyder 1990, 7) What we are trying to do is protect it from the *civilizing* tendencies of human beings; we are trying to keep them from making it too *un*-wild. And if we are not as successful as we may aspire to be in protecting wilderness from the civilizing pressures of human beings, Snyder's conception of nature, the whole natural world, as essentially wild allows a kind of promise that Bill McKibben's perspective, in his influential book *The End of Nature*, cannot afford: that "Wilderness may temporarily dwindle, but wildness won't go away." (Snyder 1990, 15)

This is the direction, it seems, for an appropriate response to the truth contained in McKibben's claim that, either with industrial revolution and the birth of the atomic bomb (as McKibben thinks) or several hundred thousand years earlier (as Snyder believes), we live in a post-natural world (when we understand "nature" in McKibben's narrow sense). If this is true, then what we need to do is to reframe the debate, for there is no point is trying to save *this* sense of nature. When Thoreau says, "Give me a wildness that no civilization can endure," Snyder replies, "it is harder to imagine a civilization that wildness can endure, yet this is just what we must try to do." (Snyder 1990, 6) Instead of asking how we can preserve the nature (in McKibben's sense) in pristine wilderness we need to ask how we who also civilize can continue to live within a wild nature (in the broader sense). So, Snyder asks, "Where do we start to resolve the dichotomy between the civilized and the wild?" (Snyder 1990, 15)

In response, Snyder observes we must recognize and *really believe* that we are animals. "We must contemplate the shared ground of our common

biological being." (Snyder 1990, 16) We must recognize that we, too, are wild animals. Our bodies are wild and operate largely without our conscious oversight.

> [T]he 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 of relaxing, staring, reflecting – all universal responses of this mammal body. (Snyder 1990, 16)

Our minds are wild;

> 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. (Snyder 1990, 16)

Language is wild;

> Language is learned in the house and in the fields, not at school. Without having ever been taught formal grammar we utter syntactically correct sentences, one after another, for all the waking hours of the years of our life. Without conscious device we constantly reach into the vast word-hoards in the depths of the wild consciousness. (Snyder 1990, 16)

Human social order is inherently wild;

> It is inherently part of what we are, and its patterns follow the same foldings, checks and balances, as flesh or stone. What we call social organization and order in government is a set of forms that have been appropriated by the calculating mind from the operating principles in nature. (Snyder 1990, 16)

We, individual human beings, are each essentially and inescapably wild. While we may lose sight of this in the hustle and pressure of our day-to-day civilized lives, it will not (in fact cannot) go away entirely. Learning to recognize and foster the wildness within us is the first step in the practice of ecological identification: the practice of conceiving (re-cognizing) one's own identity, one's self, as essentially wild.

This is Snyder's approach to his particular version of deep ecology. Deep ecology, understood as a philosophical view, is largely attributed to Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher who first used the term in 1972 to distinguish between different environmental movements (the "shallow" and

the "deep" ones) that had arisen during the course of the environmental movement of the 1960's. Deep ecological views are generally characterized by two fundamental features: (i) commitment to a biocentric theory of value and (ii) advocacy of an ecological conception of the self. In Naess' own words, deep ecology rejects, "the human-in-environment image in favor of the relational, total-field image." In Bill Devall's words, according to the perspective of deep ecology, "the person is not above or outside of nature… (but)…is part of creation on-going."[9]

This is, of course, not the place for a prolonged discussion of deep ecology. That place is reserved for the classroom.   It is worth noting here that some critics of deep ecology object to what they perceive as a misanthropic element in at least popular conceptions of the view, or they object to the idea of identifying with nature so thoroughly that we "lose the narrowness of our egos" and aspire to that rare state of enlightened identification with the whole of nature. (Bendik-Keymer 2006, 87)[10] But I hope it is clear from my discussion that Snyder's view is not open to these criticisms; Snyder does not advocate losing one's own ego by identifying with the external natural world. Rather, he prompts us to recognize that the wild essence of nature already permeates even the narrow sense of our own personal ego. It is not advice to lose oneself in nature but to recognize the wild nature that is already within one's self. Further, it is sometimes thought that a project of identifying with nature, as many understand Naess to be advocating, may lead to anything but a pragmatic response to the environmental crisis. In fact, Light contrasted his model of ecological citizenship with what he calls a model of "ecological identity." (Light 2000) This understanding of deep ecology finds in it a call for us to adopt an eco-attitude and "become one with nature" -- a response to the environmental crisis that seems to require a change only in one's attitude, not in one's actions.[11] But this is also a mistaken understanding of Snyder's deep ecology, where identifying the

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[9] Both quotes are contained in (Fox 2003, 252)

[10] It is important to note, however, that Bendik-Keymer offers these criticisms of typical and received conceptions of deep ecology within the context of his project developing the kind of deep ecological view I am here attributing to Snyder.

[11] In personal communication Light recognized and supports this distinction between the "ecological identity," – a political and cultural identity - against which he compares his model of ecological citizenship, and the version of deep ecology, or "ecological identification," (understood as a verb) that I am attributing to Snyder.

wildness of one's self is only a part of a practical response to environmental crises, that is, reconciling the dichotomy between the civilized and the wild. Snyder's development of this core idea is carried out in his accounts of first people and languages, sacred places, and bio-regionalism generally.

So this is the first half of what I mean by the practice of ecological identification: the first step in resolving the dichotomy of the civilized and the wild is to recognize that we human beings participate in both. It is important to remember and conceive of oneself as essentially wild. This is one way to meet the ends of environmental pragmatism, that is, to begin to reconnect people with nature: get them to see they could never really become disconnected – the recognition and acceptance of human wildness, to echo Snyder, may temporarily dwindle, but the wildness of human beings won't go away. This habit of mind will be manifest in many ways that will be unified as features of a single *practice* – a practice of *consciousness*, not straight forwardly a practice understood first in terms of behaviours, but it will ultimately have consequence for a person's behaviours. But in order to discuss the second part of the practice of ecological identification, and return to close my discussion of how the practice of ecological identification is one way of solving the problems for the environmental educator of participating in restoration ecology, I need to mention one more feature of Snyder's view: the importance of walking.

V.   WALKING IN THE LOCAL WILD

Rather than simply relying on this ideological, or theoretical, orientation the movement of environmental pragmatism seems to call for our finding a method, an actual practice, within which we can realize our connection with nature. The Chinese spoke of the "four dignities," Snyder tells us, "Standing, Lying, Sitting, and Walking. They are 'dignities' in that they are ways of being fully ourselves, as home in our [animal and wild] bodies, in their fundamental modes." (Snyder 1990, 99) First, it is important to see that in a practice of attentive walking we are able to recognize that we share the wild essence of the natural world. Second, to be educated about the wild nature that is close to one's home, Whyte's "tremendous trifles," requires an "experiencing of the nonhuman members of the local ecological community. Practice in the field, 'open country,' is foremost. Walking is the great adventure, the first meditation, a practice of heartiness and soul primary to humankind." (Snyder 1990, 18) So now we have the second sense of what I mean by advocating a practice of ecological identification: the searching out, or identifying, local open spaces, abandoned woods, ravines, parks, etcetera, and then experiencing them through an exploration on foot, that is, by walking.

I support Light's interest in environmental pragmatism and, especially, his attempts at developing a model of ecological citizenship by finding practices

through which people can come to form normative relations with nature through an engagement with it at, or near, their own home. "Nature is not a place to visit," Snyder's view emphasizes, "it is *home* – and within that home territory there are more familiar and less familiar places." (Snyder 1990, 7) Light encourages us to become engaged with our home territories through volunteer participation in restoration ecology. However, I believe participation in the practices of ecological identification provides an attractive alternative.

Building an academic course on environmental ethics around the practice of ecological identification involves two components, 1) an theoretical orientation to a deep ecological perspective, identifying one's self as a part of the natural world and 2) the field work, or practice, of identifying and exploring on foot those planned and unplanned bits of wild nature, Whyte's "tremendous trifles," that are able to be found within our human-dominated landscape – those bits of grass that grow up through the concrete. Ecological identification, I suggest, is a practice of ecological citizenship that does not offer the difficulties of participating in restoration ecology; it can fit comfortably within an academic calendar and is a practice that the students can take with them and engage anytime (nay, all the time) anywhere they go.

In closing I'll make some brief suggestions about the mechanics of teaching a class based on the practice of ecological identification, particularly the fieldwork aspect. Preliminary or preparatory fieldwork can be done during the first third or first half of the academic term, while the primary focus is on reading and theoretical orientation. For this I suggest assigning students, either individually or in pairs, the task of finding local bits of open space - the local tremendous trifles - that can be visited and explored later. These locations can then be identified and marked, by each group, on a single map of either the city or the county. Copies of this map could be made available to students when it is complete. The first walking explorations could be done just outside the classroom, remaining on or near the college campus. I would suggest beginning these walks by going right out the classroom door. The walking itself could take the following form: single file, follow the leader, no talking. The leader leads for an appointed period of time, walking wherever his or her will or whim may direct, and then peels off to allow the next in line to become the leader and rejoins the line at the end. Considering the number of students and the class time allotted, exactly how long each individual should lead can be easily calculated. I think one advantage to this style of walking exploration is that there is, by design, no plan, no imposition of central control and no corresponding form of order. The route will be organically determined, unpredictable, and in a word, wild. The next step is to make walking explorations of the off-campus but local sites that have previously been identified. Students can get themselves to the appointed location on time and the walking practice can again commence. Additional or

alternative projects at these sites may include each student making field observations of various wild features of the site and recording these in journals. It may be useful to sometimes have a botanist, ornithologist, or other informed naturalist accompany the group to point out and provide information to the students about the local wildlife. These kinds of exercises can be thought up either by the instructor or the group itself. What is crucial is that participants understand they are participating in an animal act, embodied locomotion, in an ancient human practice of wandering and exploring the place they live.

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