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The Role of Nature in John Muir's Conception of the Good Life

by

Randy Larsen

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

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Environmental Studies

at

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GRATITUDE

John Muir wrote that when he tried to pick anything out by itself he found it hitched to everything else in the Universe. Such is the experience of trying to recognize all those without whom I never would have finished this dissertation. The list is too long to complete. What follows is but a sampling of help received from my committee, friends and family.

Phil Cafaro's wisdom, kindness, gentle prodding, and expertise in the field have been a continual and long-standing touchstone. His ability to simultaneously challenge and support is a model to me. Joy Ackerman lifted me when I was feeling disconnected and disheartened by suggesting consistent phone conversations, to which I heartily agreed and through which I discovered newfound excitement. My advisor Mitch Thomashow introduced me to the idea of pursuing a PhD in environmental studies in the first place. He has maintained a big picture view of my work. He ushered my dissertation through the process with skill and grace and offered two pieces of advice that are still taped to my computer ~ "surrender to your work" and "take your own ideas seriously."

I hired Susan Dobra to edit my work. From the beginning, she edited, commented and supported while steadfastly refusing to take a penny for her hours of selfless work. I am more indebted to her than she could possibly know. Michael Coyle read drafts and persisted in making the case for increased clarity and organization. If you can follow what I've written much credit goes to him. Lin Jensen, with his Zen ability to get to the essence and uplifting Nature-writing skills, helped me find a poetical voice and get to the heart of the matter. Joe Corcoran continually put down what he was doing to comment on my work with insight and clarity; often giving feedback in a matter of hours. Tasha Dev gave deep consideration to the attentiveness chapter and allowed me to shoe-horn thoughts and speculations about Muir into just about any and every conversation. Becky White never one time said no when I asked if we could brainstorm on some aspect of my work. Her knowledge of Aristotle and the value she places on higher education has been a continual inspiration to me. Troy Jollimore helped me see the limits of consistency as a value and took the pressure off when I was pressing too hard. Greg Tropea, who died before I was able to complete this project, asked that I bring my newest drafts to his hospital bed; in part because he thought the work was interesting and important and in part because he cared.

My brother Larry and sister-in-law Ann gave me a place to land when I needed to get out of town to avoid distractions and focus on my work. My sister Cindy, a paragon of helpfulness, fumbled with me through formatting. When neither of us knew what we were doing she figured it out. My mother Arletta, whose belief in me is hard to comprehend, supported me in innumerable ways. She let me know she was praying for me and, knowing the heart of my mother, did so every day.

ABSTRACT

Aristotle says our best moral guidance comes from considering the lives of exemplary individuals. I explore John Muir, as an exemplar of environmental virtue, and consider the role of Nature in his conception of the good life. I argue his conception consists of a web of virtue including various goods, values, and virtues. I suggest three virtues are cardinal: attentiveness, gratitude and reverence. I explore how Muir cultivated these virtues in Nature.

I argue Muir sought freedom from a popular conception of the good life, grounded in the gilded age values of money and materialism, and was sensitive to the harms these brought to both Nature and individuals. I show that Muir was particularly aware of the effects of what he called the vice of over-industry. I argue Muir was willing to suffer extreme loneliness in order to cultivate his conception of the good life in Nature. I show that he struggled, especially in his thirties, to find a balance between freedom and community.

I show how in Nature Muir cultivated attentiveness to both his intuition and the observable world and I explore the relationship between them. I show that his rejection of anthropocentrism was based, in part, on his observations as a fully-engaged scientist. I argue attentiveness lead Muir to view wild animals as exemplars. He was especially drawn to the skill, beauty and true instinct of wild mountain sheep.

I explore the relationship between gratitude and celebration and Muir's exuberant expressions of ecstasy. I argue that while many of his friends remained stoic, his observation of the celebration of Stickeen, a small black dog, lead him to important insights into the commonality of all "our fellow mortals." I make the case that Muir was most grateful for beauty as expressed in natural harmony. I distinguish gratitude from appreciation and thankfulness by suggesting gratitude implies reciprocity, as in a debt of gratitude, and that Muir's environmental activism was motivated by wanting to reciprocate his gratitude for Nature. I also posit that through this activism Muir found increased meaning in his life; thus reflecting the nature of a truly reciprocal relationship.

I argue Paul Woodruff's framing of the term reverence offers an important environmental virtue because it positions processors as learning the limits and potentialities of their power and wisdom. Knowing one is neither all-powerful nor helpless is an essential environmental virtue because it steers clear of both apathy and hubris. I argue neither apathy nor hubris is an appropriate response to our current environmental crisis. I show how Muir was able to cultivate reverence through wild adventure.

I conclude by speculating on how President Obama's Deepwater Horizon Oil Disaster Commission might have been affected if John Muir were a member the commission.

The electronic version of this dissertation is accessible in the open-access OhioLINK ETD Center (http://etd.ohiolink.edu).

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CHAPTER ONE

PHILOSOPHY AND NATURE AT THE CENTER OF A GOOD LIFE

"The human race is challenged more than ever before to demonstrate our mastery—not over nature but of ourselves."

Rachel Carson

Introduction

On June 15, 2010, the president sat behind his desk staring into the television camera. It was a proverbial picture for the millions of viewers who associate such television talks with the important news of their lives.

Barack Obama, 17 months into his presidency, was about to speak to the first crisis he considered significant enough to warrant an oval office address.[1] Seven weeks earlier, April 22nd, Earth Day, the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig had sunk in the Gulf of Mexico, 40 miles southeast of the Louisiana coast. A failed blowout preventer was discovered two days earlier and 1.5 to 2.5 million gallons of oil began spewing into the water each day. The president spoke to the nation:

> Already, this oil spill is the worst environmental disaster America has ever faced. … Because there has never been a leak this size at this depth, stopping it has tested the limits of human technology. That's why … I assembled a team of our nation's best scientists and engineers to tackle this challenge -- a team led by Dr. Steven Chu, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist and our nation's Secretary of Energy. … A few months ago, I approved a proposal to consider new, limited offshore drilling under the assurance … that the proper technology would be in place and the necessary precautions would be taken. That obviously was not the case in the Deepwater Horizon rig. … So I've established a National Commission to understand the causes of this disaster….[2]

That the president would tap scientists and engineers to uncover technologies to curtail the gushing oil is understandable given the immediacy of the situation. The Deep

Horizon tragedy was tangible, real and threatening to destroy the ecology and economy of the entire gulf region.

Yet the president's show of confidence in technology was also emblematic of a deeper difficulty; a more fundamental issue underlying not only the specific catastrophe in the gulf but of the global environmental crisis more generally.

Many believe technology will be able to solve whatever problems we create for ourselves. It is an attitude Lewis Moncrief has called "an abiding faith in technology." It is precisely this belief, he argues, that mediates confronting our most pressing environmental challenges.[3] With trust that some current or yet to be invented technology will deliver us we have little incentive to become responsible planners of our lives. Science and technology cannot reach to the root of our environmental crises.[4] Many scientists, for many years, have been telling us just that.

More than a decade ago, the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), consisting of 1,700 of the world's leading scientists, including the majority of Nobel laureates in the sciences, issued a *Warning to Humanity.* It read in part:

> Human beings and the natural world are on a collision course. Human activities inflict harsh and often irreversible damage on the environment and on critical resources. If not checked, many of our current practices put at risk the future that we wish for human society and the plant and animal kingdoms, and may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner that we know. Fundamental changes are urgent if we are to avoid the collision our present course will bring about.… We, the undersigned, senior members of the world's scientific community, hereby, warn all humanity of what lies ahead. A great change in our stewardship of the earth and life on it is required, if vast human misery is to be avoided and our global home on this planet is not to be irretrievably mutilated.… A new ethic is required—a new attitude towards discharging our responsibility for caring for ourselves and for the earth. We must recognize the earth's limited capacity to provide for us. We must recognize its fragility. We must no longer allow it to be ravaged. This ethic must motivate a great movement; convince reluctant leaders and reluctant governments and reluctant people themselves to effect the needed changes.[5]

The UCS tell us we need a new ethic, yet for many people, especially those in policy-making positions, science and technology still offer the only hope of solving environmental problems. Who better than an engineer, they reason, to tell us about the usefulness and dangers of using oil dispersants a mile below the surface of the ocean. The reliance on scientists is predictable. For many, science seems to offer much needed, objective, and value-free solutions to emotionally laden problems. However leaving environmental questions to the "experts" doesn't guarantee objective and value-free decisions. It only guarantees that the decisions will be based on the values and assumptions of those experts.

Environmental challenges are neither exclusively, nor chiefly scientific challenges. Science is well suited to answer questions put before it, but as Amory Lovins reminds us, "The answers we get depend upon the questions we ask."[6] Environmental problems raise fundamental questions about the ends we should pursue and it is crucial that we ask questions about the sort of world we want. As Socrates insisted 2400 years ago, "We are dealing with no small matter here. But with how we ought to live."[7] We need to not only ask how to deal with oil gushing into the Gulf of Mexico, but question the very lifestyle choices which lead to the oil rigs being there in the first place.

The president's "National Commission" to "understand the causes" of the disaster includes scientists, engineers, business leaders, and politicians.[8] Though this commission may be expert in uncovering mechanical and human errors it is unlikely to be equipped or even interested in exploring deeper attitudinal causes. The president appointed no philosophers, those most directly trained in value thinking and causal reasoning, to his commission. Yet human-caused environmental disasters, such as the one in the gulf, raise fundamental philosophical questions about the kind of beings we are, what we value, how we

can flourish on this planet, and how we ought to live. If we are serious about examining the choices behind our actions philosophy can play a vital role.

In this chapter I will 1) briefly describe environmental virtue ethics, 2) present the relevant parts of Aristotelian ethical theory, 3) consider the gap in the current literature, 4) introduce John Muir and frame the rest of the study.

Environmental Virtue Ethics

The branch of philosophy that has been most dedicated to environmental issues, environmental ethics, is a peculiar hybrid in that it is grounded in one of the oldest academic traditions (philosophy) as well as one of the youngest (environmental studies). Modern ethical theory has often highlighted the importance of rules by focusing on questions of right and wrong or good and bad and deliberating about which rule should guide our actions. However, I have come to believe that the new ethic that the UCS is desperately urging us to find has its roots in a very old ethic that reaches back to ancient Greece: *virtue ethics*.

Virtue ethics focuses not on ethical rules but on character development and an exploration of what it is to live a good life. Its purpose is to guide humans to excellence of character and toward living rich and fulfilling lives. A recent branch of virtue ethics, *environmental virtue ethics*, focuses on helping humans become better citizens of the planet, more excellent earthlings.

Environmental virtue ethics is a powerful and effective way to cultivate an environmentally sensitive character, one which will be more apt to make better decisions with regard to the health of our planet. The environmental virtue ethicist would claim that the best way to avert environmental disaster is to become more excellent human beings and lead better lives. As human values and lifestyles increasingly affect the entire planet, Socrates' question

about how we ought to live takes on a heightened sense of urgency.

The Relevance of Aristotle

Virtue ethics is one the oldest normative theories in western philosophy. Plato believed an integral part of the quest for truth was exploring the nature of virtues such as piety, courage, and justice. Greek playwrights and epic poets such as Sophocles and Homer utilized virtues and vices to reveal the morality of their heroes and villains. But the first systematic account of virtue ethics was written in 350 BCE. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* both reflected and advanced the ethical principles of his time. [9]

Virtue ethics was the prevalent form of ethical thinking throughout ancient Greece but up until recently had become, quite literally, ancient history. Theories abound over exactly how virtue ethics was so completely supplanted by rule ethics, but at least three things can be said without qualification: [10] First, by the time the Enlightenment project was in full swing, virtue ethics had been almost entirely displaced by rule-based ethics. Second, beginning in the late 1950's, many philosophers began to revisit the ethical world of ancient Athens. Third, in the last couple of decades, virtue ethics has begun to grab the attention of environmental ethicists looking for more effective ways to do applied environmental ethics.

Many modern environmental virtue ethicists have found in Aristotle's writings an inspiring vision for a new way to do environmental ethics. But because of his static view of human society or questionable biological metaphysics or any number of other difficult to reconcile philosophical positions most have moved beyond his work.[11] Today, more often than not, Aristotle's writing acts as a spring board for environmental ethicists who sift through his work and utilize the parts that are helpful and let go of the parts that are not. Two particularly relevant and significant aspects of Aristotle's work are at the center of this paper: 1) the essential

importance of living a good life, 2) the role of the exemplar in helping one live that life.

The Good Life

Aristotle called the goal of the ethical life *eudemonia. Eudemonia* is often translated as "happiness." The literal translation is "possessed of a good demon." More accurately, it can be understood as "fulfillment" or "excellence" or "human flourishing." On several occasions, Aristotle simply called this goal "the good" or "the good life."

Aristotle's notion of happiness is more expansive than our current notions of happiness. He is concerned with the full maturity of human life, the fruition of human development.[12] For Aristotle, the good life is an achievement, at the apex of all worthwhile striving and, unless destroyed, enduring. It is a state of being, not a mere feeling. [13]

The goal is eudemonia and the means to the goal is leading a life of virtue, but for Aristotle the end is "internal" rather than "external" to the means. By that I mean the end cannot be "adequately characterized independently of a characterization of the means."[14] Although there is a goal in sight, pursuit of the goal and attainment of the goal are one and the same. This is an ongoing, constantly-striven-for-but-never-perfected practice.[15] Consider how the virtues are developed. How does one become brave on Aristotle's account? Practice courageous acts. How does one become liberal? Practice acting liberally. How does one become compassionate? Practice behaving compassionately. To achieve the good life*,* one embodies the virtues. One embodies the virtues by practicing the virtues. This very practice is both the path to and the end of a good life.

The Role of Exemplars

Essential to the virtue ethics project is the exemplar, or role model. Because virtue ethics offers no abstract rules, much of its moral guidance comes in the form of what we

learn by studying exemplary individuals. Exemplars, individuals who embody virtue and excellence, are central to virtue ethics. Exemplars show us how a particular virtue might be cultivated or how it might express itself within a concrete existence and what a good life might look like. This is an infrequently explored yet particularly dynamic area for environmental virtue ethicists. The study of environmental exemplars is a fascinating field rich with possibilities.

At least three important reasons recommend the study of role models: 1) The flexible guidance they offer, 2) the focus on commonality they encourage and, 3) the essential question of how ought we to live that they highlight.

Flexible Guidance

At the heart of the study of any ethics is a search for moral guidance. One of the beauties of virtue ethics is that, unlike many rule-based ethical theories, the guidance it offers is flexible. Some argue that because virtue ethics offers no specific rules to follow, it is of limited use. [16] Yet virtue ethics' flexibility and situational sensitivity reflects a truth about the imprecise nature of ethics: Because of the dynamic nature of the world in which we live, some dilemmas are, in fact, irresolvable.[17] The flexible guidance offered by virtue ethics addresses this by emphasizing practical wisdom, which prioritizes process over resolution.

Virtue ethics emphasizes the development of practical wisdom and moral judgment, or what Aristotle called *phronesis*. Knowing what to do is not a matter of internalizing a particular abstract principle but of participating in a life-long process of moral learning that will provide clear answers only when one reaches moral maturity. For the morally immature, rules can be helpful parameters, because they eliminate gross mistakes. But as we mature, we move away from abstract rules and toward discernment and practical wisdom.

Aristotle says in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that we should not expect a greater exactness than our area of study allows. In practicing ethics, we are not dealing with computers or mathematics; our “area of study” is human lives. We are trying to establish a helpful way to proceed in a wonderfully diverse yet inexact field of study. The suggestion that ethics lacks certitude may be difficult for those who wish ethics to be an exact science, but for virtue ethicists, it is a given.

Admittedly, it is not easy to judge behavior without abstract criteria for judgment. But such difficulty should not be a detriment to the pursuit of the good life. Certainly, the ancient moralists were under no illusion that an ethical life was easy to live.

Commonality

The second reason to study role models is the spotlight such a study shines on our commonalities. Though we live in a world of great diversity, a study of virtue ethics suggests that what we have in common is more essential than our differences. It is our commonalities that matter most. Our exemplars are, like us, not abstractions. They lead concrete lives. It is helpful to understand how other people have dealt with or are dealing with challenges, success, and failure. This understanding provides a link to humanity throughout time and helps build understanding, kinship, and a shared sense of human experience. A study of exemplars allows us to focus on the positive aspects of other’s lives and what works well. Later I will opine that exemplars may be found not only in the human world but in the non-human world as well. This expands even farther the focus of our commonality.

How Ought We to Live

The third reason to study role models is that it highlights the important question “how ought we to live?” We live in an age which is suffering from not only an environmental crisis

but also a crisis of value. When we study the good lives of others we have a chance to reflect and engage in dialectic with the reading. Is that how I would do that? Is that true for me also? What can I learn here? Role models need not tell us what to think, but the study of a life well lived tells us what to think about. That is a helpful start. We can take it from there.

A Glacial Gorge in the Literature

The study of environmental exemplars, as a distinct field in environmental ethics, began to blossom only in the last decade.[18] Phil Cafaro has completed the most thorough philosophical work in this area. Cafaro has studied the lives of Henry David Thoreau, Rachel Carson, and Aldo Leopold. He states:

> Any environmental virtue ethics worthy of the name must . . . include: 1) A desire to put economic life in its proper place—that is, as a support for comfortable and decent human lives, rather than as an engine powering endlessly more acquisition and consumption . . . ; 2) A commitment to science, combined with an appreciation of its limits . . . ; 3) Nonanthropocentrism; 4) An appreciation of the wild and support for wilderness protection . . . ; and 5) A bedrock belief that life is good: both human and nonhuman.[19]

After a careful analysis of the lives of Thoreau, Carson, and Leopold, Cafaro concludes that these three make exceptionally good role models because they incorporated all five aspects of environmental virtue into their lives.[20]

The list of scholarly publications in the area of exemplars of environmental virtue is short. Along with Cafaro, Kathleen Moore has also explored the exemplary nature of the life of Rachel Carson.[21] Moore upholds the moral significance of the sense of wonder—a propensity to respond with delight, awe, or yearning to what is beautiful and mysterious when it unexpectedly reveals itself —and believes Carson demonstrated an exceptional ability to cultivate the virtue of wonder. Moore argues wonder is a keystone virtue that can offer a sense of hope and restraint in this time of reckless destruction and that Carson's life

shows how this can be done. Charles List looks to Aldo Leopold as an environmental exemplar. List argues that the answer to the question of how to cultivate and transmit environmental virtue can be found in "wild leisure."[22] He maintains Aristotle's classical view of leisure is a good starting point to talk about wild leisure and that Leopold thought leisure was important enough to associate it with his land ethic. List argues the central virtue required by an ecological conscience is an offshoot of the combination of the virtues of moderation and wild leisure, and that Leopold's life was illustrative of this virtue. Bill Shaw offers a more focused analysis of the virtue ethics approach of Aldo Leopold as explicated in Leopold's *Land Ethic*. Shaw highlights three virtues cultivated by Leopold that he argues are found in the *Land Ethic*: respect, prudence, and practical wisdom. Shaw argues that practical wisdom permeated the other two virtues and that ultimately Leopold's life and philosophy were paragons of environmental sustainability. Shaw suggests that Leopold understood the good life as consisting not of happiness but rather of harmony within the biotic community.[23] To my knowledge the writings listed above constitute an exhaustive list of the carefully studied lives of environmental heroes as exemplars of environmental virtue. [24]

John Muir is of particular interest to me. His singular place in the modern environmental movement is well understood. And yet to date no philosophical writings have been published about the life of John Muir as an environmental exemplar. The apparent link between his time in wilderness, his effective environmental advocacy, and the good life makes Muir a prime candidate to study in order to learn more about environmental virtue. A careful philosophical study of the life of John Muir might help us in our pursuit to live better lives and become more environmentally virtuous. To that end the operative question of this dissertation is: *What was the role of Nature for John Muir in leading the good life?* [25]

John Muir and Framing the Study

When John Muir was a teenager his family moved from Fountain Lake Farm, Wisconsin, to nearby Hickory Hill. Muir's father had visions of expansion and Hickory Hill encompassed a larger tract of land. The new land had no accessible water, and Muir's domineering father had determined that a well must be dug and John would do the digging. The well was to be ninety feet deep with all but the first ten feet or so in finely grained sandstone. Each morning, after being lowered into the well in a wooden water bucket, John would sit cramped in a space about three feet in diameter and chip away at the sandstone with a mason chisel. It was painfully slow and tedious work.

One night, when the well was about eighty feet deep, it filled with deadly carbonic acid gas. The next morning, John was lowered into the well and immediately began to sway back and forth from the effects of the poison. He was about to lean back against the well wall, fall asleep, and die, when he chanced to look up and see the overhanging branch of a bur oak tree. The oak reminded him of life outside the well. He feebly cried out to his father "take me out." As his father began to crank on the windlass he quickly realized John was not in the bucket. He shouted out in wild alarm, "Get in! Get in the bucket and hold on! Hold on!" Somehow, Muir did not remember how, he managed to crawl into the bucket. He was dragged out of the well violently gasping for breath.[26]

Many years later while wandering in the Sierra, Muir recalled this story. In his notebook, he scribbled this warning:

> Once I was let down into a deep well into which choke-damp has settled, and nearly lost my life. The deeper I was immersed in the invisible poison, the less capable I became of willing measures of escape from it. And in just this condition are those who toil or dawdle or dissipate in the crowded towns, in the sinks of commerce or pleasure.[27]

What saved Muir's life in this allegory was his vision of Nature. If the "branch of the blessed bur oak" had not reminded him that there was life above he would not have been able to rile himself and escape the poison. When stuck one often forgets there are other options.

The well story is more than a metaphor for the role of Nature in living a good life. It is an allegory for the condition of being so enmeshed in toxicity that one can't even muster the energy to make a decision about getting free. He returned to these themes repeatedly, exploring and developing them through his writing. The basic formulation is this: There is a good life to be lived if we can brush off apathy and inertia, energize ourselves, escape an over-domesticated life, and let Nature save us. Muir's literature is rife with examples of how to meet this challenge and with warnings of how to avoid poisonous ways of thinking and living.

Nature and the Good Life

By all accounts John Muir had a dazzling array of social skills and certainly these were central to his character. *Dear Papa* is a collection of letters between John and his daughter Wanda. These letters reveal a highly sensitive and even doting father, filled with conviction and love for his family.[28] The beneficiaries of Muir's love went beyond family. President Theodore Roosevelt said of Muir that "no man ever had more friends." Accounts of his skill as a conversationalist and storyteller are legion. But the focus of this study is not on John Muir's complete conception of the good life but rather on the role of Nature in John Muir's conception of the life well lived.

My reasoning is three fold: 1) A specific focus on one aspect of the life of an environmental exemplar will allow for a richer, more bounded exploration, 2) More than most people, John Muir was concerned with working out a proper relationship between Nature and culture, believing that most people erred on the side of too many creature comforts and thus too

much culture,[29] 3) Dare I suggest that if Muir were around he would have wanted it this way? He dedicated his life to enticing people to look at Nature's loveliness. It is his passion for and dedication to Nature that makes him exemplary. It is in his thoughts and writings about Nature, not his social skills, where he is most deeply engaged and inspiring. [30] Muir's famous invitation to allow Nature to enrich our lives is typical of his attitude.

> "Camp out among the grass and gentians of glacier meadows, in craggy garden nooks full of Nature's darlings. Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves."[31,]

The Good Life Characterized

The phrases "the good life" or "a good life" can seem vague and easy to misconstrue. The most straight forward way to understand the phrases are as referring to a good life for the person living it. This is one of the most fundamental human questions. On our death beds will be able to look back and say, "I lived a good life."

However, many environmental virtue ethicists are keenly aware of the concern that virtue ethics might turn basic questions in environmental ethics upside down. Focusing on what the good life is to an individual can create complications for an ethics which was founded on the idea of taking a more holistic view.[32] Therefore, many environmental virtue ethicists understand "a good life" as one which is good for more than just the person living it but is good for others as well; both other humans and the larger biological community.

One of the reasons that Muir makes such an excellent exemplar is because we find so little tension between these two ideas. For Muir the good life included a life that was good for the larger community. "I live only to entice others to look at Nature's beauty" may be a bit hyperbolic but it gets to something fundamental about Muir's value system and the importance that Nature had to him. He found his voice and calling when he was speaking for

the good of Nature. From a larger perspective, a life which is good for a fierce and effective environmentalist like Muir is good in some larger sense because of his effectiveness.

Throughout this dissertation I'll be discussing some aspects of virtues cultivated by Muir which are seemingly more specific to Muir's life. At other times I'll be discussing aspects of virtues he cultivated which were more relevant to the good of life in the larger holistic sense. When aspects of a virtue have more specific application to environmental protection or important questions in environmental ethics I will indicate that.

It is important to keep in mind that exemplars shouldn't be perfect, least we might have difficulty relating to them. By looking at what worked for Muir and struggles he may have had we can reflect upon our own lives asking if the same is true for us and if we would choose to respond in a similar way. This is the project of environmental virtue ethics; to examine our own lives while reflecting upon the lives of exemplars.

A Web of Virtue

Modern virtue ethicists have found great value in Aristotle's holistic approach to balancing virtues. Precisely because virtues are not rules, the virtuous person is constantly in the process of using and developing good judgment with regard to how and when to apply which virtue in what situation. Given the same situation, two different people may act differently and yet virtuously. Similarly, the same person may have more than one virtuous action available. The virtuous person is striving for excellence, not perfection.

Muir famously wrote, "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe. One fancies a heart like our own must be beating in every crystal and cell."[33] The passage is better known than the context. Interestingly enough, Muir was talking about his frustration with writing for publication and his limited ability to fairly

portray any single aspect of the natural world distinct from the rest. But he may as well have been referring to virtue and the difficulty in trying to describe one virtue or virtuous action separate from another.[34] Muir doesn't present a consciously developed virtue ethic. In fact the words "virtue" and "vice" rarely occur in his collected body of work. Yet his writings contain a wide range of traditional and innovative virtues and vices, and his conception of various aspects of a good life is articulated and explored.

Perhaps because Muir was generally holistic in his thinking the virtues and goods he commends seem to form a particularly dense web which is difficult to tease out. Some aspects of his conception of good living are obviously more central than others, yet there is much overlap. The boundaries are fuzzy. Thus the image of a web of virtue seems fitting when exploring Muir's world of virtue.

Although Muir seldom used the language of moral excellence, his writing was robust in commending aspects he believed were essential to living a good life.[35] His view was not in line with the popular conception of his day or of ours (a conception I'll explore more fully in the next chapter). It is remarkable how often he directly contrasts his view of a good life with what he saw as its antithesis. For example, he contrasts spiritualism with materialism; trust with fear; sickness with health, freedom with bondage, etc. He purposely and frequently set up divisions between virtue and vice, the former leading to a good life and the latter competing with it, and these divisions are often linked within a single passage. [36]

The following is a list of the main virtues, goods, and values cultivated in or associated with Nature that Muir commends as central to living a good life. The list gives a fair "outline sketch" [37] if incomplete rendering of the role Nature plays in Muir's conception of the good life.[38]

Goods = components of a good life.

Values = ideas or philosophies associated with (derived from or supportive of) a good life.

Virtues = character traits or skills that lead toward flourishing.

Goods

Communion
Inspiration
Spiritualism
Enjoyment
Enrichment
Health (Body and Soul)
Natural
Beauty
Freedom
Adventure

Values

Love
Trust
Celebration
Mystery
Non-Anthropocentrism
Harmony
Oneness
Simplicity

Cardinal Virtues

Attentiveness
Gratitude
Reverence

Satellite Virtues

Curiosity
Kindness
Wisdom
Energy

The list is fluid and the categorization is loose. Values, virtues and goods can and often do overlap. We can find many variants of each. For example, adventure is listed as a good but a sense of adventure or adventurousness could be listed as a virtue; beauty is listed as a good but a keen ability to recognize or appreciate beauty could be understood as a virtue or a value; physical health is listed as a good but a healthy spirit might be understood as a virtue.

Some argue that virtues and goods are equally important in delineating a good life, though some early theorists, especially the early Christian philosophers, held that virtues were more important than goods because they are more essentially who we are. Nevertheless, virtues, goods, and values are all facets of Muir's ideal of a flourishing life. If we understand these as inter-connected elements, as a web of virtue, we can gain some insight into the relationship between what he saw as fundamental aspects of living a good life.

Muir sings the praises of some aspects of a good life more loudly than others. The virtues that he praises most vociferously I have labeled the cardinal virtues. They act as anchor points and launching pads from which to dive into the web and explore the myriad aspects of the good life. I will devote a single chapter to each of these cardinal virtues: attentiveness, gratitude, and reverence. The satellite virtues, values, and goods will be woven into the discussion throughout.

The oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico is a highly publicized example of a larger environmental crisis that sounds a clarion call for the field of environmental ethics. The UCS has warned us that we need a new ethic and attitude if we are to avert ecological disaster. There is an urgency to move with haste to incorporate more practice into our theory. The careful study of role models, such as John Muir, can offer us not only deeper understanding of effective environmental activism, but also new insights into the role of Nature in living good lives.

In the next chapter I'll explore the popular conception of the good life from which Muir strove to be free. This freedom was crucial as he aspired to live with Nature and cultivate his own good life.

CHAPTER TWO

FREEDOM FROM

When Muir first landed in San Francisco in March of 1868, he saw nothing but the "ugliness of commercialism."[39] He stopped a carpenter carrying tools up Market Street, and as if the tools and the street name symbolized all that he did not value, Muir asked the man for the quickest way out of town. "But where do you want to go?" asked the carpenter. "Anywhere that is wild," said Muir. Later he reflected, "He seemed to fear I might be crazy and therefore the sooner I got out of town the better, so he directed me to the Oakland ferry."[40]

Muir took a circuitous, month-long route to find Yosemite. Along the way, he described the air as a "flavor" to be savored, a "taste that thrilled through the lungs and throughout every tissue of the body."[41] In the California Central Valley, he stood knee deep in a vast carpet of gold, purple, and white flowers; looking eastward he saw an unfenced, sun-filled valley, stretching over four hundred miles long and a hundred miles across. Beyond the colorful plains stood rich, green forests and the distant Sierra, an even uninterrupted hedge of granite peaks. It was "a scene of peerless grandeur." [42]

Muir measured out one square yard and, mixing botany with amazement, sat down to record the flora. In that space he recorded 16 distinct flower species. He counted a total of 7,260 flowers, and when considering the multiple heads of some varieties he tallied 165,912. He saw thousands of grass panicles and millions of minute mosses. He wrote to a friend he had found the true Florida, the real land of flowers. "Here it is not as in our great western

prairie, flowers sprinkled in the grass, but grass in the flowers."[43] Reflecting on where he found himself and from where he had come he announced "the freedom I felt was exhilarating." [44]

Philosopher Isaiah Berlin says the word 'freedom' can have at least two distinct meanings. He makes an important distinction between *negative liberty* and *positive liberty*. Negative liberty is *freedom from,* as in independence from external and internal constraints. Often these restraints come in the form of overly complex, cluttered, confusing, and chaotic lives. Positive liberty is *freedom to,* as in an ability to do what we choose in order to make our lives meaningful.[45] These two types of freedom are not necessarily linked but often are, as they were in the encounter that introduces this chapter, in which Muir was seeking freedom from the ugliness of commercialism and freedom to experience the wild.

In the final chapters of this dissertation, I will show that virtues Muir cultivated in Nature were essential aspects of his conception of the good life. Muir's conception of the good life was not the typical conception and to the extent he found *freedom from* constraints of the popular conception of the good life, he had *freedom to* cultivate his own. In this chapter, I will show how having freedom from the popular conception of the good life was an essential part of his own conception of the good life. Specifically, I'll explain 1) the popular conception of the good life 2) harms caused by the popular conception of the good life 3) loneliness as a price for freedom.

The Popular Conception of the Good Life

The Gilded Age

In September of 1869, Muir sent a letter to his brother David. He enclosed $290 for university expenses for two of their siblings and reminded David of the $500 he had deposited in a reserve fund to be kept for the needs of any other family members. Then he wrote,

> I start tomorrow for the mountains—the Yosemite.… I know that looking from the business standpoint you now occupy you will say that I am silly and imprudent, and

> that I value my time at too cheap a rate. Well, ahem, I have not time to make a long defense. The winter storms of the Sierra are not easily borne, but I am bewitched, enchanted, and must go.[46]

His brother would not have been alone in thinking John silly and imprudent. Muir was dismissing the allure of accumulating wealth which is an integral part of the popular conception of the good life.

During the post-Civil War and post-Reconstruction era, the acquisition of wealth was promoted from *an* American value to *the* American value. Ambitious and imaginative capitalists ranged the continent looking for new money-making opportunities (which often had disastrous effects on the environment). Between 1865 and 1890, the U.S. economy grew at the fastest rate in its history, a national transportation and communication network was created, and the corporation, recognized as having the rights of persons by the Supreme Court, became the primary form of business organization. The transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869 as people poured into California. The nation's population doubled between 1865 and 1890.[47]

Mark Twain coined the term "gilded age" to ridicule the superficial, pretentious display of an era glittering on the surface but morally corrupt beneath.[48] The mores of the gilded age reached from Twain's Connecticut to Muir's California and would soon set the tone for the American value system into the 21st century.[49]

The values of gilded age were gaining momentum when Muir arrived in California. As silly and imprudent as he may have seemed to many of his contemporaries, Muir did not consider the pursuit of money and materialism essential aspects of the good life. Rather he considered the craving for material wealth a type of mental illness.

> A little money we all need nowadays, but there is nothing about the getting it that should rob us of our wits.… no sane man will allow it to blind him and draw him away from the real blessings of existence. Life is too short to allow much time for money-making.[50]

It is this conception of the good life grounded in the pursuit of money and materialism from which Muir wanted freedom. He believed pursuing it created great harm to both Nature as a whole and for individual humans.

Harms Caused by the Popular Conception of the Good Life

Harm to Nature

In 1868, when Muir was looking over the Central Valley carpet of flowers for the first time he was seeing California at a pivotal juncture. With a strong pair of binoculars one might have seen a few cows grazing creek-side but the Anglo footprint was still inconsequential.[51] In 1868, only six million out of nearly 100 million irrigable acres had been plowed or grazed. Later looking back at those initial views of the valley, Muir reflected, "Cattle and cultivation were making few scars as yet."[52] But the valley would soon be transformed. Within five years, the Central Valley Project would be proposed. Rivers and streams would be drained, diverted and filled; riparian habitat, golden poppies and purple lupines would be turned into the nation's largest irrigation systems and municipal water supplies.[53]

As the industrial revolution and its means of production and distribution moved into California the pursuit of money and materialism followed. Muir saw the Natural environment become overwhelmed and believed the destruction was the product of "devotees of ravaging commercialism," "temple destroyers," who had "a perfect contempt for Nature." They did not lift their eyes to the God of the mountains, to Nature, to virtue, to beauty, love, or life. They lifted their eyes "to the almighty dollar"[54]:

> Everything without exception, even to souls and geography, would be sold for money could a market be found for such articles.[55]

Souls sold for money speaks to how deeply entrenched Muir saw the attachment to a pursuit of money and materialism. He never questioned that the essential problem was philosophical; or that the pursuit of money and materialism was an attitude inherently antagonistic to the natural world.

Perhaps nothing is more symbolic of the values of the gilded age than the California Gold Rush. Beginning in 1849, word of the discovery of gold in California spread, and an overwhelming number of gold-seekers began to arrive from every continent. Imagine an environmental impact report for the California Gold Rush as miners swarmed the Sierra Nevada. Rivers and streams were dammed, over-fished, rearranged, and choked with debris and everlasting mercury. Ground water was contaminated with arsenic and cyanide. Hillsides were destabilized by hydraulic mining, creating vast floods; old-growth forests were denuded because the mining industry needed massive amounts of wood to fuel boilers at the mines and to build extensive canal systems. Valley meadows were filled with livestock, introducing diseases, displacing native plants, and ousting native tribes—all in the pursuit of gold.[56]

Muir arrived in California at the height of the Gold Rush and raged against the environmental destruction it wrought. He also observed something else happening beyond the obvious harm to Nature. He saw the effects of pursuing gold on those who pursued it and was convinced it was not good for them.

> Drifts and tunnels in the rocks may perhaps be regarded as the prayers of the prospector, offered for the wealth he so earnestly craves. But like prayers of any kind not in harmony with Nature, they are unanswered.[57]

Gold seekers too often “become insane” and “strike about blindly in the dark like raving madmen.”[58] Such was his view of the effect of the values of the gilded age on those who pursued such values. Such a conception of the good life could result not only in a ravaging of Nature but also of people’s lives. Money could finance material pantheons such as Vanderbilt’s *Breakers*, the quintessential architectural manifestation of the gilded age, but *eudemonia* could not be bought.[59]

Harmful to Individuals

Muir repeatedly used the word “bondage” to describe the situation of people immersed in a value system grounded in the gilded aged. He personally suffered in its pursuit (as we shall see) and believed the majority of Americans pursuing it suffered as well.

When Muir first arrived in the Sierra he recognized, but barely, that he needed money to do what he wanted to do. He viewed money as a means to an end but not as something good in itself. He saw in the people of his time, however, an entirely different attitude:

> Few in these hot, dim, friction times are quite sane or free; choked with care like clocks full of dust, laboriously doing so much good and making so much money—or so little—they are no longer good for themselves.[60]

Far from liberating, in these “ravaging money-mad days,” Muir believed the dogged pursuit of material wealth was a type of self-defeating, self-perpetuating bondage bringing irrationality and obsession.[61] From Muir’s perspective, a pursuit of money and materialism is linked to specific habits which lead to harm. One such habit with which he was particularly sensitive and familiar is what he called the vice of over-industry.

The Vice of Over-Industry

In the first chapter I wrote of the Muir family relocation to a large, waterless, farm. John was overcome and almost killed by carbonic acid gas which had seeped into the well his father had instructed him to dig. Muir says the move to the larger farm and association need for a new well was the consequence of his father's "vice of over-industry."[62] John had protested the move, saying if people lived on smaller tracts of land, they would be less likely to sacrifice vital aspects of living for the sake of getting rich. Although he argued "living is more important than getting a living," his opinion carried little weight, and his family moved to the larger farm and began working the land and themselves tirelessly.[63] To Muir over-industry represents a mindless pursuit that he believed as categorically counter to not only the good life but to life itself.

> In those days … it often seemed to me that our fierce, over industrious way of getting the grain from the ground was closely connected with grave digging. The staff of life, naturally beautiful, oftentimes suggested the grave digger's spade. Men and boys, and in those days even women and girls, were cut down while cutting the wheat.…We were all made slaves through the vice of over-industry.[64]

Muir's choice of the image of slavery is instructive. Slavery as a metaphor indicates his belief of the insidiousness of over-industry's effect on freedom. Muir recognized the grip of over-industry can be so tight that one often forgets there are other choices. Muir tended to believe people were not so much oppressed as victimized by their own inclination to conform to societal norms. In this sense, to extend Muir's metaphor, over-industry fosters a situation where the self is both slave and slave owner. This was not only Muir's critique of the masses it soon become a self critique as well.

After a time of living fairly free in the mountains of California and elsewhere Muir would again come to experience the effects of over-industry. This time the decisions leading toward bondage were not his father's but his own.

Family Bonds

At age 42, Muir married and began raising a family. For the better part of a decade he worked relentlessly though ambivalently cultivating a fruit orchard in Martinez, California. He discovered he was not immune to the effects of his own over-industry. The record of this time is thin and Muir's previously lavish journal entries praising Nature became sparse. Instead we read of a devoted husband and doting father who was often under great stress. In college, exhausted and worried about the Civil War, he had hiked into the Canadian wilderness and returned rejuvenated and healthier. But the younger Muir who was skilled at revitalizing his spirits now seldom made it to the mountains.

During these demanding days of full-time farm management, the editor of the *Overland Monthly* magazine asked Muir to write an article about the Sierra. Muir responded,

> I am lost & choked in agricultural needs & am almost beyond the memory even of literary work so that much as I should like to give you the article you want I am not able or nearly able to do so. Work is coming upon me from near & far & at present I cannot see how I am to escape its degrading vicious effects. Get someone to write an article on the vice of overindustry, it is greatly needed in these times of horticultural storms.[65]

In 1883, his friend from Alaska and former trekking buddy, Reverend S. Hall Young, came to the Martinez ranch for a visit. Young says Muir broke into a "passionate" voicing of his discontent. "I am losing precious days" Muir told Young. "I am degenerating into a machine for making money. I am learning nothing in this trivial world of men. I must break away and get out into the mountains to learn the news."[66]

Five years later Young again visited Muir and found him still lamenting his situation.

> I am a horrible example. I, who have breathed the mountain air—who have really loved a life of freedom—condemned to penal servitude with these miserable little bald-heads! (holding up a bunch of cherries). Boxing them up; putting them in prison! And for money! Man! I'm like to die of the shame of it.[67]

In a letter to his brother David in August 1887, Muir wrote, "I am all nerve-shaken and lean as a crow—loaded with care, work, and worry." [68]

By all accounts farming life was taking its toll on Muir's health. It was his wife Louise Wanda who finally released Muir from the "penal servitude." Believing the family had ample money she prepared to sell or lease much of their ranch. In a touching letter she explained to John that she had seen a devoted husband and father give too much of himself. She urged him to give more of himself to Nature in order to feel strong and at peace and to devote himself to his Nature writing. She ended the letter saying,

> A ranch that needs and takes the sacrifice of a noble life, or work, ought to be flung away beyond all reach and power for harm.… The Alaska book and the Yosemite book, dear John, must be written, and you need to be your own self, well and strong, to make them worthy of you. There is nothing that has a right to be considered beside this except the welfare of our children.[69]

At Louise's urging, John visited Lake Tahoe and mounts Shasta and Rainer with his good friend William Keith.[70] During this excursion Muir affirmed his commitment to wilderness preservation. When he saw rampant "commercialism and destruction," he was appalled to learn that this was happening while he was too consumed with "money-grubbing" to protest.[71]

Camping at the base of mount Rainer, feeling unwell, unfit, and unprepared, the fifty-year old Muir had no intention of climbing the mountain. Encouraged by a group of much younger men, Muir found himself overcome by enthusiasm. He wrote to his wife, "Did not mean to climb it but got excited and was on top."[72]

Hard Work and Over-Industry

Muir did not distinguish in his writing between hard work and what he called over-industry but he clearly saw a difference. [73] The difference does not hinge on the type of work, physical, intellectual etc., but rather with the intention behind it. Hard work may improve one's circumstances whereas over-industry leads one away from rather toward a flourishing life. [74] The distinction is reflected in the letter mentioned above from Louie Wanda to John as she was encouraging him to focus on his Nature writing and spend less of his time working on the farm.

As we will see in the next chapter Muir worked long and hard as he tried to hone his craft as a writer. He never used the phrase over-industry to describe his writing practice or preservation work or the climbing of steep mountains or building campfires although each of these may have been in some sense hard work. Flourishing requires dedicated effort but Muir saved the phrase over-industry for toil and drudgery which were at best distractions from the good life.

His choice of the phrase over-industry is a commentary on the time in which he was writing; the industrial revolution. The words industry and industriousness are associated with the popular values of the time from which he wanted freedom.

Aristotle says *eudamonea* is the product of an ethics of aspiration. We make a choice about the kind of life we want to live and then strive toward it. The ancients never believed that the ethical life was an easy life. On the contrary, the development of virtue is hard work. The etymological root of virtue is the Latin *vir*, "man"; hence, *virile*, having "manly strength." Becoming virtuous is the product of focused attention, as Aristotle put it, "it is not easy to be good."[75]

In the next section I'll argue that Muir was willing to pay a high price to break away from the popular conception of the good life. In order to pursue his own path he was often lonely.

Loneliness as a Price for Freedom

Muir wanted to get into the heart of wilderness. His passion would take him to places that many others were not likely to go. He found happiness in the wild and was determined to be true to himself regardless of what others might think. He would later write that his flight from convention came quite easily.

> I never tried to abandon creeds or code of civilization; they went away on their own accord, melting and evaporating noiselessly without any effort and without leaving any consciousness of their loss.[76]

One scholar argues this wasn't true; that it was in fact quite difficult for Muir to abandon the code of civilization.[77] But either way, the consequence of his flight from orthodoxy was that he was often left with a difficult choice between freedom and companionship. Muir's loneliness was particularly pronounced because he was not by nature a recluse; he was in fact a profoundly sociable and gregarious person. Muir was forever split by needs for freedom and companionship. His fierce independence would be a social liability all his life.

Gregarious by Nature

Those who knew Muir praised his skills as a conversationalist and described him as an engaging, dynamic, captivating storyteller and persuasive antagonist in a debate.[78] His college roommate said Muir was "the most cheerful, happy-hearted man I ever knew."[79] He made friends easily, with diverse groups of people, and tended to guard his friendships tenaciously.[80] As one scholar put it, "he liked to gab only a little less than he liked to hike."[81]

Perhaps owing to his love of social interaction Muir felt the force of loneliness in deeply challenging ways. From his earliest solo trips, he writes again and again of profound

loneliness he felt in wilderness. To avoid the U.S. Civil War he walked into the Canadian back country, later recalling it as "the first of my long lonely excursions."[82] The tension inherent in needing freedom and feeling lonely stayed with him in the high country of California.

> There perhaps are souls that never weary that always go unhalting and glad tuneful and songful as mountain water. Not so, weary, hungry me. In all God's mountains mansions, I find no human sympathy, and I hunger.[83]

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Muir's sense of loneliness was particularly challenging for him when Ralph Waldo Emerson came to Yosemite Valley in 1871, before his marriage and attempt at domesticity. After a speech by Emerson, Muir sheepishly slipped Emerson a note suggesting "a month's worship with Nature in the high temples of the great Sierra Crown. … an immeasurable camping trip back in the heart of the mountains … We'll go up a canyon singing your own song, 'Good-by, proud world! I'm going home.'"[84] But Emerson, in the twilight of his life, leaned on his party, and one member describing Muir as a man with "amusing zeal," could not be convinced.[85]

Muir lowered his aspiration from a month in the mountains to a single night under the stars. Still Emerson's handlers protested he might catch cold in the nighttime mountain air. Muir complained vociferously saying "in the whole Sierra there isn't a sneeze…. you can't take cold if you keep your nose out of doors!"[86] But Emerson's chaperones were not persuaded. They were too full of "indoor philosophy, [and] failed to see the natural beauty and fullness of promise of my wild plan." [87]

Muir slept alone that night under the big trees.[88] He later recounted the loneliness he felt:

> I followed to the edge of the grove. Emerson lingered in the rear of the train, and when he reached the top of the ridge, after all the rest of the party were over and out

> of sight, he turned his horse, took off his hat and waved me a last good-by. I felt lonely, so sure had I been that Emerson of all men would be the quickest to see the mountains and sing them. Gazing awhile on the spot where he vanished, I sauntered back into the heart of the grove, made a bed of sequoia plumes and ferns by the side of a stream, gathered a store of firewood, and then walked about until sundown. The birds, robins, thrushes, warblers, etc., that had kept out of sight, came about me, now that all was quiet, and made cheer. After sundown I built a great fire, and as usual had it all to myself. And though lonesome … I quickly took heart again,— the trees had not gone to Boston, nor the birds; and as I sat by the fire, Emerson was still with me in spirit, though I never again saw him in the flesh.[89]

It is easy to see why this was so difficult for Muir. It wasn't just that he was without human company that night, he had thought Emerson, of all people, would understand and support his vision. When he read Emerson's writings Muir believed he had found a kindred spirit. But Emerson not only left Muir to sleep under the stars by himself that night; what was worse was Emerson tried to convince Muir to leave Yosemite and move to New England. Emerson cautioned Muir that "there are drawbacks to solitude, who is a sublime mistress but an intolerable wife."[90] An unsettling commentary, Muir thought, on celebrated transcendentalism.

It was of course a great compliment to Muir that Emerson asked him to leave his Sierra perch.[91] Likewise, it was a compliment to Emerson when Muir refused to accept the invitation. By declining, Muir was in fact living Emerson's "Nature gospel."[92]The two maintained a correspondence for the rest of Emerson's life and developed a strong bond. But that night Muir felt dreadfully lonely.

For five years after arriving in the Sierra, Muir declined all invitations to leave. [93] For the next five years he would venture into the city periodically, especially during winter months to write, but he still considered the mountains his home.[94] Until he married Louise Wanda, Muir was largely a solitary mountain wanderer attempting to make peace with pangs of loneliness.[95]

Muir's Last Lonely Journey

In August of 1911, six years after the death of his wife, the 74-year-old Muir endeavored to complete the journey he had began 40 years earlier: an excursion to the Amazon. Muir didn't relish the idea of being lonely but chose to go alone anyway. Muir's friends and family tried to discourage him from making the trip alone even though they surely realizing their attempts would be in vain. His friend Ellie Mosgrove wrote, "You do not know how loathe we were to let you go this trip alone, but then we who know you well forget that the world is yours and not the limited zone we call home."[96] His friend Henrietta Thompson wrote, "I do not quite like the idea of this trip you intend making to South America. It is so hot and there are so many snakes and big bugs and biting things generally … Still, if you must follow your fate, of course you will. And as you have said we can trust God to take care of you wherever you go."[97] Robert Marshal of the United States Geological Survey wrote, "if you do make that southern trip, I wish you all pleasure of course, but, if it were in my power, I would not let a man who means so much to the world, and especially to these United States, go alone."[98] President William Taft, who considered Muir to be a public treasure, was concerned about Muir going alone. Taft issued a July 8 memorandum to United States diplomatic and consular officers around the world, introducing "John Muir, Esquire, a distinguished naturalist and explorer" and asking that Muir be given any assistance he may oblige.[99]

Finally, on August 3, Helen, Muir's youngest daughter wrote a serious letter to her father announcing that her husband, Buel Funk, would accompany Muir on the trip south. She wrote, "[I]t will be a big load off my mind for I don't want to think of you away off there all alone and I will worry all the time you are gone."[100] Muir politely declined, explaining to

Katharine Hooker "loving darling Helen wrote anxiously begging me to take her husband with me as she couldn't bear to have me go alone. Of course, I couldn't let him sacrifice his own young life for mine."[101]

Muir's sense of loneliness was made more acute by the recent death of three of his closest friends. In a letter to Helen he writes, "Your letter received yesterday telling of our dear [Alfred] Seller's death Sunday made me sad and lonely. I suppose you know that J.D. Hooker, the friend in our greatest need, was taken violently ill the day of dear Seller's death and died Wednesday evening. And [William] Keith is too gone. I wonder if leaves feel lonely when they see their neighbors falling."[102]

One scholar comments, "Given the objections voiced by his friends and family, the anguish caused by the recent deaths of several close friends, the worries about Hetch Hetchy Valley, the grueling task of completing the *Yosemite* manuscript, and the lonely prospect of traveling, old and alone, into the Amazon jungle, it is remarkable that Muir's journey happened at all."[103]

It may seem peculiar that a man as outgoing and companionable as Muir would choose to suffer so much solitude.[104] But for Muir, solitude was often a prerequisite for freedom. He wrote to his sister Sarah saying, "I have not yet in all my wanderings found a single person so free as myself."[105] And solitude was more than just a precondition for freedom. Muir also found that solitude itself brought inestimable benefits; peace and quiet, chances of encountering wildlife, an ability to be attentive, and enhanced opportunities for self-reliance among them.[106] So despite his preference not to feel lonely, he was committed to finding his own way, which more often than not was a lonely way.

In the end, Muir disregarded all arguments that he was too old, sick or significant to make this journey alone. He wrote to Katharine Hooker on the eve of his departure, “It’s kind of you to care so much about my loneliness in my travels but I’m always fortunate as a wanderer and fear nothing fate has in store … I start tomorrow for the great hot river I’ve been wanting so long to see, and alone as usual.” He then added a final thought on the matter, “Often times our loneliest wanderings are most fruitful of all.”[107]

Conclusion

Muir knew that he was, in some ways, an outlier. He knew his conception of a life well lived was not typical. But he also knew that time in Nature was essential for people even though they may forget or not know this. For a time he was entrenched in the pursuit of money the desire to acquire wealth but this desire did not burn deeply inside. In fact, his experience of working on the ranch only deepened his conviction that time in Nature was essential to living a good life.

He observed the harms caused to individuals and Nature when people become trapped by the draw of the values of the gilded age. In order to seek freedom from these values he was willing to endure loneliness and isolation from human contact for very long stretches of time. In the conclusion to *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau writes, "If a man loses pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured, or far away."[108] Thoreau meant that one should do things in one's own way regardless of societal norms and expectations.

Of course, what drums true for one person is not necessarily true for others. There are few men or women, during his time or our own, able or interested in adventuring as Muir did. He wrote,” Our forefathers have forged chains of duty and habit which bind us

notwithstanding our boasted freedom and we ourselves add link to link."[109] Clearly, the chains from which Muir wanted freedom will bind some more tightly than others. The solitary adventure Muir found and cultivated in Nature enriched his life but isn't for everyone.

This last point is at the heart of the virtue ethics project. We do not study exemplars to emulate their behavior as much as to consider our own behavior in light of theirs. Studying exemplars affords abundant opportunities to ask how we might do that particular thing differently or whether what was true for him is also true for us. A study of exemplars encourages us to look for our own answer to the pressing question of how we ought to live. Muir's admonitions were suggestive, not absolutist. He famously wrote, "Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees." [110] Not everyone will do it the same way. No matter. But as a pathway away from the popular conception of the good life and the values of the gilded age Muir would recommend. "Go to Nature and find peace whoever and wherever you are and however you are able."

Now, after having described the popular conception of the good life, harms associated with its pursuit, and the loneliness Muir dealt with in order to move away from such a conception, in the next chapter I'll consider the first of three virtues I'll discuss that Muir cultivated in Nature: attentiveness.

CHAPTER THREE

ATTENTIVENESS

> **"Patient observation and constant brooding above the rocks, lying upon them for years as the ice did, is the way to arrive at the truths which are graven so lavishly upon them."[111]**
>
> **—John Muir**

As we multi-task through the world, it is hard to imagine many of us taking time to lie upon rocks "for years as the ice did." But the passage touches on part of Muir's personality characterized by one of the key virtues he was able to cultivate in Nature: attentiveness.

The word 'attentiveness' casts a big net. It is something more than what your fourth grade teacher meant when she said "pay attention" and expected you to screw yourself into something. It is more inclusive than concentration and doesn't suggest grappling with the world. Attentiveness expresses availability and openness. It implies being observant, sensitive, mindful, and as fully engaged as possible with the unfolding of both the inner and outer world. One may attend to the workings of the inner world by listening to feelings and intuition and attend to the outer world through observation via the senses. Attentiveness also implies an awareness that at times the boundary between inner and outer is fuzzy as when one is lost in something else and the self is forgotten. Attentiveness of this connectivity between inner and outer is a metaphysical facet of the term often explored through world religions. [112] These qualities frame the virtue of attentiveness.

In this chapter I will show how the attentiveness Muir cultivated in Nature was an essential part of his conception of the good life. Specifically, I'll 1) explore Muir as a fully

engaged scientist, 2) suggest that this engagement led him to reject anthropocentrism, 3) show that his attentiveness allowed him to see wild animals as exemplars, 4) consider the connection between being inwardly and outwardly attentive.

Fully-Engaged Scientist

Above all else, Muir considered himself to be a scientist.[113] In his mid 20s, before leaving for the "University of Wilderness," he studied geology and botany at the more traditional University of Wisconsin. His early work with Ezra Carr, his studies of Louis Agassiz and subsequent contact with Joseph Le Conte gave him formative scientific training.[114]

He valued scientific observation, but the intimacy he felt with Nature left him not entirely at home with the positivist science of his day. His connection with the land was far too intimate for detached observation. Muir did not uphold the notion of separation between the observer and the observed. On the contrary, in order to increase his union and sympathy with Nature, he wore what he described as "tough grey clothes, the color of granite."[115]

Similarly, he gave no heed to a distinction between mind and spirit. He didn't believe one could flourish without the other. He was interested in everything and everything's relationship to everything else. As one observer put it, "Muir was not on vacation in the Sierra. …This activity was his life. He was neither botanist nor geologist, but a whole man in a whole Nature, yearning."[116] In wild Nature, Muir could engage deeply with the captivating workings of the world without distraction and hone his pan-observational skills.

This is how he describes his methodology:

> This was my "method of study": I drifted about from rock to rock, from stream to stream, from grove to grove. Where night found me, there I camped. When I discovered a new plant, I sat down beside it for a minute or a day, to make its acquaintance and hear what it had to tell. When I came to moraines, or ice-scratchers

> upon the rocks, I traced them back, learning what I could of the glacier that made them. I asked the bowlders [sic] I met, whence they came and whither they were going. I followed to their fountains the traces of various soils upon which forests and meadows are planted; and when I discovered a mountain or rock of marked form and structure, I climbed about it, comparing it with its neighbors. [117]

Muir applied this method to some of the vexing questions of the day. For example, he challenged the theories of Josiah Whitney and others who believed the Yosemite Valley was the creation of a giant catastrophe whereby the bottom had literally dropped out. Muir countered that Yosemite was the product of glaciers slowing carving out the rocks. His opponents were not impressed with his methodology; they treated him roughly and belittled his theory as the wild fantasy of an ignorant shepherd.[118] Ultimately, however, he proved to be more right than those who ridiculed him.[119]

Despite his pursuit of a scientific explanation of the genesis of Yosemite his *feelings* in the Sierra were omnipresent. His experience of ecstasy in the midst of beauty was so ubiquitous that he was unconvinced by simple material explanations of mountain geology. He respected the work of scientists like Charles Darwin, John Tyndall, and Asa Gray and yet was not grounded in their camp. In the summer of 1872, he wrote that he had "a great longing for Gray, whom I feel to be a great, progressive, unlimited man like Darwin and Huxley and Tyndall." But after Gray visited him, Muir wrote, "He is a most cordial lover of purity and truth, but angular factiness of his pursuits has kept him at too cold a distance from the spirit world."[120]

Like any virtue, attentiveness perpetuates itself. The more attentive Muir became, the more it enriched his life. The more it enriched his life, the more attentive he became. His attentiveness was deeply entwined with empirically grounded metaphysical values. I will explore one those values next.

Rejecting Anthropocentrism

One evening, when John was a teenager, a fellow Scottish immigrant named George Mair visited the Muir family farm. Mair was outspoken and sympathetic about the dislocation of indigenous peoples by the settlers. Mair called the displacement "robbery" and argued it was a "ruthless" destruction of the natives' ability to maintain their livelihood. John's father, Daniel Muir, did not agree and was indignant. He responded that the natives had failed to make good use of fertile soil and must make way for "industrious, god-fearing farmers." Such farmers, including Daniel, would "spread the Gospel" and utilize the land in a way that would support "ten or a hundred times more people in a far worthier manner." [121] Mair responded that the Scottish immigrants were in fact inexperienced agriculturists and (now zeroing in on his target) had been merely "merchants and mechanics and servants" in the land from which they had come. These same farmers would undoubtedly feel mistreated if they were displaced by more expert farmers who could "raise five or ten times as much" on an acre of land.

Carefully listening to the banter was the young John Muir. He agreed with Mair's position and disagreed with his father. Muir concluded his father was supporting "the rule of might with little or no thought for the right or welfare of the other fellow if he were the weaker."[122]

John Muir was being introduced to something foundational about ethical thinking. If "might" does in fact make "right" there would be no need for traditional ethics. Questions about who and what counts, who and what should be considered morally, are questions we grapple with precisely because we don't believe that might makes right. If strength settled the issue we would be done with ethics altogether. Ethics exists as a reflective, thoughtful response to the tyranny of unbridled power.

In Muir's day, as in our own, the predominant attitude which guided human actions in relation with the natural world was anthropocentrism. Through an anthropocentric lens, humans see themselves as the center of the moral universe. If anything or anybody else has value, it has so in a strictly instrumental sense. Anthropocentrism is based on value assumptions, not on biology.[123]

Muir was raised with the religious values of his father, a fervent believer in the central importance of humans generally and European Christians specifically. George Mair argued against value distinctions among different human groups. Muir took George Mair's argument a step farther. He came to believe, in fact, that there was no biological evidence to support an exalted position of humans over-nonhumans. When Muir studied Nature, he saw a dynamic, holistic, ecological system; increasingly, respect for the health of the system and the individual members of it became central in his environmental ethics.

In his journal, written during his thousand mile walk to the gulf in 1868, tucked within a flowing description of the beauty of Nature, is John Muir's lyrical meditation on anthropocentrism. Here he expresses a belief in the intrinsic value of non-humans:

> The world, we are told, was made especially for man, a presumption not supported by all the facts. A numerous class of men are painfully astonished whenever they find anything, living or dead, in all God's universe, which they cannot eat or render in some way what they call useful to themselves. … The sheep, … food and clothing "for us," … whales are store houses of oil for us, to help out the stars in lighting our dark ways … Hemp is a case of evident destination for ships' rigging, wrapping packages, and hanging the wicked…. Iron was made for hammers and ploughs, and lead for bullets all intended for us. … Now, it never seems to occur to these far-seeing teachers that Nature's object in making animals and plants might possibly be first of all the happiness of each one of them, not the creation of all for the happiness of one. Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation? Plants might possibly be first of all the happiness of each one of them, not the creation of all for the happiness of one. Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation?…The universe would be incomplete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge.…They are earth-born companions and our fellow

> mortals. … This star, our own good earth, made many a successful journey around the heavens ere man was made, and whole kingdoms of creatures enjoyed existence and returned to dust ere man appeared to claim them. After human beings have also played their part in Creation's plan, they too may disappear without any general burning or extraordinary commotion whatever. … But I have wandered from my object… I joyfully return to the immortal truth and immortal beauty of Nature.[124]

This is an amazing passage. It both places humans in a geological time perspective and is a clear statement of Muir's radical non-anthropocentrism. At least one scholar argues the beliefs first expressed in this writing represent not only the cornerstone of Muir's own environmental ethics but also a "bedrock principle for future environmentalists to follow."[125]

Muir's antagonism was aimed not so much at the human species as at the arrogance of "Lord Man." Lord Man represents an attitude, of a "numerous class of men," generally held by a figure with high social standing and propriety who believes he is entitled, by God-given right, to seize land and use Nature anyway he sees fit. Muir has nothing but scorn for this attitude:

> I have precious little sympathy for the selfish propriety of civilized man, and if a war of races should occur between the wild beasts and Lord Man, I would be tempted to sympathize with the bears.[126]

Muir was by no means the first non-anthropocentrist in Western philosophy or science. But if Muir didn't come to these conclusions on his own, they were greatly reinforced and deeply engrained by his own attentiveness, observation and reflection.

A Virtue Based on Reason

As mentioned earlier, rejecting anthropocentrism is not only a core personal value for Muir but also the cornerstone of the modern day environmental movement. The way Muir cultivated non-anthropocentrism is an interesting window into how Aristotle understood virtue and may also offer insight into how to cultivate virtues generally.

Modern environmental virtue ethicists tend to use the word 'virtue' more liberally than Aristotle. Modern ethicists often use the word virtue to signify a skill or trait linked to

living a good life. But Aristotle says the virtues must be "voluntary." By this he means they are a product of reason and will. He believes we consciously choose to cultivate a particular virtue. It is a question of reasoning about which virtues we want and then disciplining and focusing our activity in order to create a habit which eventually will become "second nature." We cannot, however, create virtue from scratch. We must first possess some sense of the virtue or a predisposition for it. A seed of virtue must already exist in order for it to be cultivated into fuller virtue.

Some amount of this reasoning and cultivating process was at play for Muir. During his thousand-mile walk to the Gulf of Mexico, the 28-year-old Muir was repelled by reptiles and yet struck by the thought they were cherished by God:

> How narrow we selfish, conceited creatures are in our sympathies! How blind to the rights of all the rest of creation! With what dismal irreverence we speak of our fellow mortals! Though alligators, snakes, etc. naturally repel us, they are not mysterious evils… and they are beautiful in God's eyes. They dwell happily in these flowery wilds, are part of God's family, unfallen, undepraved, and cared for with the same species of tenderness and love as is bestowed on angels in heaven or saints on earth.[127]

The tension between alligators both repelling him and being beautiful in God's eyes speaks to Muir's moral aspiration. Being repelled by reptiles was his present condition; learning to treat them with the respect he believes they deserve as creatures God saw as beautiful is where he aspired to be. The path from where we happen to be to where we aspire to be is, for Aristotle, the journey of an ethical life. Muir's alligators existed more in his imagination than on his footpath, so he was dealing with mostly inherited fears. Because he believed it was natural for humans to be frightened by reptiles, he was choosing to push aside base instinct in order to consciously cultivate a higher moral principle. Such action based on reason and will is the hallmark of Aristotelian virtue.

Principles are not the same as Aristotelian virtues. In a sense, virtues are a step beyond principle. To believe something to be true or right is not the same as integrating the attitude into our character. In this way, Muir's struggles have something to teach modern philosophers and environmentalists. To believe in non-anthropocentrism is not the same as *feeling* it. To arrive at the point where one actually "feels" like behaving according to virtue is a sign of integrating the virtue into our character and thus becoming virtuous. Aristotle took feelings very seriously for exactly this reason. They let us know when the virtue has become a part of who we are.

In the Sierra Nevada, Muir was sometimes faced with his inherent prejudice against rattlesnakes. He once jumped up and down on a snake which crossed his path, killing it with his boots. He felt badly about what he had done. He believed that senseless killing was more natural for boys, and that adults should learn and grow out of it. [128] After killing the snake on the trail, he wrote, "I felt degraded by the killing business, farther from heaven, and I made up my mind to try to be at least as fair and charitable as the snakes themselves, and to kill no more save in self-defense."[129] He eventually learned that "scales may cover as fine a nature as hair or feathers or anything tailored" but it took time and practice.[130] It is Muir's conscious and repeated efforts to try to integrate the virtue that makes him exemplary in this regard. Thoreau had said, "A man's first responsibility is to live his life as his principles demand," but to do so when those actions are against one's natural instinct or upbringing is the result of great tenacity.[131] Muir first rejected anthropocentrism philosophically and then aspired to cultivate actions associated with that belief into his character.

Muir's assault on anthropocentrism was direct and radical. While camping on Glacier Point with Teddy Roosevelt, the President began to tell Muir of his African big game

adventures. He was detailing the slaughter of some wild beast when Muir finally interrupted the President, chastising Roosevelt about the "boyishness of killing things."[132]

"Mr. President!" lectured Muir," haven't you gotten far enough along to leave that off?"

"Muir, I guess you're right," said the President.

Yet Roosevelt never gave up his big game hunting.

Gifford Pinchot was the first director of the National Forest Service. Despite what he saw as Muir's quirky ways, Pinchot was charmed by and looked up to Muir. In his autobiography, Pinchot describes a hike he took with Muir through the desert Southwest, "When we came upon a tarantula he [Muir] wouldn't let me kill it. He said it had as much right there as we did."[133] If either Pinchot or Roosevelt had embraced Muir's non-anthropocentric position, the history of U.S. environmentalism might have been different.

Rejecting Anthropocentrism and Living a Good Life

In Chapter One, I quoted Phil Cafaro: "Any environmental ethic worthy of the name must … include … non-anthropocentrism." To explore this position fully is well beyond the scope of this writing, but a simple understanding of the core of the argument is this: If human good is the sole basis for moral praise and blame, then protecting and/or respecting the natural world becomes conditional and, therefore, is constantly in question. If, on the other hand, something else or perhaps everything else, has value that should be counted or considered morally, protecting and/or respecting it would not be contingent on what is in it for humans.

There are those who argue that a successful, effective environmental ethics must *be* anthropocentric.[134] The argument assumes that people will always only act in their own self interest. Additionally, some argue that placing "unreasonable demands" on ourselves is a "threat to ethics,"[135] and some see recognizing value in non-humans as unreasonably limiting

human freedom. It is understandable why an ethic that excessively limits freedom would not be widely embraced. It would be difficult to make a case for self-oppression as an essential component of the good life.

Muir, however, both enjoyed personal freedom and was an early and forceful defender of non-human centered ethics. His life is an example of how a profound respect for the non-human world and vibrant flourishing can co-exist. Muir's life was enriched rather than diminished by recognizing the intrinsic value of Nature and rejecting anthropocentrism. Many environmental ethicists have tried to ground arguments of non-anthropocentrism within various normative theories.[136] Showing that such a view can enrich our lives will ground our theory in personal experience.

From the careful listening of George Mair's debate with his father to the long walk to the gulf which was filled with observation and reflection, attentiveness was at the core of Muir's strong non-anthropocentric views. In the next section, I'll explore how his continued attentiveness toward the lives of our "fellow mortals" made his life richer. [137]

Attentiveness and Animal Exemplars

For Aristotle, potential exemplars consist exclusively of excellent humans, but for Muir, because of his non-anthropocentric view, the possibilities are more expansive. Through Muir's attentiveness to wild animals he found the three benefits mentioned in Chapter One inherent in studying exemplars: guidance, commonality, and help focusing on the fundamental question "how ought I to live?" As with human exemplars, the goal is to use *phronesis* as we look, learn and puzzle through questions of how we can relate. By being attentive to his fellow mortals, Muir found qualities that he could both learn from and in many ways relate to.

His writings reveal a person not only comfortable with using virtue language when describing wildlife but one willing to recommend animal virtue as conducive to better living. This became increasingly true the more time he lived in the Sierra. When he first arrived, he was not quite as sensitive.

> In my first interview with a Sierra bear we were frightened and embarrassed, both of us, but the bear's behavior was better than mine … [A]fter studying his appearance as he stood at rest, I rushed toward him to frighten him, that I might study his gait in running. But … he did not run at all; when I stopped short within a few steps of him, as he held his ground in a fighting attitude, my mistake was monstrously plain. I was then put on my good behavior, and never afterward forgot the right manners of the wilderness.[138]

His subsequent meetings with bears were filled with caution and humility. When he later encountered a "formidable" grizzly, he hid behind a tree hoping to observe without being noticed. He was struck by the "fine dignity" of the animal.[139]

Attention to animals enhanced Muir's life in many ways. Muir's close observation to detail and overall attentiveness to wildlife is clear. At times, animal behavior seems to merely mesmerize Muir and at other times, inspire him. His love, admiration and respect for wildlife are evident throughout his field notes.[140] He ventured to see wild animals on their own terms absent a sense of anthropomorphism. Thus, the similarities he found between non-human animals and human animals represented kinship not sub-humanity. Following are selected animals and some virtue terms Muir used to describe them.

Wild Animal Virtue

Deer: charming, cautious, curious, graceful, strong, vivid, eager, alert, beautiful[141]

Bucks: experienced, adaptable[142]

Douglas squirrels: gentle, cheery, bright, vigorous, valiant, earnest, bold, firm[143]

Gray squirrels: stealthy[144]

Tamias (chipmunk): diligent, gentle, confiding, cheery, sure-footed[145]

Wood chucks: hearty, fun-loving[146]

Wood rats: trusting, friendly, confident[147]

Porcupines: even-tempered, good-natured, inoffensive, genial[148]

Bears: luxuriant, relaxed, unruffled[149]

Coyotes: cautious, bold, studious, patient, prudent[150]

Sage cocks: strong, hardy, independent, defiant, brave, adaptable[151]

Blue grouse: brave, wise, alert, loyal [152]

W*ater ouzels*: irrepressible, melodious, fearless[153]

Mountain quail: inquisitive [154]

Clark's crows: strong, enduring, cunning[155]

Sparrows: happy, lively, curious[156]

Woodpeckers: hearty, good-natured[157]

Robins: even-tempered, cheery, graceful, reassuring[158]

Grasshoppers: hearty, keen, carefree, joyful[159]

Ants: relentless[160]

Bees: industrious.[161]

Wild animal virtue stimulated Muir's mind, energized his body and was a never-ending source of pleasure. "Any glimpse into the life of an animal," he explained, "quickens our own and makes it so much larger and better in every way."[162]Although attentiveness toward many different species of animals was essential to his conception of the good life, Muir saves his most lavish praise and in-depth discussion for wild mountain sheep. [163]

Wild Mountain Sheep

Muir's insight into sheep is deep and layered. He lived as both shepherd and mountaineer, which allowed ample opportunity to contrast domestic sheep with wild sheep. The difference was striking to him and a subject of endless reflection. Nothing was clearer to Muir than his belief that life is better when it includes enough time in wild Nature to thwart the numbing effects of domesticity. In wild and domestic sheep he found models for what is life affirming about the wild and deadening about domestication.

Wild Wool and the Popular Conception of the Good Life

In the essay "Wild Wool," Muir tells us he has a friend who doesn't care much for wildness. His friend is a man who finds value only in that which is efficient, useful and productive. He is a lowland man of agriculture and not interested in mountains. His friend has a

> call to plough, and woe to the daisy sod or azalea thicket that falls under the savage redemption of his keen steel shares. … Wildness charms not my friend … and whatsoever may be the character of his heaven, his earth seems only a chaos of agricultural possibilities calling for grubbing-hoes and manures.[164]

The view that the value of Nature is found in its utility for humans is not at all exceptional. Rather, it is a mainstream position at the heart of the popular conception of the good life in both Muir's time and our own. It is Muir's non-anthropocentrism that is the outlier, not his friend's view. Muir understands that this "… barbarous notion is almost universally entertained by civilized man, that there is in all the manufactures of Nature something essentially coarse which can and must be eradicated by human culture." [165]

Two words in this passage give particular insight into Muir's attitude. He uses the word *civilized*, (as well as the synonym "tame") in a pejorative, cynical sense throughout the essay. The word *coarse,* (as well as the antonym "fine") is used to set the point of contention.

Which is more fine and which is more coarse, the tame life or the wild life? There is no doubt as to Muir's answer.

Muir describes his delight, while examining fleece from three wild rams, in discovering that the grade of wool of wild mountain sheep is much finer than the wool of domesticated sheep. The wool is not only literally more "fine" but as a metaphor "fine" is too obvious for him to resist. "Well done for wildness!" he exalts, "Wild wool is finer than tame! …Here … is an argument for fine wildness that needs no explanation. Not that such arguments are by any means rare, for all wildness is finer than tameness."[166]

Muir handed out pieces of this wild sheep fabric to his friends, asking only that "the fineness of wildness be fairly recognized and confessed," but the returns were "deplorably tame." His friendly antagonists would admit to the literal "fineness" of wild wool but saw no importance in the fact. They pointed out that wild wool is of limited value because there is very little of it per sheep and, making the instrumentalist point, owing to its very fineness, difficult to spin. They would taunt Muir, asking how many wild sheep it would take to make a single pair of warm socks or a flannel shirt. Muir reflected that "the quantity question rises again and again in all its commonplace tameness. For in my experience it seems well-nigh impossible to obtain a hearing on behalf of Nature from any other standpoint than that of human use." [167]

Muir believed focusing on human utility missed several important points: Firstly, sheep wool is made by and for sheep. In order to judge the effectiveness of its function one should use as criterion the *purpose* of its creation. "Wild wool was not made for man but for sheep, and that, however deficient as clothing for other animals, it is just the thing for the brave mountain-dweller that wears it." [168]

Secondly, after the pursuit of its own good each animal secondarily is made as a part of an integrated ecosystem benefiting all others and the system itself.

> I have never yet happened upon a trace of evidence that seemed to show that any one animal was ever made for another as much as it was made for itself. Not that Nature manifests any such thing as selfish isolation. In the making of every animal the presence of every other animal has been recognized. … therefore, what may be the note which any creature forms in the song of existence, it is made first for itself, then more and more remotely for all the world and worlds.[169]

This passage depicts an interesting sequential holism. When individuals pursue their own good in their own way, they become more excellent individuals. Consequently, with stronger members of a healthier, more dynamic system, the system is strengthened as well. One scholar argues that this section of *Wild Wool* shows that Muir differed from later biocentrists, such as Leopold, in his emphasis upon the singularity of animals. Muir was interested in both the welfare of the biotic community and the rights of individual animals.[170]

Thirdly, all suffer because of the unenlightened human utility view. Furthermore, misguided education has perpetrated this human-centered position throughout time.

> No dogma taught by the present civilization seems to form so insuperable an obstacle in the way of a right understanding of the relations which culture sustains to wildness as that which regards the world as made especially for the uses of man. Every animal, plant, and crystal controverts it in the plainest terms. Yet it is taught from century to century as something ever new and precious, and in the resulting darkness the enormous conceit is allowed to go unchallenged.[171]

In *Wild Wool*, Muir challenges anthropocentrism through a defense of respect for the inherent value of wild sheep. The essay is playful and his position seems laughable to his friends but his reasoning is unyielding. The gulf between his and his friend's view about wild wool helps illustrate the gulf between differing conceptions of the elements of a good life. The popular conception, upheld by his friends, sees human utility as of primary, if not of singular, importance. Muir's conception celebrates intrinsic value and is more egalitarian and eco-centric.

Muir also deeply valued the pure, unbridled instinct of wild mountain sheep. I will turn to a discussion of wild mountain sheep instinct and the role of Nature in connecting inward and outward attentiveness in the final section of this chapter.

The Connection between Inwardly and Outwardly Attentive

Muir was attentive to and had great faith in his inner voice even though he wasn't sure what to call it. He used various descriptors—instinct, intuition, inner compass, other self, bygone experiences, inner vision— and wrote about it continuously and trusted it completely.[172] What Muir was sure about is that this instinct was natural, not supernatural, and more "positive and true" in the mountains. For him it was an inner voice inseparable from the outward. There was a reciprocal nature to this inner voice; it wasn't just hatched internally. This inward/outward connection comes through in phrases like "tidal impulses" which he used to describe what called him to leave the University and walk a thousand miles to the Gulf of Mexico. A tide is a product of the relationship between the moon, the earth, and the oceans. To have a tidal impulse is to put us in that mix as well linking our inner voice to the world around. He ventured that, in some people,

> …the impulse, being slight, is easily obeyed or overcome. But in others it is constant and cumulative in action until its power is sufficient to overmaster all impediments, and to accomplish the full measure of its demands. For many a year I have been impelled toward the Lord's tropic gardens of the South. Many influences have tended to blunt or burn this constant longing, but it has outlived and overpowered them all.[173]

It was these same impulses that guided or pushed him toward the Sierra. He would follow premonitions when tracing glaciers which would lead him far and wide. [174] Having a life rich with time, free from hurry, he learned to better listen to his intuition.

In a passage describing his first ascent of Mount Ritter, he offers a glimpse of the importance he places on instincts:

> After gaining a point about half-way to the top, I was suddenly brought to a dead stop, with arms outspread, clinging close to the face of the rock unable to move, hand or foot either up or down. My doom appeared fixed. I *must* fall. There would be a moment of bewilderment, and then a lifeless rumble down the one general precipice to the glacier below. When this final danger flashed upon me, I became nerve-shaken for the first time since setting foot on the mountains, and my mind seemed to fill with a stifling smoke. But this terrible eclipse lasted only a moment, when life blazed forth again with preternatural cleanness. I seemed suddenly to become possessed of a new sense. The other self, bygone experiences, Instinct, or Guardian Angel,—call it what you will —, came forward and assumed control. Then my trembling muscles became firm again, every rift and flaw in the rock was seen as through a microscope, and my limbs moved with a positiveness and precision with which I seemed to have nothing at all to do. Had I been borne aloft upon wings, my deliverance could not have been more complete. [175]

Cohen points out that much of the preceding passage was written with the passive voice, suggesting the event was unfolding and happening *to* him as the result of an unknown agent.[176] Muir did not see this as a case of wrestling against the world but rather of finding alignment with something larger.

It is also noteworthy that in the passage "instinct" is the precursor to "life blazed forth." Clearly, for Muir being attentive to this inner voice and a flourishing life, and in this specific example life as opposed to certain death, are linked.

Listening to Instinct and Emerson

While visiting Muir in Yosemite in 1871, Ralph Waldo Emerson spoke to Muir of the debt a man of truth and intuition owes to society. After returning to Concord, Emerson wrote to Muir and returned to the subject. He attempted to gently convince Muir to come down from the hills and involve himself with society:

> I have been far from unthankful—I have everywhere testified to my friends, who should also be yours, my happiness in finding you— the right man in the right place—in your mountain tabernacle, and have expected [you] when your guardian angel should pronounce that your probation and sequestration in the solitudes and snows had reached their term, and you were to bring your ripe fruits so rare and precious into waiting society. [177]

Muir was not ready. Emerson's word may have had influence on Muir's decision to one day work in society, lobby presidents, write books, and the like but that came much later. Emerson had said, "If the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him."[178] Muir believed the same thing. He had concluded it was not yet time to leave the mountains. To Emerson's urgings Muir responded,

> I will follow my instincts be myself for good or ill and see what will be the upshot. As long as I live, I'll hear waterfalls and birds and winds sing. I'll interpret the rocks, learn the language of flood, storm, and the avalanche. I'll acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens, and get as near the heart of the world as I can.[179]

But Emerson kept trying:

> There are drawbacks to solitude, who is a sublime mistress, but an intolerable wife. So I pray you to bring to an early close your absolute contracts with any yet unvisited glaciers or volcanoes, roll up your herbariums and poems, and come to the Atlantic Coast.[180]

Muir received from Emerson several volumes of his essays which Muir carried with him in the Sierra. In one volume was the essay "Self-Reliance*."* In Emerson's own words Muir found support for his desire to disregard Emerson's advice. Muir marked the following passage:

> And truly it demands something godlike in him who cast off the common motives of humanity and has ventured to trust himself for taskmaster. [181]

Reading Emerson's essays may have helped bolster Muir's resolve to not accept Emerson's invitations. Or, more likely, Muir's attentiveness to his own inner vision was resolve enough. In Muir, Emerson may have seen glimpses of Henry David Thoreau: a man, like Muir, who chose to be more solitary than Emerson had counseled.[182]

Mystery versus Superstition

Muir made no secret of his belief in an internal compass. In private journals he scribbled, "If a magnetic needle, a strip or particle of iron can be shown its way, shall the soul of a free man

be left unguided?” But this internal compass was nurtured in and by the wild. In a published essay he wrote “[W]e are governed more than we know, and most when we are wildest.” [183]

On more than one occasion Muir had what he concluded were “telepathic” experiences.[184] Muir embraced mystery but had no superstition in his make-up, so rejected the idea that these were supernatural experiences. Rather he believed they were experiences deeply grounded in Nature based on phenomena not yet understood. He saw these as the result of one clearing the clutter of a busy mind filled with artifice. When asked to account for his telepathic experiences Muir responded that “anyone who lives close to the mountains is sensitive to these things.”[185]

Muir understood the difference between the mysteries of Nature and the supernatural. He recounts an occasion in San Francisco when he was tricked by some friends into attending a séance. Muir recalls, “After common greetings were over there came an awkward pause that seemed to betoken ghost weather. Pretty soon as if by prearrangement, everybody got up and went into another room and sat down at a big round table.” Muir refused to sit and the others insisted that as “a scientist” he should “observe and see if he could explain the phenomena.” They had placed a violin under the table and were anxious to hear it played without the touch of a human hand. “Just sit down, Mr. Muir, and we’ll put out the lights, so our spirit friends can get to work.”

“All right,” he said glaring under the table. “If you want me to observe, I’ll stand off here and watch the violin. And I don’t want the lights put out. I have to see the thing I study.”

“But Mr. Muir,” they exclaimed, “can’t you understand there may be forces in nature so delicate and refined that even the glance of an eye would at once arrest and spoil their wonderful manifestations?”

“No, I don’t understand anything of the sort,” he grumbled. “A mechanical force strong enough to jingle the fiddle strings couldn’t be hurt by a mere glance of an eye. I’ve been praying all my life, ‘Open mine eyes that I may see.’ Now you tell me to close my eyes, or sit in the dark while something goes on under the table I’m supposed to pass judgment upon … Why, mon, if I’d make such a fool of myself I’d never be able to look a pine tree in the face again!” He left the room leaving them to enjoy their “ghostly music.”[186] Muir was by no means a “spiritualist” (the “New Age” movement of the late 1800s); his own form of spiritualism was far too connected with Nature for that.[187]

Instincts and Wild Mountain Sheep

Being attentive to instincts was essential to Muir’s conception of the good life and he was convinced they were strongest in the wild. Seeing such instinct and the bold action they rendered was, in large part, what inspired Muir to study wild mountain sheep with such passion. “I have been greatly interested in studying their habits during the last four years, while engaged in the work of exploring high regions … When they moved I devoured every gesture.”[188]

During that four-year period, he observed in wild sheep not

> a single awkward step or unsuccessful effort. I have often seen tame sheep in the mountains jump upon a sloping rock-surface, hold on tremulously a few seconds, and fall back baffled and irresolute; but in the most trying dangers, where the slightest inaccuracy would have resulted in destruction, these moved with magnificent reliance on their strength and skill, the limits of which they never seemed to know.[189]
>
> [W]e might note that in form the domestic sheep is expressionless, like a round bundle of something only half alive; the wild is elegant as a deer, and every muscle glows with life. The tame is timid; the wild is bold. The tame is always ruffled and soiled; the wild is trim and clean as the flowers of its pasture.”[190]

What is striking about this passage is the contrast he draws between the wild and the domestic. For him, the two different types of sheep are quintessential examples of what wildness, and lack of wildness, does to living beings—and not just to sheep but to humans as

well. The analogy he makes between humans and sheep is sometimes subtle and sometimes direct. There is no question that when Muir writes about sheep he is constantly struck by the comparison with humans. Once when a fence broke down, he witnessed a group of confused and alarmed domestic sheep. “Having escaped restraint, [the sheep] were, like some people we know, afraid of their freedom, did not know what to do with it, and seemed glad to get back into the old familiar bondage.”[191]

Instinct can be lost or bred out of all of us when we are not grounded in wild Nature. Unlike mountain sheep, domestic sheep had been “warped by scientific breeding from their elemental instincts, they had been degraded into “mongrel victims of civilization.”[192]

In wild mountain sheep, Muir saw a model of boldness. Describing the sheep scale an icy peak, he wrote,

> This is most astounding feat of mountaineering I have ever witnessed …I watched the progress of these animal mountaineers with intensest sympathy, and exulted in the boundless sufficiency of wild nature.[193]

The word ‘sympathy’ implies a shared feeling. Muir is not a detached observer; he is fellow mountain climber. He has a depth of understanding and appreciation of the sheep that those who have not scaled steep rocks do not have. And he exults in wild Nature and what it produces.

Muir also admires where the sheep live and implies that the sheep are not oblivious to the beauty that surrounds them. He is dismissive of those who may accuse him of anthropomorphism, contrasting the wildness of the sheep with the tameness of those who fail to understand them. “Their feeding-grounds are among the most beautiful of the wild Sierra gardens, bright with daisies and gentians, and mats of blooming shrubs. Although tame men are slow to suspect wild sheep of seeing more than grass.”[194] We can learn from these sheep. If we stay in touch with the wild, we can fill our lives with beauty.

The wild mountain sheep also appeal to his independent side. Unlike domestic sheep, wild mountain sheep do not habitually and mindlessly follow the flock. They learn from the more experienced among them and yet go it alone when they choose to do so.

> [E]ach one of the flock, though acknowledging the right leadership to the most experienced, climbed with intelligent independence—a perfect individual, capable of separate existence whenever it should choose to secede from the little clan. But the domestic sheep is only a fraction of an animal, a whole flock being required to form an individual, just as numerous florets are required for the making of one complete sunflower.[195]

Wild species, says Muir, are given what they need to flourish. As a former shepherd and agriculturist, he had seen it. He knew what would happen to the domestic varieties—apples and sheep—when the natural was stripped away. Nature "would throw one to her caterpillars, the other to her wolves."[196]

In the contrast between wild and domestic sheep, Muir found the perfect example of the difference between living a wild life and living a domesticated life. The difference is one of the quality of one's attentiveness, and for Muir, attentiveness is a virtue. Like a boy stuck in a well as carbonic acid gas poisons his mind, domestic sheep are no longer in touch with the wild, the free, and the inspired. They are unable to attend to the voice inside that will save them. The wild life is the good life. The domesticated life is something less.[197]

Muir is recommending something in his discussion about wild and domestic sheep. What is true of sheep is also true for people. Be like wild sheep, connected to Nature and natural instincts. Be bold and glowing with life. Don't be like domestic sheep, disconnected from Nature and natural instincts. Do not be timid and expressionless. As he wrote in his journal, "There is a love of wildness in everybody. In God's wildness lies the hope of the world."[198]

In the next chapter I'll explore a virtue Muir cultivated in Nature which increased proportionately with his attentiveness: gratitude.

CHAPTER FOUR

GRATITUDE

In March of 1867, while tightening a loose factory machine belt, a sharp file slipped and pierced John Muir's right eye on the edge of the cornea. He immediately lost sight in the right eye. A few days later, due to a sympathetic response, he lost sight in his left eye. Muir was without sight and unsure if his vision would return for several months.

Before the accident he had been scheming to travel to South America for a botanical excursion.[199] After the accident he bemoaned the decision not to leave earlier. He feared an attachment to societal comforts was the true cause of his blindness. In darkness he dreaded the possibility of never again looking upon "a single flower, no more of lovely scenery, not any more of beauty … the sunshine and the winds are working in all the gardens of God, but I-I am lost."[200] Muir was terrified by the prospect of being unable to see Nature's beauty.

Shortly after his sight returned he set out toward South America bidding "adieu to all my mechanical inventions determined to devote the rest of my life to the study of the inventions of God."[201] He hoped to walk away from civilization and straight into "the beating heart of Nature."[202] He was grateful to be given a second chance to celebrate in "god's fields."[203]

In the previous chapter I explored the role of attentiveness in Muir's conception of the good life. One of the consequences of careful attentiveness to Nature was Muir's gratitude for Nature. In this chapter I'll show how the gratitude Muir cultivated in Nature was essential to his conception of the good life. I'll illustrate that his frequent celebrations in Nature were

celebrations of gratitude and what he was mostly grateful for was Nature's beauty. I'll also suggest that Muir's environmental activism was a reciprocation of his gratitude for Nature. The chapter is divided into three sections: 1) gratitude and celebration 2) gratitude and beauty 3) gratitude and reciprocity.

Gratitude and Celebration

The word gratitude is related to the word grace both derived from the Latin *gratus* "To sing, praise or celebrate God's favor or help."[204] So, etymologically gratitude and celebration are linked. As with all virtues, the virtue of gratitude is cultivated by the practicing of the virtue. One increases gratitude by practicing gratitude. For Muir this took the form of ecstatic celebrations. Even during his own time Muir was famous for his celebrations of Nature. As one scholar put it, Muir is "the most celebrated celebrator of Nature in America."[205] I'll consider the Yosemite earthquake of 1872 as an example of how Muir celebrated Nature.

A Noble Earth Quake

The winter of 1871-72, Muir's third in Yosemite, was an exceptionally stormy season. On the heels of enough December rain to send "Yosemite rejoicing in a glorious flood" a powerful earthquake changed the landscape of the area.[206]

On March 26th, Muir awoke at 2:30 a.m. to a soulful rumbling which sent him darting outside to see if the valley walls were about to crash on his head.[207] Eagle rock, a short distance from his cabin, broke loose and fell about 2000 feet in a shower of boulders and dust, exploding and crushing the surrounding forest. In an avalanche of rock, "firs, oaks, and spruces were snipped like thistles."[208]

Not only was the quake physically exhilarating Muir believed it validated his theory that Yosemite Valley was created by glaciation. If Josiah Whitney had been correct, as many had presumed, that the valley was created by a cataclysmic sinking then perhaps the bottom of the valley would have dropped even further during such an earthquake. Muir rejoiced in the solidity of the valley floor as evidence that Whitney's theory was unfounded. The earthquake was confirmation that "Yosemite granite was well plumbed & dovetailed."[209]

Fear of the bottom dropping out sent many residents both native and white fleeing for their lives. The tragedy for Muir was that bad science had given people a reason to fear Nature.[210] He pointed to the consequences of such a "violence hypothesis" on those who believed it. They were afraid of Mother Nature and what was worse was some were instilling the fear of Nature into their children. "A little girl of Hutchings cried terror stricken in the night, 'Grandma Grandma! Pray to God to Stop it!'"[211]

For Muir, on the other hand, the earthquake was a cause for celebration "as John the Baptist angel said squarely, 'I am Gabriel' this storm said I am earth-quake & I rumbled out to the open sky shouting 'A noble Earthquake, Noble Earthquake!!'" He told terrified valley residents, in an unsuccessful, and empathetically questionable, attempt to comfort them, to "come, cheer up; smile a little and clap your hands, now that kind mother Earth is trotting us on her knee to amuse us and make us good."[212]

By the end of the day he had begun a letter to Emerson believing the earthquake was compelling evidence to convince him to return to the valley for an extended visit. Muir wrote that the deep-throated rumblings were "the first spoken words that I have heard direct from the tender bosom of mother earth … Think how a whole Yosemite year would shine in the middle sky of a life like yours … I wish you were here this night to be trotted and dumpled

on this mountain knee."[213] If Emerson believed Muir's time in Yosemite was but a momentary sequestering from civilization Muir would answer with his most enthusiastic conviction that experiencing earth quakes first hand is essential to a good life.[214]

In addition, Muir celebrated earthquakes because of the role they play in creation. Wild storms are punctuated, dramatic examples of the natural process through which beauty comes from seeming destruction. … "All Nature's wildness tells the same story; the shocks and outbursts of earthquakes, volcanoes, geysers, roaring, thundering waves and floods, the silent uprush of sap in plants, storms of every sort, each and all, are the orderly, beauty-making love-beats of Nature's heart."[215]

From chaos the process derives beauty; from beauty more and still higher forms of beauty. Muir had great faith in all manner of storms believing in the good that would come from them. Part of the thrill for Muir during the earthquake of 1872 was anticipating what might come next "as if Nature were wrecking her Yosemite temple, and getting ready to build a still better one."[216]

For Muir, the exhilaration, the smell, the electric energy of earthquakes and the opportunity to watch world-making are all cause for rapturous celebration.

> I used to envy the father of our race, dwelling as he did in contact with the new-made fields and plants of Eden; but I do so no more, because I have discovered that I also live in "creation's dawn." The morning stars still sing together, and the world, not yet half made, becomes more beautiful every day.[217]

The Yosemite earthquake is but one example of Muir's celebration of storms. Such celebrations are a common theme throughout his writings. Cohen calls them Muir's "stormy sermons."[218] This is an apt description because of the fervor of these stories. Through these sermons Muir exhibits not only a gala of gratitude for natural processes but he also celebrates the perspective that storms offer. I'll return to this idea of perspective in the next chapter but

for now suffice it to say Muir saw storms as antidotes to an arrogant, anthropocentric society because they remind us humans that we are not in control. “How terribly downright must seem the utterances of storms and earthquakes to those accustomed to the soft hypocrisies of society. Man’s control is being steadily extended over the forces of nature, but is well, at least for the present, that storms can still make themselves heard through the thickest walls.”[219]

Just below the surface of Muir’s celebration lurked a conundrum. Why was he so often the only one celebrating? Why did others not respond, not only to storms but to Nature’s beauty generally, the way he did? Such questions stayed with him throughout his life and he puzzled through them later when he considered how best to protect Nature. I’ll offer just two examples of how Muir was mystified by what he considered a true phenomenon: seemingly indifferent responses to Nature’s beauty.

Stoic Friends

Annie Bidwell

Annie Bidwell details an outing with Muir and others to Mount Lassen. She describes Muir as the most enthusiastic person she or “anyone else has ever seen.”[220] She explains how at night “Mr. Muir would make immense fires to display the beauties of the silver fir, which in the glow … assumed the appearance of enormous pagodas of filigree silver. Mr. Muir would waive his arms and shout “Look at the glory! Look at the glory!’”[221] Asa Gray and Sir Joseph Hooker, who considered themselves more serious scientists, would gaze calmly and appraisingly at the “glory” but would say nothing. Bidwell became dismayed at their aloofness and asked, “Why do you tease Mr. Muir? Don’t you think it is beautiful?” “Of course it is” they responded, “but Muir is so eternally enthusiastic we like to tease him.”[222]

Later on the trip, Muir discovered glacial *striae* carved into lava rock and shouted "Hurry, run, see this wonderful thing!" Bidwell, laboring behind, choking on red dust wheezed out, "I can't hurry any faster than I am. I'm spitting blood now." Muir unrelenting said, "Oh, never mind that. Hurry. This is worth dying for!"[223]

Tellingly, Muir was urging them toward ancient glacial carvings on a rock; not something fleeting like a bird or sunset. By this standard, Muir's urgency was not reasonable for there was no need for his friends to rush. It is understandable why his friends might not respond the way he did. His ecstatic gratitude was beyond common reason.[224] And he celebrated alone.

Charles Sargent

Similarly, in 1898 Muir and his friends Charles Sargent and William Canby climbed Grandfather Mountain in North Carolina. They lumbered up slope after slope, Muir impatiently leading the way. When they reached the top Muir was mesmerized by the view. Sargent stood detached, clothed in his "frosty, inherited dignity." This is how Muir described what happened next:

> I couldn't hold in, and began to jump about and sing and glory in it all. Then I happened to look around and catch sight of Sargent, standing there as cool as a rock, with a half-amused look on his face at me, but never saying a word. "Why don't you let yourself out at a sight like that?" I asked."I don't wear my heart on my sleeve," he retorted. "Who cares where you wear your little heart, mon," I cried. There you stand in the face of all Heaven come down to earth, like a critic of the universe, as if to say, 'Come Nature, bring on the best you have. I'm from BOSTON!'"[225]

What added to Muir's bewilderment was the fact that he was often in the company of those who clearly loved Nature when he celebrated alone. Charles Sargent, Asa Gray, and Joseph Hooker were among the most influential botanists of the 19th century. Sargent was first director of the Arnold arboretum at Harvard, Joseph Hooker was Charles Darwin's best

friend. Each of these people knew Nature intimately and yet somehow remained stoic when Muir believed grateful celebration was a more fitting response.

Perhaps because he was often in the company of others who didn't celebrate their gratitude Muir was deeply affected when he finally was in the company of someone who did. Travelling in Alaska, in July of 1880, Muir met his celebratory equal; someone who would celebrate gratitude as exuberantly as he did. The fact that this passionate someone was not human made a lasting impression on Muir.

Stickeen

The "most memorable of all" his "wild days" occurred while exploring the Taylor glacier in Alaska with a small black dog named Stickeen. After making haste to welcome a storm and join the "exhilarating music and motion" and "go forth to see God making landscapes" Muir and Stickeen passed a full day on the glacier before turning back toward camp. [226] They hurriedly skipped over crevasses with hopes of arriving before dark. Their progress, however, was halted by a daunting 60 foot crevasse. The only way across was a thin sliver ice bridge four inches wide, attached eight feet below the top of the chasm on each side.

With an ice axe, Muir cut steps down the wall of the crevasse to gain access to the ice bridge. He then climbed down the steps, sat at the foot of the ice bridge, flattened its razor sharp edge and "hitched" himself across. When he arrived at the other side he cut more steps in the far wall in order to climb to the top.

Stickeen was anxiously waiting on the opposite side. Muir recalls,

> When I gained the other side, he screamed louder than ever, and after running back and forth in vain search for a way of escape, he would return to the brink of the crevasse above the bridge, moaning and wailing … Strange so small an animal should be capable of such big, wise fears. I called again and again in a reassuring

> tone … He would hush for a moment, look down again at the bridge, and then lie back in despair, as if howling,"O-o-oh! what a place! No-o-o, I can never go-o-o down there!"[227]

But the "brave dog" did climb down the steps and began to carefully negotiate the sliver ice bridge. He arrived at the other side, stopped, and looked up at the steps leading to the top. Here is where Muir feared Stickeen might fail for dogs are notoriously poor climbers. Muir was trying to decide if he had clothing sufficient to fashion a noose to put over the dog's body to haul him up. Meanwhile Stickeen was studying the steps. Muir writes,

> Then suddenly up he came in a springy rush, hooking his paws into the steps and notches so quickly that I could not see how it was done, and whizzed past my head … And now came the scene! "Well done, well done, little boy! Brave boy!" I cried, trying to catch and caress him; but he would not be caught. Never before or since have I seen anything like so passionate a revulsion from the depths of despair to exultant, triumphant, uncontrollable joy. He flashed and darted hither and thither as if fairly demented, screaming and shouting, swirling round and round in giddy loops and circles like a leaf in a whirlwind, lying down, and rolling over and over …When I ran up to him to shake him, fearing he might die of joy, he flashed off two or three hundred yards, his feet in a mist of motion; then, turning suddenly, came back in a wild rush and launched himself at my face, … Moses' stately song of triumph after escaping the Egyptians and the Red Sea was nothing to it.[228]

Three decades later Muir was still retelling the story at public speaking engagements and around dinner tables often at the insistence of his daughters.[229] Through the years he highlighted Stickeen's celebration and bravery with increasing animation; saying "nothing in after years has dimmed that Alaska storm-day" or its effect on my opinion of "our fellow mortals."[230]

This is more than a story of a man relating to a dog's emotional outburst. In some ways Stickeen acted as an exemplar for Muir. Briefly consider two of the benefits inherent in

studying exemplars described in Chapter One: finding commonality and helping focus on the fundamental question of "how ought I to live?"

A study of exemplars prioritizes commonalities over differences. In one telling passage Muir says, "His voice and gestures, hopes and fears, were so perfectly human that none could mistake them."[231] But what is "perfectly human" to Muir may seem beyond the pale to his peers who teased Muir for his ecstatic celebrations. Stickeen's voice gestures hopes and fears may have been perfectly fitting, or perfectly Muirian, but Muir would have probably been alone among his friends in calling them perfectly human.

It is interesting to consider the virtue of courage in this context. Aristotle says courageous acts require an element of fear. It is not courageous to push forward while oblivious to danger. To be brave is to feel the fear and do it anyway. Muir says Stickeen was howling in despair moments before the brave little dog crossed the sliver ice bridge. In chapter three we saw how Muir's writings reveal a person comfortable with using virtue language when describing wildlife. Here Muir is using virtue language to describe a semi-domesticated animal though Muir is quick to complement Stickeen as more wild than tame. He could "endure cold and hunger like a bear" and "swim like a seal."[232]

The day on the glacier with Stickeen also helped Muir focus on the essential question of how I ought to live. For Muir, part of the answer is to celebrate and be grateful. Muir tended to think people were less oppressed by society than ensnarled by their own propensity to conform. [233] This conformity has a stifling affect on their truer natures. Muir was struck by Stickeen's ability, unlike many humans he knew, to be able to freely express his gratitude. Muir's own life made the argument that celebrating gratitude was both innate and life enriching. In Stickeen he saw someone exhibiting panoply of emotions, emotions that Muir

shared, including boisterous celebrations of gratitude. It was evident to Muir that such emotional expressions enriched the celebrant. It was the shared natured of these emotions which mostly affected Muir when he reflected about Stickeen. "Who could have guessed the capacity of the … enduring little fellow for all that most stirs this mortal frame? Nobody could have helped crying with him!"[234]

In the next section I'll show at the heart of Muir's rejoicing was a gratitude for Nature's beauty.

Gratitude and Beauty

"Everyone needs beauty," Muir wrote, "as well as bread."[235] By comparing beauty to bread Muir is expressing his belief that exposure to beauty is essential and at the center of a flourishing life. When he was immersed in beauty his natural response was one of gratitude.

Appeal to Beauty

There is a chasm between the published writings of John Muir and his unpublished journals and letters. The published books are polished and purposefully crafted with a specific audience and goal in mind. The letters and journals are raw and emotional aiming more toward expression than effect. What the two sets of writings have in common is Muir's response to the beauty of Nature.

On December 16, 1908, Muir spoke before the committee on Public Lands of the House of Representatives, in defense of the Hetch Hetchy valley. This was the last great cause of his life. He turned to what he believed was his most persuasive argument. He turned to beauty. His statement began:

> The better part of the world is beginning to know that beauty plays an important part in human progress, and that regarded even from the lowest financial stand point it is one of the most precious and productive assets any country can posses.
>
> Most of our forests have already vanished in lumber and smoke, mostly smoke. Fortunately the Federal Government is now faithfully protecting and developing nearly all that is left of our forest and stream resources; nor even in these money-mad commercial days have our beauty resources been altogether forgotten. Witness the magnificent wild parks of the West, set apart and guarded for the highest good of all, and the thousands of city parks make to satisfy the natural taste and hunger for landscape beauty that God in some measure has put into every human being.[236]

Philosophers have been grappling with meaningful conceptions of beauty since before the time of Plato. [237]Aristotle saw beauty as synonymous with perfection.[238] An in-depth discussion is better left for a work of aesthetics and is beyond the scope of this writing. But a brief exploration may bring some understanding of why Muir felt such gratitude for beauty.[239]

A Conception of Beauty

In his book *Only a Promise of Happiness?* Alexander Nehamas argues that beauty is not strictly public, an objectivist Kantian notion, nor entirely private, a conception of subjectivism, but what he calls "personal."[240] If one understands public/objective and private/subjectivist conceptions of beauty as representing extremes on a continuum, Nehamas' "personal" would be found somewhere in the middle.[241]

A personal conception of beauty, according to Nehamas, is more like a joke: not everyone finds the same thing funny, but many do, and our conceptions of both beauty and humor tie us to a larger community. Importantly, these communities are shaped by shared values. We find something more beautiful if it is representative of our values. So, for example, if one places value on clean air knowing whether or not a brilliant sunset is the product of thermal inversion haze may be relevant to whether or not one finds it beautiful.

The genesis of the sunset colors may be pertinent to one's assessment of its value and hence its beauty. Beauty is more than just "good lookin." [242] Muir is reflecting the connection between beauty and the value of what he considers natural when he writes, "God never made an ugly landscape. All that the sun shines on is beautiful, so long as it is wild."[243]

By Nehamus's account, beauty is not only grounded in value but is also seductive. He continues:

> To judge something as beautiful is to express a desire to continue to interact with it. It pulls me toward it. Beauty is a mystery – forever a step beyond what I can say about it. A call beyond language. When I say something is beautiful I want others to share the appreciation with me. To find something beautiful is not just to contemplate it but to make it a part of your life. Why? Because you think there is something more to it than you see initially. You want to know more.[244]

One of the features of beauty is that we want to know more about it. We are pulled toward beauty and compelled to have it be a part of our life. Muir wanted beauty as a part of his life because he found it essential to flourishing but also because he saw beauty as tantamount to god. A life without beauty was a godless life.

Muir's Beauty and Value

Muir's earlier writings, both published and private are filled with references to "Lord" and "God." As his thinking and writing style matured, he began to substitute in the words "Nature" and "Beauty."[245] Indeed, God, Nature and Beauty seem to have become synonymous.[246] In one revealing passage, he says

> The pines that spring around me higher, higher to the star-flowered sky, are plainly full of God. God in them. They in God. . . . Oh, the infinite abundance and universality of Beauty. Beauty is God. What shall we say of God, that we may not say of Beauty! [247]

This is important because it shows that as Muir was cultivating gratitude for beauty he was also cultivating gratitude for God. Notice how Beauty and God are both capitalized

in this passage. Coming out of a strict fundamentalist Christian upbringing Muir had began to understand God in more expansive ways. Many scholars have tried to parse through Muir's relationship between god and Nature. It has been argued he was Taoist, pantheist, animist, and forever and always a Christian.[248] But regardless of the religious label one may wish to place on Muir it is fair to say the value he saw in Natural harmony, God and Beauty were interrelated. To help illustrate this point I'll consider an excursion he took to Mount Ritter.

Beauty and Harmony from the Top of Mount Ritter

Having spent the summer of 1873 studying high mountain glaciers, Muir set out one late autumn morning from the foot of Mount Lyell, down to Yosemite Valley, to replenish his supply of bread and tea. Among the first people he met were two artists awaiting his return to the valley. They asked whether during his mountain ramblings he had ever come upon a landscape fitting for a large painting and, if so, if he would be willing to lead them there.[249]

Muir understood enough about the artistic aesthetic to believe his sense of beauty would differ from that of the artists. He wrote:

> to artists, few portions of the High Sierra are, strictly speaking, picturesque. The whole massive uplift of the range is one great picture, not clearly divisible into smaller ones. . . . In general, the younger the mountain-landscapes,-- the less separable are they into artistic bits capable of being made into warm, sympathetic, lovable pictures with appreciable humanity in them." [250]

It was difficult to find scenes clearly divisible into smaller pictures. Muir correctly anticipated this would disappoint the young artists. The general expression of the Sierra is scenery, rocky and savage, but non-distinct.

> They threaded the forest from ridge to ridge, eagerly scanning the landscapes as they were unfolded. …' we see nothing as yet at all available for effective pictures.' [251]

For the artists the rocky and savage nature of the Sierra made it difficult to frame. For Muir, the rocky and savage nature of the Sierra made it alluring because it was evidence that the mountains were still in the early stages of formation.[252] The Sierra is a relatively young mountain range, with its latest uplift as recently as 4 million years ago. It was certainly much younger than mountain ranges Muir had known before.[253] Eventually, Muir did find landscape scenery suitable for framing and left the appreciative artists there as he went off to climb Mount Ritter.

On top of Ritter Muir was captivated by his ideal of beauty; stunning vistas of flowing ecosystemic harmony. Rushing in different directions, forming various watersheds and bioregions were five rivers all emanating from his perch on the top of Mount Ritter. Beyond the valleys was a seemingly endless range of mountain peaks. It was a powerful sight.

"How truly glorious the landscape circled around this noble summit!--giant mountains, valleys innumerable, glaciers and meadows, rivers and lakes, with the wide blue sky bent tenderly over them all."[254] In great detail, Muir, describes the view looking in the four directions.

> [G]enerally, when looking for the first time from an all-embracing standpoint like this, the inexperienced observer is oppressed by the incomprehensible grandeur, variety, and abundance of the mountains rising shoulder to shoulder beyond the reach of vision; and it is only after they have been studied one by one, long and lovingly, that their far-reaching harmonies become manifest.
>
> Then, penetrate the wilderness where you may, the main telling features, to which all the surrounding topography is subordinate, are quickly perceived, and the most complicated clusters of peaks stand revealed harmoniously correlated and fashioned like works of art-- Nature's poems carved on tables of stone--the simplest and most emphatic of her glacial compositions.[255]

This was true beauty; Nature's poems. Inexperienced observers might be overwhelmed by the grandeur; but attentive natural scientists that look long and lovingly are able to comprehend Nature's harmonies. With experience and knowledge and patience the beauty becomes apparent.

Beyond the geographic harmony, Muir was mesmerized by the chronological harmony. The past, present, and future were merging in unimaginable and yet observable ways in front and below him.

> Could we have been here to observe during the glacial period, we should have overlooked a wrinkled ocean of ice as continuous as that now covering the landscapes of Greenland; . . . Here are the roots of all the life of the valleys. Ice changing to water, lakes to meadows, and mountains to plains. And while we thus contemplate Nature's methods of landscape creation, however imperfectly, the landscapes of the past, we also learn that as these we now behold have succeeded those of the preglacial age, so they in turn are withering and vanishing to be succeeded by others yet unborn.[256]

Muir's description of the view from the top of Mount Ritter is an illustration of beauty as more than visual splendor. He was captivated by a view into the processes of Nature. Muir's love of beauty is drawn from a gratitude for holism. From Ritter he saw nature's harmonies, vastness, a peek back in time, and a glimpse of what the future view might hold; connecting webs of time and place. Such images, seen and imagined, pictures of god, beauty, and Nature were profoundly beautiful to Muir.

The Ugliness of Abstraction

In contrast to the beauty Muir saw in holism was the concern he felt that too many others would see Nature in dead statistical abstractions. He noticed tourists consumed with quantifications and comparisons. Some would judge one attraction as more extraordinary than another, or deem one sequoia superior if it was bigger than another, or judge waterfalls

by the volume of water. Muir responded:

> As far as the Falls are concerned, it seems to be pretty generally believed that the greater the quantity of water the greater the beauty, and it certainly seems pathetic that at this stage of evolution it should be necessary to state that every waterfall has an individual character, and that each possesses a series of beauties changing with the seasons, and all the various types of beauty blending with one another inseparable an incomparable. [257]

The preoccupation with the largest, oldest, and tallest was dangerous because it assumed an artificial standard of judgment. Thus he pointed out that Mount Whitney had "no special geological significance" and held "little appreciable individuality." [258] Muir didn't equate the highest with the most beautiful.

The tourist inclination to preference highlights and points of interest was a crime against Nature in a place like the Sierra. Gaping at artifacts might be appropriate in museums but Nature, which was "inseparable and incomparable", should not be objective or isolated from a view of Nature's harmony.

Late in life he spoke of evolution in an interview, criticizing the reasoning of those who believed the theory meant that the harmony of Nature was to be understood as "the blind product of an unthinking abstraction." He was reluctant to get involved in discussions about ideas of Nature abstracted from Natural harmony; that which was abstracted, was dead; no longer a part of a living, ecological system. He was a great defender of Darwin and stridently maintained that evolution was a process not an act. Furthermore, if one wished to know Nature's beauty, it was a process that needed to be witnessed. No amount of theorizing would change the basic issue: people who abstracted themselves from Nature's harmony could not learn of her beauty. He told his interviewer, "You say that what I write may bring this beauty to the hearts of those who do not go out to see it. They have no right to it." [259]

Beauty in the Face of Danger

To get a sense of how essential was Muir's gratitude for natural beauty consider how at times his gratitude would eclipsed even a sense of personal safety. One telling example is found in his essay "The Snow Storm on Mount Shasta." [260]

On the last day of April, 1875, Muir and his hiking companion Jerome Fay were stuck in an ice storm as they climbed down from Mount Shasta. For seventeen hours the two lay on top of volcanic fumaroles trying not to freeze to death. They had no shelter and little clothing. Muir was wearing but a short sleeved shirt. They lay on their backs, skin burning from steam while their chests were covered with ice and snow. Neither turned over afraid of inhaling carbonic acid gas which might cause sleep and death. The temperature reached twenty below zero. In this world, filled with fire and ice, a world which seems to have nothing of sensate pleasure in it, Muir found beauty.

> Storm clouds on the mountains--how truly beautiful they are!-- floating fountains bearing water for every well; the angels of streams and lakes …The extreme beauty of the sky at times beguiled our sense of suffering. Ursa Major, with its thousand home associations, circled in glorious brightness overhead; the mysterious star clouds of the Milky Way arched over with marvelous distinctness, and every planet glowed with long lance rays like lilies within reach.. . . . .Then the bitter moaning wind and the drifting snow would break the blissful vision, and our dreary pains would cover us like clouds.
>
> "Muir," Jerome would inquire, with pitiful faintness, "are you suffering much?"
>
> "Yes," I would reply, straining to keep my voice brave, "the pains of a Scandinavian hell, at once frozen and burned. But never mind, Jerome; the night will wear away at last, and to-morrow we go a-Maying, and what camp fires we will make, and what sun baths we will take!" [261]

Upon making it safely off the mountain the beauty of this perilous situation was replaced by beauty found upon liberation.

> How beautiful seemed the golden sunbeams streaming through the woods, and warming the brown furrowed boles of the cedar and pine! The birds observed us as we passed, and we felt like speaking to every flower. . . . Next morning we seemed to have risen from the dead. My bedroom was flooded with living sunshine, and from the window I saw the great white Shasta cone wearing its clouds and forests, and holding them loftily in the sky. How fresh and sunful and new-born our beautiful world appeared![262]

From the depths of "Scandinavian hell" to the heights of "golden sunbeams," Muir's gratitude for the beauty of Nature would consistently percolate to surface regardless of the conditions.

Gratitude and Reciprocity

John Muir was not a hedonist extracting pleasure from Nature. Such gratification may create an innate sense of delight but is not virtue. As Aristotle counseled, to possess virtue is to act virtuously, "to virtue belongs virtuous activity."[263]

Aristotle's description of friendship is a window into Muir's relationship with Nature. Aristotle says friendship is a "common good" that what is good for one friend is good for the other. To merely use a friend as a resource is an ill-conceived notion and ill-formed friendship. One values ones friends for their own sake and is drawn to protect and support one's friends. Inherent in friendship is a draw toward reciprocity born of gratitude for the relationship and for the friend. A desire to give back is an essential feature of gratitude, distinguishing it from appreciation or thankfulness. [264] In this sense, gratitude is like love; more than a passive affect but also an activity.[265]

The Influence of Muir

Emerson wrote to Muir of the debt to society owed by a man of instinct and insight. But the debt Muir felt was to Nature not to society. An exploration of Muir's environmental

campaigns is beyond the scope of this writing. But it is appropriate to point to his legacy as an environmentalist as indication of his willingness to reciprocate his gratitude.

Galen Rowell once asked Rheinhold Messner, perhaps the world's most accomplished mountain climber, why the most beautiful mountains and valleys of the European Alps are so highly developed? "How is it that we Americans have managed to preserve our mountain areas while you Europeans have trashed yours?" Messner explained the difference in three words, "You had Muir."[266]

Robert Underwood Johnson says in Yosemite in 1889 he and Muir looked upon despoiled forests, meadows, streams and waterfalls and as Muir deplored the havoc that commercialism had wrought there were "tears in his voice." Johnson was deeply moved, as seldom in his life, by Muir's protective instincts saying Muir "loves (Yosemite) as a mother love's a child."[267]

Muir's love for Yosemite was manifest in many well known actions. As well as founding the Sierra Club, Muir is called the father of the National Park Service.[268] This designation is the result of a backpacking trip in 1903 on which he convinced President Theodore Roosevelt of the need for federal protection for this country's wild places. Beneath the trees of Yosemite, Muir and Roosevelt laid the foundation of Roosevelt's conservation legislation. Muir had access to Roosevelt in part because the President wanted to meet Muir after having read his articles and books. Years later Roosevelt wrote:

> His was a dauntless soul. … Not only are his books delightful, not only is he the author to whom all men turn when they think of the Sierra and the Northern glaciers, and the giant trees of the California slope, but he was also … what few nature lovers are, a man able to influence contemporary thought and action on the subjects to which he has devoted his life. … Our generation owes much to John Muir. [269]

Subsequent generations owe much to Muir as well. In 1988, The California Legislature proclaimed April 21 (Muir's birthday) John Muir Day to observe the importance of a clean, safe, natural environment. It called on the governor to issue a proclamation recognizing John Muir Day and requesting that public schools include special programs in their activities, to recognize the contributions of John Muir to State of California.

Several years ago, the California Historical Society voted Muir the "greatest Californian in the state's history."[270] Muir is the only person in our nation's history to be on two different postage stamps. His image, along with Yosemite Valley and the California condor, is on the California quarter issued in 2004. More sites in California have been named for John Muir than any other individual, including Muir woods, Muir Gorge in Yosemite, Muir pass in Kings Canyon, Muir Grove in Sequoia, and the John Muir trail. The U.S. Geological Survey's guidelines on naming mountains and lakes, uses Muir as an example of one who has had so many places named for him that they would not likely approve any further commemorations.[271] Often times such designations are given to those making financial contributions or philanthropic work. John Muir's honors have come solely on the basis of his effectiveness in protecting Nature.

Muir knew his most affective work would place him in the midst of affairs for which he cared very little. "This playing at politics saps the very foundations of righteousness," he wrote.[272] Indeed, perhaps the depth of his gratitude can be understood by his willingness to be in situations he found so distasteful. Muir was willing to enter a world and mode of thought which he feared was a part of the problem.[273] Muir's influence and effectiveness did not come easily or without personal challenges.

Challenges

Perhaps more than any other prominent environmentalist, Muir puzzled over the complicated relationship between people and Nature. In 1868, Muir walked away from civilization "to find the law that governs the relationship subsisting between human beings and Nature."[274] He had faith in a great love at the heart of the world but couldn't see it in human culture. He believed he found that love in Nature's harmony. By the 1880's, he knew he would be deeply challenged trying to share a vision of it.

"I would gladly do anything in my power to preserve Nature's sayings and doings here or elsewhere but have no genius for managing societies."[275] This passage speaks not only to Muir's desire but also to his confusion. He recognized most people did not respond to Nature the way he did and this knowledge complicated his vision of Nature preservation.

He felt ambivalence about sharing Nature's beauty with those who were not likely to appreciate it.[276] On one hand, he believed if people could be led to Nature they would be charmed. On the other hand, the cumulative result of his experience was that this wasn't necessarily true. Some people saw beauty and majesty in a giant sequoia where others saw only board feet.

Etched in his mind was his experience at Mammoth Caves in Kentucky, a place he considered a natural wonder, when he found that many living nearby had not even bothered to go look.[277] Nor would he forget his first summer in the Sierra working with Billy the sheep herder. Muir tried to get him to the rim of Yosemite to marvel at the view that had taken Muir's breath away. But Billy wouldn't go, telling Muir Yosemite was but "a hole in the ground, a place dangerous about falling into, a good place to keep away from. …Tourists that spend money to see rocks and falls are fools, that's all. You can't humbug me." Muir

concluded that of all of Nature's voices, the only one Billy heard was "baa."[278] Muir knew that not everyone was enthusiastic about Nature's beauty.[279]

Muir never developed an abiding faith in humanity. He remained deeply torn between hope and skepticism about humankind. But he did have faith in Nature and eventually surrendered to a hope that Nature could transform people. This hope would act as a guiding principle in his preservation efforts.

> Few are altogether deaf to the preaching of pine trees. Their sermons on the mountains go to our hearts; and if people in general could be got into the woods, even for once, to hear the trees speak for themselves, all difficulties in the way of forest preservation would vanish.[280]

Muir didn't completely believe it; but he went with it.[281] And, in roughly scribbled notes, parts of which would later become *Our National Parks,* Muir wrote, "heaven knows that John Baptist was not more eager to get all his fellow sinners into the Jordan than I to baptize all of mine in the beauty of God's mountains."[282] The use of the word "sinners" speaks to his skeptical view of humanity. His eagerness speaks to his optimism about the possibility of Nature effecting change. If people could become Nature lovers it was Nature that would do the seducing. His role was to deliver people to Nature's influence. His ambivalence not withstanding this is what he intended to do.[283] One way he hoped he could invite people to Nature was through his writing.

Writing

Muir had no formal training as an author and fretted about writing for a popular audience. He knew words were insufficient to communicate what he wanted to express.[284] He did his best to recreate the joy he found in Nature and celebrate with his audience but the practice was strained. Muir's editor, Robert Underwood Johnson, repeatedly encouraged Muir to reduce his use of the words 'beautiful' and 'glorious' in his writings.[285]

But glory, an Old Testament word signifying the presence of god, was as close as he could get to what he saw and felt in Nature so he leaned on the word.[286]

It is unlikely that any art form, separate and abstract, can convey a holistic experience. But Muir's task was even more desperate because what he wanted to communicate was not a human experience; he wanted to reflect Nature itself. He was more interested in people knowing Nature than in people using Nature as a vehicle for personal experience. "The truth" he would say "is I have a low opinion of books. No amount of word-making will ever make a single soul to 'know' these mountains. One day's exposure to mountains is better than mountains of books." [287] Getting people to know Nature is what he wanted to accomplish. At times, he feared it was a hopeless task but he kept at it.

The writing process itself was a constant struggle for Muir. His secretary, Marion Randall Parsons, noted that "composition was always slow and laborious for him … Each sentence, each phrase, each word, underwent his critical scrutiny, not once but twenty times before he was satisfied to let it stand." Muir would often say to her, "This business of writing books is a long, tiresome, endless job."[288]

Muir's friend, zoologist Henry Fairfield Osborn described Muir's practice. "Daily he rose at 4:30 o'clock and after a simple cup of coffee labored incessantly … he groans over his labors, he writes and rewrites and interpolates." Having not been trained or schooled in literature Muir read copiously in search of guidance and a model. Osborn says Muir admired the prose of Carlyle, Emerson and Thoreau and it was Thoreau with whom he most directly related and whose style he tried to emulate.[289] Though Thoreau was prickly and Muir deeply social they each shunned high-brow culture, required solitude, embraced Nature and

cultivated a scientific aptitude.[290] Says Osborn, "He is a very firm believer in Thoreau and starts (his writing day) by reading deeply of this author."[291]

In addition to the difficulty of the writing process, Muir even had trepidation about the possibility of successfully connecting with his audience. “Book making frightens me” he said “because it demands so much artificialness and retrograding.”[292] The word retrograding implies regression. Muir hoped he had graduated from civilization and worried that too much involvement with a popular audience would send him backward. He feared unwelcomed influence into his life as he mediated between his vision of Nature and the expectations of his readers. He was apprehensive that in communicating with a popular audience he would have to identify with their thinking. By lobbying in the halls of humanity he would be opening himself to the sway of those he lobbied. He knew it wasn’t a one way relationship. This was a real concern for a man fiercely independent and, as discussed in Chapter Two, at odds with popular values. Nevertheless, Muir was committed to publishing as a path to “say a good word for Nature.”[293] He set out to understand the audiences he would try to reach and wrote with those different audiences in mind.

Audience Analysis

As an example of Muir’s attempt to pattern his writing to reach specific audiences consider his arguments for the preservation of what one day would become Sequoia National Park. His analysis took three different forms for three different audiences.

“God’s First Temples: How Shall We Preserve Our Forests?” was sent to the *Sacramento Record Union*. The intended audience of this publication was the California legislature. This article was extremely utilitarian in nature. Muir emphasized the value of forests as watershed. He tried to appeal to the self-interest of Californians pointing out

that they were losing a "valuable resource." He spoke of "wasteful" lumbering methods and suggested that Californians were not keeping up with the Europeans in practicing, efficient, economic forestry.[294] One cannot help but notice a slightly cynical tone in this article.

"On the Post Glacial History of Sequoia Gigantea" was published by the *American Association for the Advancement of Science*. This article included a more sophisticated analysis of the condition of the forest and was aimed primarily at a science-minded audience. Muir was comfortable writing in this style.

"New Sequoia Forests of California" was published in *Harpers*. Given that Muir was attempting to reach an eastern audience, the *Harpers'* article was not addressing a California utilitarian consciousness but rather an eastern aesthetic sensibility. It is safer politically for an eastern congress member than a western one to vote for federal intervention in western lands. The eastern constituency would not be as affected economically. Therefore, the importance of non-economic considerations is increased in the mind of the voters, and the representatives are not as hamstrung with their votes. The strategy of lobbying those on the opposite seaboard for intervention is still highly effective today. In the *Harpers'* essay, Muir was able to describe his personal conversion to the gospel of "King Sequoia" and speak with a poetic voice of the multidimensional living community of the Sierra Forest. Muir was more comfortable writing to this audience than to the resource utilitarian audience but still felt uneasy with objectifying Nature by putting it to a spiritual use.

Reciprocity and Meaning

Current research offers a dizzying array of the benefits of gratitude. Grateful people are happier, less depressed, less stressed, and more satisfied with their interpersonal relationships.[295] They experience higher levels of control over their environments, more personal growth, a higher likelihood of finding purpose in life, and have higher degrees of self acceptance.[296] Grateful people develop more positive ways of managing difficulties, are more likely to deal with problems directly, are less likely to blame themselves or deal with troubles through substance use.[297] Evidently grateful people sleep better.[298] Many virtues are central to a flourishing life, but gratitude may be uniquely important. Recent studies suggest that gratitude can explain aspects of well-being that other personality traits cannot.[299]

The reciprocation of gratitude can bring an additional benefit as well; meaning. In his seminal work *Man's Search for Meaning* Victor Frankl's writes, "Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life." [300] Frankl argues we are drawn to discover meaning in our lives more fundamentally than we are drawn toward power or pleasure. We need to "stop asking about the meaning of our lives" but recognize we are responsible to life to answer about our own unique meaning. And our answer must consist "not in talk and meditation, but in right action and in right conduct."[301] A life of meaning may bring, as a by-product, happiness but meaning is more fundamental than pleasure.

In this way, and true to the nature of the word, reciprocity comes full circle. By "saying a good word" for Nature, Muir found added meaning. In the second chapter I wrote about the difference between hard work and over-industry. It is worth noting that as much as Muir struggled with Nature writing and questions concerning environmental activism he

never used the word over-industry to describe this work. As frustrating and difficult as the work may have been at times, it was on balance meaningful and enriching.

Muir's activism benefitted both himself and the larger community. Recognizing the union between what is good for the whole and what is good for the self is a key desideratum for environmental exemplars. Many environmental virtue ethicists are sensitive to the concern that virtue ethics might turn vital questions of environmental ethics upside down. Focusing on what the good life is to an individual can generate complications for an ethics which was founded on the idea of taking a more holistic outlook.[302] Therefore, many environmental virtue ethicists understand "a good life" as one which is good not just for the one living it but for other humans and the wider biological community as well.

One of the reasons Muir makes an excellent environmental exemplar is because we find so little tension between these two ideas. For Muir the good life included a life that was good for the larger community. "I live only to entice others to look at Nature's beauty" may be a bit overstated but it gets to something fundamental about Muir's value system.[303] Muir found added meaning in his life when he reciprocated his gratitude by "saying a good word" for Nature." [304]

Summary

Muir cultivated gratitude through his boisterous celebrations in Nature. These celebrations formed a type of gratitude practice. Although other people, including his friends, did not necessarily feel compelled to celebrate as he did. Muir's connection to the non-human world was enhanced when he witnessed the celebration of Stickeen.

Muir's gratitude for Nature was deeper than appreciation or thankfulness as demonstrated by his desire to reciprocate. This pull to reciprocate resulted in campaigns of

environmental protection which were ultimately good for others because of their effectiveness and added meaning to Muir's life.

In the next chapter I'll show how Muir cultivated a third virtue in Nature, reverence, and consider its central role in his conception of the good life.

CHAPTER FIVE

REVERENCE

On September 2, 1867, John Muir spread out a map to “rough-hew” a thousand mile walk from Wisconsin to the Gulf of Mexico. He would journey south by the “wildest leafiest, and least trodden way” he could find and collect plant specimens along the way. He would make entries in a small journal with the intrepid pronouncement *John Muir, Earth-Planet, Universe* circled with ecstatic curlicues on the flyleaf.[305] He would venture to Florida and find his way to South America to retrace Humboldt’s trek. He planned to tramp southward to a tributary of the Orinoco River, follow it to the main river, cross the divide to the Amazon basin, build a raft and ride the Amazon River to the Atlantic Ocean. [306] He was “doomed to be carried of the spirit into the wilderness.”[307]

He did not plan to contract malaria and typhoid fever in Cedar Keys, Florida. He was a mile or two from his lodging when the fever hit. He walked on but repeatedly passed out. Awaking unsure of the way he was heading, he resolved to pass out with his head pointing in the right direction. He would rise, stagger, and fall again in “delirious, bewilderment, gasping and throbbing with only moments of consciousness.”[308] Proud, headstrong, stubborn, fiercely independent, Muir insisted through a sheer force of will he could get to where he was going. He made it. But afterward he convalesced for three months in Cedar Keys.[309]

When Muir lost his sight in the industrial accident, he reasoned city life was at the core of his strife. He was sure that Nature could never hurt him, for Nature was the original source of good living and the cure for all illness. Yet he had contracted malaria not in civilization but in

the wild, and the illness left him fearing he may never recover. He did not blame Nature; he blamed himself for not being sensitive to limits.

> When man takes himself to sickly parts of the tropics and perishes, he cannot see that he was never intended for such deadly climates. No, he will rather accuse the first mother of the cause of the difficulty.[310]

Given his complete faith and trust in Mother Nature it is not surprising that he concluded his illness was a human failing. Muir began to believe that our job is to learn about the limits Nature places upon us and to respond accordingly.

Muir had started his journey with a bold spirit of world exploring. By the time he left Cedar Keys, he humbly believed that every species and individual has an assigned place beyond which they venture at their own peril. At the same time, he was gaining a sense of self-reliance. He had walked 1000 miles toward freedom and wisdom. He had shipped home a dazzling array of plants, evidence of his increasing ability as a botanist, and he had reflected deeply about the composition of the world and his place in it.

Each of these insights is a corollary of reverence. For as we shall see, the notion of reverence as a virtue, an ancient Greek conception, entail a proper understanding of human limitations and potentialities. Reverence grounds both our attitude and actions in reality, eschewing both delusion and apathy. In the previous chapters, I've explored the roles of attentiveness and gratitude toward Nature that Muir cultivated in his conception of the good life. The purpose of this chapter is to show how Muir cultivated reverence in Nature and to consider its central role in Muir's conception of the good life. This chapter is divided into four parts: 1) a description of reverence 2) reverence and science 3) reverence and mountaineering 4) reverence and wild adventure.

A Description of Reverence

The conception of reverence I'll be using in this chapter comes from Paul Woodruff. He explains in *Reverence: The Renewing of an Ancient Virtue,* reverence was an essential part of ancient Greek morality, although, he admits, "Reverence compels me to confess that I do not know exactly what reverence is."[311] Of course, not knowing precisely what a virtue is does not mean one does not have a useful idea about it. It is difficult to be exact about the virtues of attentiveness or gratitude as well and yet we can have meaningful conceptions of each.

Woodruff claims that reverence was a *cardinal* virtue for the Athenians; a principal virtue of paramount importance upon which other virtues are built.[312] Yet reverence doesn't appear on any list of ancient virtues and is seldom talked about. Woodruff claims this is because reverence was so fundamental to the ancient Greek way of life that it seldom needed to be discussed. Consequently, modern scholars have overlooked the importance of reverence to the ancient Greeks.

Woodruff describes reverence with an Aristotelian schema: a "golden mean" situated between two vices. The vices represented excessive and deficient amounts. He characterizes reverence as a "proper understanding of human limitations." He situates reverence between the vices of acting base, like a wild animal, in the deficient, and acting like a God, in the excess. To be reverent is to know your human place, and your human power and limitation, right in between.

Woodruff offers many examples from ancient literature in which the destructive power of *hubris* (which he understands as antithetical to reverence) is illustrated and explored. He claims that Homer's *Iliad,* and Sophocles *Oedipus Tyranus*, and *Antigone* were

all primarily works about people and their proper niche in the world: explorations of reverence. Perhaps his most interesting example is Euripides' *Bacchae.*

The *Bacchae* is a play about a young king, Pentheus, who sets out to do battle with the god Dionysus. Dionysus is a young god. Pentheus doesn't believe he is a god at all but rather merely a charismatic leader of a new cult. Pentheus fears the local men will lose control of their women if they leave their duties and head to the mountains to worship with Dionysus.

This prospect so bothers Pentheus that he loses his wits. He becomes outraged by the women's newly found sense of independence. He is so incensed that he is incapable of reasoning or listening to reason and disregards the advice of the prophet Tiresias, his grandfather and the women of the town. He becomes increasingly arrogant and isolated and doesn't question his own self-righteous indignation or his conviction that the cult must be abolished. But in Greek mythology, only monsters and giants challenge the gods. Humans, who have a proper sense of the limits of power, don't dare.

As his rage increases the play's chorus begins to sing about a human being transformed into a wild beast:

> A wild-eyed monster
> Without a human face
> Like a deadly giant
> wrestles with the gods![313]

Pentheus is transformed to the point that even his mother no longer recognizes him. When she sees him spying on a sacred ritual, she thinks he is a wild lion. She and the other worshipers hunt down this lion, rip him to pieces with their bare hands, and victoriously return with his severed head as a trophy. No one, not even his own mother, ever see Pentheus as human. They only see the beast.

The moral is clear. If we become so arrogant, so filled with *hubris* as to believe that we are on par with the gods, we sacrifice all the blessings of being human. Humans should know their proper place.

The lesson of the *Bacchae* is summed up when the chorus sings:

> Wisdom? It's not wise
> To lift our thoughts too high;
> We are human and our time is short.[314]

Reverence, then, is to have a proper understanding of human limitations, to understand we are not on par with the gods, and to be clear we have power and wisdom but not absolute power and wisdom. One could cultivate this sense of reverence in various situations. The project of this chapter is to explore how Muir cultivated reverence in Nature.

In Chapter Three I explored how Muir's attentiveness led him to an understanding of the folly of anthropocentrism and the arrogance of Lord Man. Such an attitude represents the vice of excess associated with reverence as discussed by Woodruff. In Chapter Four I discussed Muir's reciprocal response to his gratitude to Nature. These actions show Muir's willingness and ability to activate his power and wisdom to navigate away from the vice of deficiency of reverence as per Woodruff's description. In this section I'll give a sampling of how Muir's time in Nature helped him cultivate the golden mean of reverence.

Reverence and Science

> **"Kill as few of your fellow beings as possible and pursue some branch of natural history at least far enough to see Nature's harmony."**
>
> **—John Muir**[315]

It is unlikely I could sum up Muir's philosophy in a single sentence but the preceding quotation comes close. At the core of his value system is an appreciation of life and Nature's harmony as observed through studying Nature.

Earlier I argued that Muir's full engagement as a scientist was an example of attentiveness. For Muir this scientific observation was also a path toward reverence. To better understand how this was so, it would be helpful to briefly discuss some general aspects of scientific study and some more specific aspects of the study of natural science.

In some ways, science is little more than a documented approach toward knowledge: detailed, careful, and verifiable. To practice science is to reduce assumptions, attempt to remove bias, verify results, and limit conclusions to what the evidence supports. This method promotes humility in its practioners because the answers to scientific questions beget yet more questions in an ongoing quest toward tentative knowledge. As Bruce Alberts, President of the National Academy of Science, tried to impress upon his fellow science teachers, "We should try to make students understand . . . why a scientist can never be sure that he or she has the final answer to anything."[316] In this way, the study of science can be a pathway toward reverence because science attempts to clarify the limitations of human knowledge.

The study of science in general is a pathway toward reverence because of its method; the study of natural science can take practitioners a step closer toward reverence because of its subject matter. Woodruff writes, "Reverence toward objects like (Nature) yields primarily what I call awe, and it is usually inarticulate."[317]

There is something ineffably awe-inspiring about contemplating Nature and the origins of life. We look to the stars for extraterrestrial life but so far, nothing. Nowhere else in the universe have we found life; and if we do someday, life will still be a special and rare event. If the NASA space probes *Spirit* or *Opportunity* had found life, say a single blade of crabgrass on the surface of Mars, a picture of that blade would have been on the front page of every newspaper in the country. Yet we sometimes take life here on Earth for granted.[318] As

Loren Eiseley says, "If our whole life had not been spent in the midst of it, [our planet] it would astound us."[319]

Earth has grown from 0 to 5 or 10, some say as many as 30, million species in several billion years. We're unsure when, how, or why life emerged, but we know that once life appeared, there was no stopping it: microbes in the Precambrian, trilobites in the Cambrian—and the Pleistocene produced persons.[320] Six mega-extinctions notwithstanding, the number of life forms keeps increasing and becoming more diverse and complex.[321] Holmes Rolston III calls this tendency for earth's life forms to increase in numbers as well as in variety and complexity "a pro-life principle."[322]

Particularly awe-inspiring is the sudden, inexplicable emergence of flowering plants during the Age of Reptiles. Charles Darwin couldn't explain or understand it. He called the abrupt appearance and rapid spread of flowers "an abominable mystery."[323]

With flowers, the world's plants were transformed from shades of camouflage green to vivid, vibrant, multi-hued rainbow carpets. They brought a dizzying display to Earth and ushered in phenomenal changes to the animal world. Flowering plants are angiosperms (encased seeds) and the seeds made possible the agile brain of warm-blooded animals. Mammals burn lots of oxygen and require a constant body temperature. It was the encased seeds of flowering plants which provided the concentrated food source necessary for mammals to flourish.[324]

Those who study natural history, even those most secular in their leanings, are humbled by what they see and, most importantly, what they cannot understand.[325] E.O. Wilson exclaims: "The flower in the crannied wall—it *is* a miracle"[326] and "The biosphere membrane that covers the Earth, and you and me…is the miracle we have been given."[327]

The story of life on Earth is a 3.5 billion-year odyssey about which we have pieced together very little. The story could never be told adequately, "not even in outline form" and the study of life can fill even non-monotheists with a sense of awe.[328] Ernst Mayr speaks humbly when trying to explain life. "Virtually all biologists are religious, in the deeper sense of the word, even though it may be a religion without revelation…The unknown and maybe unknowable instills in us a sense of humility and awe."[329]

Those engaged in the study of life on earth are particularly impressed by the complexity of life systems and the limits of human understanding. Life systems are more complex than we know and more complex than we will probably ever know.[330] Aldo Leopold wrote, "The ordinary citizen today assumes that science knows what makes the community clock tick; the scientist is equally sure that he does not. He knows that the biotic mechanism is so complex that its workings may never be fully understood."[331] An awareness of the limits of human knowledge is essential aspect of reverence.

The study of science asks its practioners to be careful with their claims, and the study of natural science opens one up to awe by focusing on life. Both help clarify the understanding that humans have wisdom and power but not absolute wisdom and power. Woodruff calls this the proper understanding at the heart of reverence. This is the tradition in which John Muir was steeped and points to the attitude he cultivated in Nature.[332]

In Chapter Three I argued that through attentive scientific observation, Muir came to embrace non-anthropocentrism and, further, that his non-anthropocentric view was the cornerstone of his own environmental ethic and a core principle for environmentalists to follow. Muir's non-anthropocentric views were central to his cultivation of reverence.

Non-Anthropocentrism

Recall that Woodruff says an object of reverence is one that reminds us of human limitations. Muir's observations of and experiences with wild animals drew his attention to these limitations. For example, any residual belief Muir may have harbored about being the most powerful animal in the forest was quickly put to rest by the Yosemite bear who taught him the "right manners of the wilderness."[333] When Muir tried to scare the bear into running in order to study the bear's gait, the bear turned, unintimidated and unafraid. As Muir recalls the incident he says "the business of running then fell on me."[334]

Part of what Muir means by a lesson in right manners of the wilderness is a lesson about his niche in the wilderness, about how humans fit in. This was not just a theoretical lesson; it also was experiential: the difference between studying and living. It is one thing to appreciate on an intellectual level that humans are less physically powerful than bears. It is another thing to be looking in the eyes of a bear, momentarily frozen by her size, not quite knowing what to do. And to make the obvious explicit, this type of penetrating experience with a bear is more likely to happen in the mountains than in the city.

When Muir observed wild animal virtue he made inevitable comparisons to similar virtues in humans. For example, when Muir says mountain quail are inquisitive or sage cocks are brave or coyotes are both patient and bold he is comparing them to his own sense of these qualities in humans. Muir observed that sometimes sage cocks were seemingly braver and that coyotes more patient than humans. As discussed in Chapter Three, Muir's sense of the elevated virtue of wild animals was particularly the case for wild mountain sheep, as Muir was dazzled and inspired by their boldness. Muir valued and did not dismiss these qualities in wild animals. In fact, in many cases, as I previously argued, Muir saw wild animals as exemplary.

In *Respect for Nature,* Paul Taylor argues that each animal is a teleological center of life and pursues "its own good in its own way."[335] He says the claim that humans are inherently superior to other animals is a product of circular reasoning because we judge non-human animal excellence with a criterion established for human excellence: namely, rationality. For example, to claim that humans are superior to panthers because panthers are less intelligent than humans is to apply a standard important for proper human functioning to panthers.[336] If a panther stops to analyze a situation before acting, the panther would be deadly slow. Rationality may work well for humans but human-type rationality would not be good for panthers. Similarly, if the criteria for excellence is keen eyesight, humans would be found less excellent than eagles; if it were speed, humans would be found less excellent than cheetahs; if it were strength, humans would be found less excellent than grizzlies; if it were instinct, humans would be found less excellent than salmon; if it were mountain climbing, humans would be found less excellent than wild mountain sheep, and so on throughout the animal kingdom. Each species has a good of its own and pursues its own good in its own way and rationality may or may not enter into it.

Additionally, establishing one group as somehow superior to another group is a necessary first step in establishing the logic of domination which purportedly justifies the subjugation of one group by another.[337] But Muir's observation and experience in Nature led him away from the logic of domination and toward an increased commitment to ethical holism. He came to believe the value of wild animals was an inherent value and that animals were not merely instruments for human uses. Such reflections led him to develop a deeper belief about the proper, non-central, role of humans to the rest of Nature. I'll return to a passage introduced in Chapter Three to consider it through the lens of reverence.

> No dogma taught by the present civilization seems to form so insuperable an obstacle in the way of a right understanding of the relation which culture sustains to wildness as that which regards the world as made especially for the uses of man. Every animal, plant, and crystal controverts it in the plainest terms. Yet it is taught from century to century as something ever new and precious, and in the resulting darkness the enormous conceit is allowed to go unchallenged. I have never yet happened upon a trace of evidence that seemed to show that any one animal was ever made for another as much as it was made for itself.[338]

A couple of aspects of this passage are worth mentioning. First, Muir calls anthropocentrism a conceit. The claim that the world was made especially for the uses of humans is not only a false claim; it is a claim born of *hubris*. Woodruff says *hubris* is antithetical to reverence. So then anthropocentrism becomes a kind of anti-reverence.

Secondly, Muir speaks of a lack of evidence supporting the anthropocentric position. This appeal to evidence points to Muir's faith in science. If one were to follow science, as he did, one would arrive at the same non-anthropocentric conclusions. For Muir, if one wishes to follow Nature, biocentrism isn't just a physical fact; it is a moral claim.[339]

Muir says that "any glimpse into the life of an animal quickens our own and makes it so much larger and better in every way."[340] One important way that such a glimpse makes our life better is that it can lead us toward insights helpful in cultivating reverence. Understanding that wild animals sometimes have admirable qualities to a greater degree than we have them may offer insight into a proper understanding of the relative power and limitations of humans.

Reverence and Mountaineering

> One of our best playgrounds was the famous old Dunbar Castle …We tried to see who could climb highest on the crumbling peaks and crags, and took chances that no cautious mountaineer would try. That I did not fall and finish my rock-scrambling in those adventurous boyhood days seems now a reasonable wonder.
>
> … I was so proud of my skill as a climber that when I first heard of hell from a servant girl who loved to tell its horrors and warn us that if we did anything wrong

> we would be cast into it, I always insisted that I could climb out of it. I imagined it was only a sooty pit with stone walls like those of the castle, and I felt sure there must be chinks and cracks in the masonry for fingers and toes. Anyhow the terrors of the horrible place seldom lasted long beyond the telling; for natural faith casts out fear.[341]

The notion of Muir as a self-assured youngster believing he can climb out of hell is so beautifully whimsical it is hard not to smile. Surely sometimes "faith casts out fear," but in the ambition to climb out of hell might one not notice a smidgeon of over-confidence? The question, of course, is at the heart of reverence. To be reverential is to have a proper understanding of human limits: to recognize we have some power and wisdom but not absolute power and wisdom.

Muir's literature about mountain climbing is significant not because of his first ascents but rather because of the reverential spirit in which he achieved them. The notion of conquering mountains seemed wrong-headed to Muir. [342] "As well say a man is conquered when a fly lights on his head" he would respond.[343] Muir was humbled by mountain climbing but at the same time he was empowered.

To illustrate the point, I'll return to the earlier example of his first ascent of Mount Ritter. On one hand, Muir was the first person to reach the top via the steep northern face. This was a feat of determination and skill and left him with a sense of accomplishment and a better understanding of his ability. On the other hand, he wasn't sure how or by what grace he had done it and deflected much of the credit. When Muir was "brought to a dead stop … unable to move hand or foot either up or down," he had reached what he believed were the limits of his ability—both his physical ability to go farther and his intellectual ability to figure what else he might be able to do. He feared his "doom" was "fixed." Later when reflecting about not falling and dying he wrote "I scarce know how" the danger passed. There

was a critical moment when his “Instinct, or Guardian Angel … came forward and assumed control.” When he made it to the top he “leaped with wild freedom upon the highest crag on the summit” for he believed his deliverance came not from his own reason or strength but from somewhere else. [344]

This situation embodies reverence because Muir learned that both his own power and his wisdom to understand what had happened were limited. He saw himself aligned with something greater and this belief brought perplexing metaphysical questions. Was he a part of some natural intelligence or just in touch with one? Where did John Muir stop and the rest of Nature begin?[345] The mountain merged with heaven and the finite mixed with the infinite. Nature was not disjointed so how could he be apart? To experience a seamless connection with Nature was “a good practical form of immortality,” he mused, but it was incomprehensible to his thinking mind.[346]

When George Mallory was asked in 1923 why he climbed Everest, he responded casually “because it is there.” The question for others to ponder became what is *it*? After having more time to reflect on the question, he gave a more thoughtful reply:

> Have we vanquished an enemy? None but ourselves. Have we gained success? That word means nothing here. Have we won a kingdom? No … and yes. We have achieved the ultimate satisfaction … fulfilled a destiny. To struggle and understand —never the last without the other; such is the law. … We’ve only been obeying an old law then? Ah! But it’s *the* law.[347]

To struggle and understand is *the* law, says Mallory. It might be noted that insights into the limits of our knowledge is a kind of understanding as well. A realistic sense of our personal capacity is ever-changing because our abilities change. As long as we are questing to understand our limits, we won’t stray too far from reverence.

Reverence and Dreaming of Bread

Muir famously traveled lightly when mountaineering. He preferred to stay warm by dancing overnight on mountaintops rather than by carrying a blanket. Unlike many mountaineers of his day Muir saw no need to carry a gun. He felt safe in the mountains, found guns cumbersome and preferred the company of wild animals to hunting them for food. Because Muir so valued the freedom that came with a lighter load and didn't hunt he generally got by on bread and tea.

Muir gave careful attention to his bodily needs and discovered he could go longer without sleep than without food. He might be fine with two or three days of limited sleep but after a single day climbing without food he would notice weakness in his legs. Muir felt frustrated by the bondage of food. When he wrote "we need beauty as well as bread," he might have added for his own edification "we need bread as well as beauty." He never skimped his need for beauty, but sometimes he neglected his need for food.

One night after a long, foodless scramble near the glaciers of Lyell and Ritter mountains he dreamt of bread. In his dream he saw a wide, glaciated canyon with a magnificent lateral moraine composed of fine brown loaves of bread, thousands of bread boulders stretching into the distance.[348] Muir took the dream seriously because it warned of danger and spoke to him of the limits of his body without sustenance. He broke off exploring to stock up on food. "We dream of bread," he wrote, "a sure sign we need it."[349]

As much as Muir fantasized of flying over the high Sierra on "spirit winds" he learned that the views he sought were only available to those who climbed.[350] Those who climbed needed to take seriously certain personal maintenance functions. He was an earth

person, not an angel. With time he learned about the limits of his corporeal frame and better respected and accepted them.

One doesn't need to climb mountains to feel hungry or to realize one needs food. But for Muir, this primal dependence came more clearly into focus in the mountains as he pushed his physical limits. Furthermore, as with his more than theoretical encounter with the Yosemite bear, the intensity of his direct experience of hunger in the mountains brought a more encompassing understanding of those human limitations.

Reverence and Wild Adventure

At the heart of the virtue ethics project is the development of practical wisdom or *phronesis.* Through the process of moral maturation, we develop judgment and emphasize discernment, the applications of which are essential to living a more flourishing life. Such was the case for reverence with John Muir. To help illustrate how Muir's judgment improved as he began to develop a proper understanding of his limitations, I'll discuss two wild nature adventures. The first is his experience behind Yosemite Falls.

Yosemite Falls

In the early 70's when Muir first arrived in the Sierra he increasingly pushed himself in a quest for knowledge and adventure. He still retained some of the reckless haughtiness of his youth, and he took risks that few experienced adventurers would take. For example, in early April 1871, on a night when the moon was turning Yosemite Falls into a ribbon of glowing silver, Muir climbed to Fern Ledge at the foot of the upper falls. He intended to camp for the night and enjoy the view. However, when it occurred to him if he edged behind the falls he might catch a glimpse of a "moonbow," he was overcome with enthusiasm. He

found the moonlight breaking through the prism of falling water enchanting "but suffered sudden disenchantment" when

> Down came a dash of spent comets, thin and harmless-looking in the distance, but desperately solid and stony in striking one's shoulders… Instinctively dropping on my knees, I laid hold of an angle of the rock, rolled myself together with my face pressed against my breast, and in this attitude submitted as best I could to my thundering baptism … there was a confused noise … not heard as music.… My fate seemed to depend on a breath of the "idle wind." … Between the ice and the wall I wedged myself, and lay face downwards until the steadiness of the light gave encouragement to get away. Somewhat nerve-shaken, drenched, and benumbed, I made out to build a fire, warmed myself, [and] ran home to avoid taking cold.[351]

Literature about risk-taking advises pushing ourselves as essential to living a good life. Risks expand possibilities and enhance growth. But intelligent risk-taking generally includes at least one important caveat: "Don't risk everything."[352]

Muir says his fate seemed to depend on a breath of the "idle wind." In other words, he was lucky. He lived to tell about it—but barely. He wrote to his sister Sarah that his excursion on the ledge had "nearly cost all."[353] The next morning he "awoke sane," recognizing "it was a wild scene but not a safe one."[354]

Muir says he "submitted" to his "thundering baptism." To submit is to yield and accept that one is not in charge of a situation. A baptism is a ritual sacrament of purification the purpose of which is to get right with god.[355] As Muir submitted to his Yosemite Falls baptism, some of his overconfidence was washed away. The account of his predicament reads like a child checking boundaries to discover what can be gotten away with. "I am only a baby slowly learning my mountain alphabet," he would admit.[356] And with this admission, Muir's understanding of his limitations and his judgment based on that understanding began to mature. When three years later he took a wild tree ride, John Muir was a man more steeped in reverence.

Wind Storm

In December of 1874, Muir had another, less reckless if equally memorable wild adventure. As he walked along a ridge near a tributary of the Yuba River, he was thrilled by the prospect of a wild wind storm.[357] Throughout the day the wind howled and uprooted trees at a rate of one every two or three minutes. Feeling the wind and smelling the fragrance, it occurred to him that "it would be a fine thing to climb one of the trees to obtain a wider outlook and get my ear close to the Æolian music of its topmost needles."[358] He reasoned that "under the circumstances the choice of a tree was a serious matter."[359] He chose the tallest tree in a group of Douglas Spruce growing together like a tuft of grass "rocking and swirling in wild ecstasy."[360] He concluded this particular tree would be safe to climb because no tree in the group would fall unless they all fell and that was extremely unlikely. Muir was "accustomed to climbing trees making botanical studies" and had no difficulty reaching the top of this one.[361]

> Never before did I enjoy so noble an exhilaration of motion. The slender tops fairly flapped and swished in the passionate torrent, bending and swirling backward and forward, round and round, tracing indescribable combinations of vertical and horizontal curves, while I clung with muscles firm braced, like a bobolink on a reed.[362]

The tree top swept between twenty and thirty degree arches and Muir felt secure because he had observed similar trees sweeping nearly to the ground "without breaking a fiber."[363] He was "therefore safe, and free to take the wind into my pulses and enjoy the excited forest from my superb outlook."[364]

The wind provided more evidence to Muir of his communality with the rest of Nature. Until this day it had never occurred to him that trees and humans had in common the ability to travel.

> We all travel the milky way together, trees and men … Trees are travelers, in the ordinary sense. They make journeys, not extensive ones, it is true; but our own little comes and goes are only little more that tree wavings—many of them not so much.[365]

In Muir's public writings, he went to great lengths to assure his readers that Nature adventures were invigorating rather than dangerous. In this private journals, we see that his experiences became safer and saner with *phronesis*—the wisdom of experience, or prudence. Contrasting his wild tree ride to his experience behind Yosemite Falls is just one example. His past experience of tree climbing and observation of tree movement gave him knowledge enough to reduce danger. He was measured in his approach to climbing the fir tree. When he crawled on Fern Ledge behind Yosemite Falls, he was more enthusiastic than wise, lacking experience and knowledge.

These two wild adventures illustrate the role of *phronesis* in the cultivation of reverence in Nature. They give some insight into how, with time and experience, Muir developed a more proper understanding of his power and wisdom.

Conclusion

In *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman wrote "now I see the secret of making the best person, it is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth."[366] Perhaps Muir had something like this in mind when he insisted that he and Emerson sleep under the stars in the mariposa grove during Emerson's visit to the Valley in 1872. Of course, it didn't happen, but I like to imagine the stream of their conversation if it had. Looking at the night sky, perhaps they would have contemplated the paradoxical edges of an infinite yet somehow expanding universe.[367] Had they entertained such ideas, they would have been practicing reverence.

Philosopher William James, a contemporary of Emerson and Muir, wrote of the *multiverse*; a hypothetical set of multiple possible universes, the entirety of space, time, matter, and energy as well as the physical laws and constants that describe them.[368] There are perhaps an infinite number of these perpetually expanding universes. How can one not be reverenced when faced with our limited ability to comprehend such limitlessness?

I've posited Muir's conception of the good life in Nature as a web of virtue; if so, reverence is the *stabilimentum* at the center of the web. Other virtues, values and goods are filaments shooting outward and returning. Reverence is Muir's core virtue. Reverence takes Plato's counsel to *know thyself* and adds Aristotle's instruction to act on that knowledge.

Muir would never see himself as a god; not even a flawed one, as Emerson had, yet Muir realized he had power. That power manifested itself in campaigns of reciprocity, as discussed in Chapter Four.

Lynn White Jr. says humility, as expressed by St. Francis of Assisi, is a key environmental virtue.[369] Yet humility is only half of reverence. Muir was equally troubled by apathy as by the arrogance of Lord Man. He saw the belief that we are powerless to change our circumstances as problematical and untrue.

Human attitudes are at the center of human actions as clearly as human actions are at the center of the environmental crisis. Acting intelligently and with a proper perspective of what can and cannot be done is essential. To be reverent is to see oneself as neither Lord Man nor as helpless but in the golden mean of human limitation and potential—to understand we have some power and wisdom but not absolute power and wisdom. Reverence is a reality check. Nothing about reverence is delusional. To be reverent is to be grounded in the

moment's truth of our situation and ourselves, and from this center, a good life can flourish.

In Nature John Muir was able to cultivate this essential aspect of the good life.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

In 2010, President Obama formed a National Commission, “a team of our nation’s best scientists and engineers,” tasked with uncovering the causes of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. The Commission’s findings, published in January 2011, highlighted government regulators’ failure to keep up with the pace of technological advances in offshore drilling.[370] The Commission, which included no philosophers or ethicists, did not consider value-based causes or question the ethical choices which resulted in the oil rigs being in the Gulf in the first place.[371]

It is worth thinking about what kind of issues might have been raised and what the meetings might have been like if John Muir had been on President Obama’s National Commission.

Considering Muir’s time with the 1896 National Forestry Commission, which he agreed to join as guide and advisor, offers insight. The Commission was formed to make recommendations for the best “uses” of US Forests. The other commissioners describe Muir as personable, “a story teller in a million”—and unyielding in his positions. [372] Typical of Muir’s resolve was Commissioner Gifford Pinchot’s account of the two coming upon a tarantula: “[Muir] wouldn’t let me kill it. He said it had as much right there as we did.”[373]

Muir insisted the commission visit the land. He believed it was important that the commissioners stay in touch with the earth while they were working. They hiked through the Black Hills, Yellowstone, parts of Idaho, the southern Cascades, the southern Sierra, Crater

Lake in Oregon, the Santa Lucia coast range, and the Grand Canyon. Muir's journals do not record discussions of specific issues before the Commission. Rather, in page after page, he describes topography, vistas, sunsets, tree species, and speculations about geology. He writes of seeing the Grand Canyon for the first time as he and Pinchot watched the sunset. "I ran up to the verge of the canyon and had my first memorable and overwhelming view in the light and shade of the setting sun." [374] Muir thought it important enough to record which commissioners slept in tents and which slept under the stars.

Muir's involvement with the Forest Commission informs my idea of what his time on Obama's Oil Disaster Commission might be like. I imagine at the first gathering he would have moved to hold meetings outside so the commissioners would not to be infected by too much "indoor philosophy."[375] He would have suggested nights under the stars to gain a proper perspective and cultivate reverence.

Muir would have suggested to the group that the essential problem before them was philosophical. He would have maintained that the oil disaster was in fact not exceptional but rather the predictable result of a culture that does not lift its eyes to Nature, to virtue, to beauty, love, or life but rather "to the almighty dollar."[376] He would have argued the tragedy was systematic of something much broader than government regulators' failure to keep up with the pace of technological advances in offshore drilling. He would have seen the unfolding ruin in the Gulf of Mexico as an object lesson, with its glaring symbols of the frail successes and ominous failings of our technological age, and also as an existential moment; an opportunity to stand back and question societal assumptions, values and directions. He would insist that if we do not take the opportunity to do so we will be merely treating the symptoms of a value system that leads directly to antagonistic attitudes toward the natural world.

Muir would have warned the commissioners that a presumption that the world was made for humans is not supported by the facts.[377] He would insist that at the heart of our troubles is "Lord Man," an attitude that humans are entitled, by God-given right, to recklessly use Nature any way we see fit. Muir would point out that the idea that the value of Nature is found in its utility for humans is arrogant and unenlightened.

Perhaps another commissioner would suggest that the Deep Horizon Oil Rig helped fuel a deeply seated American value: namely, freedom of choice. Muir would want to differentiate between freedom of choice and autonomy. In his folksy way he would impress upon the commission the oppression he felt on his Martinez ranch as he bemoaned trivial choices such as choosing between dozens of grape varieties for planting. He would argue there is a difference between the value of freedom of choice, *per se*, and the functional task of choices in our lives. The important issue, he would insist, does not concern the number of choices we have but whether the choices nurture or deny us, make us more mobile or fence us in, increase self-respect or weaken it. In short, do the choices available to us better our lives? Not all choices enhance freedom. In fact, some impair freedom by taking time and energy we would be better off devoting to other matters.[378] Muir would argue that even though choice has obvious value in that it helps us get what we want, an over-abundance of choices can have, paradoxically, the opposite effect. Too many choices become time-consuming, burdensome and perhaps most disconcerting of all, distracting. Such was Muir's personal experience on the ranch.

Muir would want the Commission's report to emphasize that the good life is not the same as a complex life; and for Muir, a man who walked to the Gulf of Mexico from Wisconsin with a comb, a couple of books and a change of underwear in his pack, the

benefits of simplicity were apparent. Muir would tell his fellow commissioners that the essential question revolves around how much of what we might call "life" is exchanged for sorting through myriad choices and resisting distractions.

If other commissioners insisted that the report have specific action items and recommendations Muir would ask the commission to highlight the role of Nature as an elixir for the emptiness many try to fill with materialism. Rather than turning toward conspicuous consumption when one feels unfocused and unraveled, Muir would push the commission to recommend the beauty and peace of Nature.[379] He would argue that the commissions' findings address how people might find more time for solitude and peace in Nature as an alternative to lifestyle choices supported by oil.

Perhaps this proposal would be rejected as "silly and imprudent."[380] It is usually that way when someone appointed to a commission snubs the assumptions of the group. But though admittedly out of the mainstream, Muir's ideas hardly would be imprudent. He would point out the recklessness of a conception of the good life that leads to unprecedented environmental catastrophes. With the tenacity of wild mountain sheep and boldness born of mountaineering, Muir would argue his point, recognizing that compromise is the outcome of a process. He would hold that it does nobody any good to begin the process with an already compromised conviction. If he were appointed to the commission to give his opinion and make his case, he would.

Muir would further opine that the complications and distractions of the values of the current "gilded age" numb us with what he called a "deadly apathy of luxury."[381] Such apathy puts us—to borrow a principle of classical theatre—at an "aesthetic distance" from actions or events, an effect consequent to theatre which reassures the audience that the action

on stage, however intense or disturbing, is only make-believe. But it is quite another matter when we begin to view the actual world as if it were a play and ourselves as if we were an audience safely insulated from life's events and absolved of any obligation to act. Aesthetic distance is meant to dissuade theatre goers from the inclination to jump on stage and warn Romeo not to take the poison, that Juliet will in fact awaken from her apparent coma in "two and forty hours." But aesthetic distance is not appropriate outside the theatre: life on earth is not a play and needs our involvement.

Muir would have cautioned that relying on technology in the aftermath of environmental disasters with the sanguine expectation of a fix is an inappropriate response to real-life events, an unfortunate expansion of aesthetic distance that encourages the relinquishing of our human responsibility for making essential decisions about what is unfolding before us. The point of personal involvement is made by an old philosophical maxim, an often-paraphrased quotation of Immanuel Kant: "Ethics without science is empty, science without ethics is blind."[382]

We face unparalleled environmental challenges today and science and technology alone are not equipped to meet them. As mentioned in Chapter One, those who know have been telling us just that. The Union of Concerned Scientists consisting of 1,700 of the world's leading scientists, including the majority of Nobel laureates in the sciences, warn us that in order to avert "vast human misery" and an irretrievable mutilation of "our global home on this planet … a new ethic is required—a new attitude."[383]

I have come to believe the new ethic the scientists implore us to find is grounded in a very old ethic. Aristotle tells us at the heart of ethics is practical reason used to discern how we should live. He advises that we turn toward the guidance of older and wiser people who

have had greater life experiences. If Aristotle is right, in the face of uncertainty our first and maybe our best step will be to look toward the judgment of the wise and caring, to look toward the values and lifestyle choices of exemplars such as John Muir.

Our exemplars need not tell us what to think; but considering their lives may help us sort out what is worth thinking about. The very questions we ponder prioritize our actions. Behind human actions, either in plain view or immersed in conflicting impulses, we find human attitudes. We are well advised to both think clearly about our values and live in accordance with them.

In this dissertation I have explored the link between what Muir believed and how he behaved. It is this nexus between knowledge and action that drew me to environmental virtue ethics originally. Virtue ethics demands that ethicists be more than theoreticians; it demands that we become action-oriented individuals. For Aristotle, the goal is not simply to acquire knowledge; the goal is to act in accordance with virtue. Knowledge without action is no virtue.

> To virtue belongs virtuous activity. But it makes, perhaps, no small difference whether we place the chief good in possession or in use, in state of mind or in activity. For the state of mind may exist without producing any good result, as in a man who is asleep or in some other way quite inactive, but the activity cannot; for one who has the activity will of necessity be acting, and acting well. And as in the Olympic Games, it is not the most beautiful and strongest who are crowned but those who compete.[384]

Cultivating virtue, living a good life, and becoming more excellent are human matters. Even if John Muir's specific concerns are not our concerns, he is still exemplary in that he gives us a model of how to translate knowledge into action. When reflecting on his life Muir wrote, "I am always happy at the center."[385] And toward the end of his life, he said to a close friend, "I have lived a bully life. I have done what I set out to do."[386]

NOTES

Note about the Notes

Many Muir scholars have been flummoxed by his habit of continuously reworking his writings. One passage or account may reoccur countless times in various versions in journals, books or articles. To this end I am profoundly thankful to William F. Kimes and Maymie B. Kimes, editors of *John Muir: A Reading Biography*: Fresno: Panorama West Books, 1986. They have created a cross-referenced work leading through the various versions of Muir's writings. In the following notes, essays, articles and pamphlets found in Kimes will be cited by title and then keyed to Kimes' numerical system.

Chapter One

[1] Other well spoken presidents had taken fuller advantage of the ethos inherent in the setting. By nearly a year and a half into their administrations, Presidents Reagan had Clinton had each given five oval office addresses.

[2] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President to the Nation on the BP Oil Spill" *White House Press Release*, June 15, 2010.

[3] Lewis W. Moncrief, "The Cultural Basis for Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* (October 30, 1970), 508-512.

[4] While the President has labeled the BP oil spill the worst environmental catastrophe in recent U.S. history, it is but the latest environmental disaster to hit the area. In the early 1970's oceanographers discovered a "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico which has double in size since the 1980's. As of July 2010 the dead zone was 8,500 square miles, the size of New Jersey, hugging the Gulf Coast from Alabama to Texas. Scientists working with the Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force believe the dead zone could be every bit as harmful to the gulf as the BP oil spill. The dead zone is the result of hypoxia, a condition resulting from oxygen levels too low to sustain marine life. Hypoxia is generally caused by too many nutrients, usually nitrogen and phosphorous, mixed with water. The nutrients activate excessive algal growth, which results in decreased sunlight, loss of vegetation, considerable reduction in dissolved oxygen and, ultimately, conditions unsuitable to most forms of aquatic life.

Scientists have isolated three primary causes for excessive nutrients in the Gulf: run-off from agricultural fertilizers along the Mississippi watershed, the dredging of canals for flood control and transportation, and the destruction of riparian habitats along with the draining of wetlands to create farmlands. Each of these activities is the direct result of human efforts to control nature through technological improvements.

Some scientists fear the oil spill will worsen the dead zone, because when oil decomposes, it also consumes oxygen. The Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task

Force was established in the fall of 1997 as part of a process of considering options for responding to the Gulf of Mexico hypoxia. For information about their mission and members, see the of

[5] The Union of Concerned Scientists issued and widely circulated this appeal in November 1992. *The World Scientists' Warning to Humanity* was written and spearheaded by the late Henry Kendall, former chair of Union of Concerned Scientists board of directors. The complete statement can be read at: http://www.ucsusa.org/ucs/about/1992-world-scientists-warning-to-humanity.html

[6] Amory Lovins, "Technology Is the Answer (But What Was the Question?)" published as a guest essay in G. Tyler Miller, *Environmental Science*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth, 1991), 56-57.

[7] Quoted in Joseph R. Des Jardins, *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth, 2006), 7.

[8] A list of the seven appointed members of the commission and of their backgrounds and qualifications can be found at: "President Obama Announces Members of the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling Commission," *White House Press Release*, June 14, 2010.

[9] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,*(New York: Random House, 1958).

[10] Paul Taylor argues virtue ethics was all but eliminated when Christian rule ethics came into vogue. He says the change from virtue ethics to rule ethics "was the destruction of a whole approach to and framework of philosophical ethics. It was the replacement of the ethics of aspiration with the ethics of duty." Alasdair MacIntyre says the change was more gradual, a steady deterioration of modes of thought that have now become so fragmented that we have lost all context of which they were originally a part. He maintains ethics is best understood as a tradition imbedded within a community framework and that our modern moral language has no community context and, consequently, is completely incoherent. J.B Schneewind suggests that virtue ethics was abandoned as a result of a centuries-long process of critique and revision. Paul Taylor, *Virtue Ethics: An Introduction* (Interlaken: Lindon Book Company, 1991), 78. Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue*. 2nd Ed. South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). J.B. Schneewind, "The Misfortunes of Virtue" *Ethics* 101 (October 1990): 42-63.

[11] Philip Cafaro, *Thoreau's Living Ethics: Walden and the Pursuit of Virtue* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), ix.

[12] Newton Stallknecht and Robert Brumbaugh, *Spirit of Western Philosophy* (New York: Logmans, Green and Company, 1950), 162.

[13] A helpful comparison can be drawn between Aristotle's happiness and health. Like happiness, health is something that is normally long lasting. One is not generally momentarily healthy. Nor, like happiness, are there varying types of health: One either possesses it or does not. Happiness is not pleasure. There are many different types of pleasure: the pleasure of drinking a blackberry smoothie or the pleasure of watching a sunset. Happiness, however, like health, should only be used in the singular.

Happiness and health become somewhat disanalogous with respect to the factor of choice. We have less choice with regard to our health than we do with our happiness. Effort is required to keep or regain our health, but we are initially born more or less healthy. Happiness, in the Aristotelian sense, is not a gift of nature. It is earned via choice and, at least partly through continued effort, sustained over an extended period of time. Nonetheless, the analogy is useful in that health and happiness are both a type of fulfillment and have to do with proper functioning. If our body functions properly, we are healthy. If our soul functions properly, we are happy.

[14] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 184.

[15] To support this point, in Chapter Ten of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle sides with Solon who once insisted that we pronounce no man happy until he is dead.

[16] The argument that virtue ethics is unable to offer moral guidance because of a lack of codifiability inherent in the ethical system is, perhaps, the most commonly voiced criticism. For a fuller explication of this criticism see J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 186; Robert Louden, "Some Vices of Virtue Ethics," in *Ethical Theory Classic and Contemporary Readings*,1st ed., ed. Louis Pojman, (Belmont Ca.: Wadsworth, 1989), 311-320, 313-314.

[17] Elizabeth Anscombe argues much specific action guidance is available by employing virtue and vice terms ("v-rules") such as "Do what is honest/charitable; do not do what is dishonest/uncharitable." Even though our modern list of virtues, according to Anscombe, is relatively short, our list of vices is remarkably and usefully long, far beyond anything that those who think in terms of deontological principles has come up with. Much action-guiding advice comes from moving away from behaviors that are negligent, spineless, indolent, insensitive, obstinate, callous, bigoted, selfish, mercenary, reckless, rude, haughty, indifferent, cold, impetuous, frail, audacious, boorish, duplicitous, self-indulgent, materialistic, greedy, shortsighted, malicious, manipulative, unappreciative, resentful, cruel, wasteful, and unfaithful and on and on. Rosalind Hursthouse offers an insightful discussion of how Anscombe's V-terms can be followed for moral guidance. G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (January 1958). Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory and Abortion," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 20, (1991). For an excellent discussion of environmental vices, see Phil Cafaro's "Gluttony, Arrogance, Greed, and Apathy: An Exploration of Environmental Vice," *International Association of Environmental Philosophy* (March 2006): http://www.environmentalphilosophy.org/Cafaro.pdf

[18] Thomas Hill's work is often understood as the first work in environmental virtue ethics. He argued in 1983 that the cardinal environmental virtue is proper humility. Hill's work was greatly influenced by Lynn White Jr.'s writing about the roots of the environmental crisis and the corrective role of humility. White, a Christian man, argued Christians need a new religion or to rethink their current one. He suggested environmentally sensitive Christians should follow the example of Saint Francis of Assisi to cultivate a proper humility and sensitivity to life. In 1993 Geoffrey Frasz evaluated humility as an environmental virtue, specifically the position of Hill, and concluded that Hill's conception of proper humility can be more adequately understood if associated with the virtue he calls openness. Neither Frasz nor Hill explored the life of Saint Francis and White speaks of him for but a single page. Never the less, it seems that White's discussion of St. Francis, as expanded upon by Hill and Frasz, was an early example of an environmental exemplar. Thomas Hill, "Ideas of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments," *Environmental Ethics* 5 (Fall 1983): 211-224. Lynn Townsend White, Jr, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science*, 155 (March 10, 1967): 1203–1207. Geoffrey B. Frasz, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: A New Direction for Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 15 (1993): 259-274.

[19] Philip Cafaro, "Thoreau, Leopold, and Carson: Toward an Environmental Virtue Ethics." *Environmental Ethics, 23* (2001): 3-17.

[20] John Muir, the focus of this dissertation, would meet these criteria as well.

[21] Kathleen D. Moore, "The Truth of the Barnacles: Rachel Carson and the Moral Significance of Wonder," *Environmental Ethics,* 27 (Fall 2005): 265.

[22] Charles List, "The Virtues of Wild Leisure," *Environmental Ethics,* 27 (Winter 2005): 355.

[23] Bill Shaw, "A Virtue Ethics Approach to Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic," *Environmental Ethics,* 19 (1997): 53-67.

[24] Some philosophers have considered the notion of environmental virtue inherent in specific cultures. For example, John Patterson explored the indigenous Maori's cultivation of respect and responsibility and some advantages inherent in their application. John Patterson, "Maori Environmental Virtues," *Environmental Ethics,* 16 (1994), 397-409.

[25] Muir was of the habit of capitalizing Nature. I will follow this form throughout the study.

[26] John Muir, *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913).

[27] John Muir, *John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir*, ed. Linnie Marsh Wolfe (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1938).

[28] John Muir and Wanda Muir, *Dear Papa: Letters between John Muir and his Daughter Wanda,* ed. Shirley Sergeant (Fresno, Ca.: Panorama West Books, 1985).

[29] The virtue literature bears this out. Starting with Aristotle much has been written about social virtue and very little about environmental virtue.

[30] I passed the winter solstice 1998 with David Brower at the John Muir House Historical Site in Martinez California. I was interviewing Brower for an *EcoTalk* radio special. The focus of the interview was John Muir. When we walked into the house Brower said “it is good to have a look around.” This gave me pause because I knew that Brower, then 86 years old, had lived the vast majority of his life less than an hour away, in Berkeley. He said he had never been to John Muir’s house before. He also said that in the early 1960’s, when he was executive director of the Sierra Club, an organization founded by Muir, he was approached by members of Congress to solicit his support in establishing this house as a national historic site. Brower didn’t do it. He told me that he would rather “protect John Muir’s Sierra than John Muir’s house.” I couldn’t help but believe that Muir would have agreed. At this point, I developed a deeper appreciation of Stephen Fox dubbing of David Brower as “John Muir reincarnate.” It is in this spirit that the focus of this study is on the role of Nature in John Muir’s conception of the good life. Stephen Fox, *The American Conservation Movement: John Muir and his Legacy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981), 261.

[31] John Muir, *Our National Parks* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917), 56.

[32] Holmes Rolston III, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole" in Ronald Sandler and Philip Cafaro, eds., *Environmental Virtue Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 61-78.

[33] John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 211.

34 The doctrine of the unity of the virtues was championed by Socrates who argued “all of the virtues are one.” The fundamental virtues Socrates explores in both the *Protagoras* and *Laches* are justice, courage, temperance, piety, and wisdom. He maintains that all the virtues consist in a kind of knowledge. However, exactly what he meant by the unity of the virtues has puzzled scholars for ages. There is wide agreement that Socrates believed that these cardinal virtues form a unity in the sense that one cannot have one of the virtues without having all the others. Where scholars disagree is in whether Socrates intends to make the stronger claim that the virtues are identical with each other. Some passages in these Platonic dialogues seem to commit Socrates to the position that there is just one virtue with five different names, while others passages seem to suggest that each virtue has its own distinct essence and definition.

For our purposes here it is enough to recognize that the virtues play off each other in robust and interesting ways forming a kind of web of virtue. For an excellent discussion of Socrates and the unity of the virtues hypothesis, see Daniel Devereux, “Unity of the Virtues” in *A Companion to Plato,* ed. Hugh Benson (San Francisco: Blackwell Press, 2006), 325.

[35] Although Muir didn’t use Aristotelian language of moral excellence, he quite often used more general moralist language when making his case for a good life. For example, while in

the midst of the struggle to establish Yosemite National Park, he said to a Sierra Club gathering, "The battle we have fought, and are still fighting … is a part of the eternal conflict between right and wrong, and we cannot expect to see the end of it." John Muir, "The National Parks and Forest Reservations" *Sierra Club Bulletin* (January 1896): 276.

[36] Many of these distinctions were separated into camps of artificial versus/natural, wild/tame; mountains/cities; natural/cultural, etc. Questions pertaining to whether or meaningful distinction between nature and culture can be made have long been studied by environmental ethicists. For Muir, Nature and culture exist on a continuum and the wilder one's life is the closer he or she is to "the beating heart of Nature and God."

[37] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 319.

[38] At the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle says he has given but an outline sketch of the good and it is up to others to fill in the important parts. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 409.

Chapter Two

[39] Linnie Marsh Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir* (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), 94.

[40] Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness*, 95.

[41] John Muir, "Rambles of a Botanist among the Plants and Climates of California" *Old and New 5,* June 1872, 768.

[42] Muir, *Rambles of a Botanist*, 69.

[43] Donald Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 151.

[44] John Muir, *The Life and Letters of John Muir, vol. II*, edited by W.F. Bade (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), 13.

[45] *Two Concepts of Liberty* was the inaugural lecture delivered by Berlin before the University of Oxford on October, 31, 1958. It was subsequently published as a 57-page pamphlet by Oxford at the Clarendon Press. The notion of negative liberty is associated with British philosophers such as Locke, Hobbes, and Adam Smith, and positive liberty with continental thinkers, such as Hegel, Rousseau Herder, and Marx.

[46] Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness*, 124.

[47] Thomas Misa, *A Nation of Steel: The Making of Modern America ~ 1865-1925* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 40-47.

[48] The phrase gilded age was coined by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today* (Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1873).

[49] Jack Beatty argues the values that came to being in America at this time became entrenched and are still with us in large part today. He points out the greed and avarice of the time was institutionalized through laws and public policy. Jack Beatty, *Age of Betrayal: The Triumph of Money in America – 1865-1900*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

[50] John Muir, "John Muir on the Sea" *San Francisco Examiner*, August 23, 1897.

[51] In addition, once several hundred thousand natives lived in the state but due to disease, enslavement, and brutality by 1868 the number had dwindled to seven thousand. Most likely no Yokuk or Miwok settlements would have been visible at this time from the route Muir took to enter Yosemite.

[52] John Muir, "The Treasures of the Yosemite." The Century Magazine, Vol. XL. August, 1890. No. 4

[53] In 1873, Barton S. Alexander completed a report for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that was the first attempt at creating a Central Valley Project. In 1904, the Bureau of Reclamation (then the Reclamation Service) first became interested in creating such a water project, but did not get far until a series of droughts and related disasters occurred in the early 1920s. "The Central Valley Project" *Bureau of Reclamation History Program*.

[54] John Muir, *The Yosemite* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin,1912), 261-62.

[55] John Muir, "Forests of the Sierra" *San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin*, June 28, 1889.

[56] Duane Smith, *Mining America: The Industry and the Environment, 1800-1980*. (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 1987); Rebecca Solnit, *Savage Dreams: A Journey into the Hidden Wars of the American West* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1994).

[57] John Muir, "Nevada's Dead Towns," *San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin* January 15, 1879.

[58] ibid

[59] The Breakers is considered by many to be the architectural and social archetype of the gilded age. According to Thomas Gannon, "if the Gilded Age were to be summed up by a single house, that house would have to be The Breakers." The year of its completion, The Breakers was the largest, most opulent house in a summer resort considered the social capital of America." The Breakers was the Rhode Island summer home of Cornelius Vanderbilt II constructed between 1893 and 1895. The Vanderbilt family was among the most prominent industrialists of America at the time. The mansion has 70 rooms and 65,000 sq ft. of living

space. Thomas Gannon, *Newport Mansions: the Gilded Age* (Little Compton RI: Fort Church Publishers, 1982), 8.

[60] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 3.

[61] John Muir, "The Hetch-Hetchy Valley" *Sierra Club Bulletin*, January 1908, 211.

[62] Muir's father was a figure straight out of a Greek tragedy. In the end his obsessive drive would do him in and he would lose everything including his wife and quite possibly his sanity.

[63] Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness,* 41.

[64] John Muir, *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 222-223.

[65] Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 293-94.

[66] Samuel Hall Young, *Alaska Days with John Muir* (1915, reprint, Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1990), 205.

[67] Young, *Alaska Days with John Muir*, 206.

[68] Muir, *Life and Letters II,* 219.

[69] Muir, *Life and Letters II,* 220.

[70] Keith and Muir were deep friends for 38 years. Both had been born in Scotland the same year, and they shared a love for the mountains of California. James Mitchell Clarke described their friendship as one "in which deep affection and admiration were expressed through a kind of verbal boxing, counter-jibe answering jibe, counter-insult responding to insult." Clarke, James Mitchell *The Life and Adventures of John Muir* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1908), 112.

[71] Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness*, 238-239.

[72] Muir, *Life and Letters II*, 219-220.

[73] Muir's enthusiasm for work is legendary. As a boy his father wouldn't let him stay up at night to read or work on his inventions. So, instead John arose at 2:00 a.m. to read and invent before he began his long day working on the farm.

[74] Some have argued that relentless labor on the family farm actually stunted Muir's physical growth. Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness,* 34.

[75] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* (New York: Random House, 1958), 346.

[76] Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness*, 95.

[77] Michael Cohen says Muir the author was reinventing Muir the young radical. He says when Muir left his father's farm and the university life he was stuck 'between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born.' Cohen argues that Muir knew what he didn't want and had some vague ideas about what he might want; most importantly that he wanted to leave society and civilization and enter the self consistent world of Nature. Michael Cohen, *The Pathless Way,* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 24-27.

[78] Muir, *Life and Letters II*, 1-23.

[79] Worster, *Passion for Nature*, 84.

[80] Muir's friend Hart Merriam described Muir's personality. "Muir was a great talker, but not a loud talker. And although he usually monopolized the conversation, he was listened to with attention and often with delight. Like most men who have spent much of their lives in the mountains, he was an independent thinker and had well-digested opinions on a surprisingly large number of topics. He was argumentative by nature, and his Scotch blood showed in the persistence and tenacity with which he upheld his point of view. On the other hand, he was rarely aggressive or disagreeable. In fact, he was one of the most charming companions I have ever known. In addition to a kindly and generous nature, he possessed a keen sense of humor and was something of a tease. When walking the deck of the steamer on the Harriman Alaska Expedition, his most constant companion was the eminent geographer, the late Henry Gannett. Speaking of their friendship, he explained that when he first saw Gannett he was impressed by what he called the "preternatural solemnity" of his expression. This, he asserted, with a merry look in his eye, had convinced him that Gannett, like himself, was fond of humor, and he was not long in learning that Gannett, though not a Scotchman, also loved an argument. The result was that the two were always happy together." *C. Hart Merriam on Muir ~ John Muir exhibit,* http://sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/tributes.aspx

[81] Worster, *Passion for Nature*, 3.

[82] John Muir, in Fredrick Turner, *Rediscovering America: John Muir in His Time and Ours* (Markham OT: Viking Press, 1985), 114.

[83] This unpublished journal entry of October 1872 is not atypical. John Muir, *John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir*, ed Linnie Marsh Wolfe (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1938), 89.

[84] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 72.

[85] One of Emerson's handlers wrote the following about Muir in his Journal. "He was an interesting young fellow, of real intelligence and character, a botanist mainly, who, after

studying a year or two at Madison, had "zigzagged his way," he said, "to the Gulf of Mexico, and at last had found this valley, and had got entangled here,— in love with the mountains and flowers; and he didn't know when he should get away." … Occasionally he rambled among the mountains, and camped out for months; and he urged Mr. Emerson, with an amusing zeal, to stay and go off with him on such a trip."James Bradley Thayer, *A Western Journey with Mr. Emerson* (Little, Brown, & Co., Boston, 1884), 89.

[86] From a talk given by Muir in New York, Jun 17, 1911; *Sierra Club Bulletin*, January 1924, 45-46. Years later, Theodore Roosevelt wrote Muir from the White House that he had "always grudged Emerson's not having gone into camp with you. You would have made him perfectly comfortable and he ought to have had the experience" Letter to Muir, Washington, D.C., January 27, 1908: John Muir Papers, Holt-Atherton.

[87] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 144-150.

[88] One of Emerson's handlers wrote in his journal about their encounter. "We were off at about three o'clock, and left M. standing in the forest alone; he was to pass the night there in solitude, and to find his way back to the valley on foot. We had all become greatly interested in him, and hated to leave him. His name has since grown to be well known at the East, through his valuable articles in the magazines. James Bradley Thayer, *A Western Journey with Mr. Emerson* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1971), 88-109.

[89] Muir, *Our National Parks,* 102.

[90] *Wolfe, Son of the Wilderness, 199.*

[91]In 1871, Emerson suggested Muir as the perfect person to edit Thoreau's journals. He also included Muir on a short list he kept in his journal called "my men."

[92] Wolfe writes, "Muir was himself an original. He was never warped out of his own orbit or made a satellite to any man or system of thinking. But he was hospitable to Emerson's ideas because … they were indigenous within himself. When Emerson said: 'Every rational creature has in Nature a dowry and estate. It is his if he will,' the words struck fire in Muir's mind. Remembering them, in due time he went out to claim his dowry and to reject all compromises. The gentle Emerson, happy in his Concord meadows, never wholly took possession of his estate. Like Moses, he only pointed the way. Thoreau and Muir alone of all his followers fully *lived* his Nature gospel." Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness*, 80.

[93] Others tried to convince Muir that New England sophistication would make his life richer. John Runkle, President of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, whom Muir had guided through an excursion to the High Sierra ice fields, had urged Muir to study science professionally at MIT. Muir wrote to a friend, "He thinks that if the damp mosses and lichens were scraped off I might make a teacher – a professor faggot to burn beneath their technological furnaces. All in kindness but I'd rather grow green in the sky."John Muir letter to Jean Carr, 1872, JMP, 2:1122.

[94] In 1899, Muir was one of thirty members of an elite community of scientists, artists, photographers, and naturalists brought together to explore and document the Alaskan coast from Seattle to Siberia. In part because of the striking contrast with his unaccompanied travels, Muir was thrilled to be with so many fellow Nature lovers. "Nearly all my life I have wandered and studied alone. On the Elder (the ship's name) I found not only the fields I liked best to study, but a hotel, a club, and a home, together with a floating university in which I enjoyed the instruction and companionship of a lot of the best fellows imaginable." The exuberance expressed in Muir's appreciation of having others to share his experiences with underscores how often this was not the case. Muir letter to Mary Harriman et al., 30 Aug 1899, JMP 10:6195.

[95] For several years after marriage the two seldom left home. Louie Wanda was a homebody and seldom traveled at all. She never made the trip to Wisconsin to meet John's childhood home or meet his family. A day trip to San Francisco was to her a long excursion. In early July 1884, Muir took his wife to Yosemite Valley for the only time. They worried constantly about their daughter who they had left with her grandparents. Worster, *Passion for Nature*, 296.

[96] John Muir, *John Muir's Last Journey: South to the Amazon and East to Africa, Unpublished Journals and Selected Correspondence*, ed Michael Branch (Covelo Ca: Island Press, 2001), xxxvi.

[97] Muir, *Last Journey*, xxxvi.

[98] Muir, *Last Journey, xxxvii.*

[99] Muir, *Last Journey, xxxviii.*

[100] Muir, *Last Journey, xxxvii.*

[101] Muir, *Last Journey, xxxviii.*

[102] Muir, *Last Journey,* xxxviii.

[103] Muir, *Last Journey,* xxxix.

[104] Martin Heidegger argues that both sociality and solitude are essential. He says *being-with* is "equiprimordial" with *being-in-the-world*. This means we are not, first and foremost, solitary beings who then come into contact with others, nor are we social beings who then withdraw into solitude; but that both sociality and solitude run right through us. Neither is more fundamental than the other. They co-evolve and we cannot afford to ignore either aspect. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. Joan Stambaugh, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 148.

[105] Muir, *Wilderness World*, xvi.

[106] Phil Cafaro writes, "Free and focused activity will be a key desideratum for any virtue ethics. Such freedom does not depend on absolute solitude, but arguably it does demand a certain independence from others." Philip Cafaro, *Thoreau's Living Ethics: Walden and the Pursuit of Virtue* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 109.

[107] Muir, *Last Journey, xxxix.*

[108] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or, Life in the Woods* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1854), 315.

[109]Muir, *John of the Mountains*, 234,

[110] Muir, *Our National Parks,* 56.

Chapter Three

[111] John Muir, *John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir*, ed. Linnie Wolfe Marsh (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1938), 34.

[112] The inclusivity of the word attentiveness places it at the heart of many spiritual traditions. For example, Zen master Ikkyu was once ask for some maxims of the highest wisdom. He immediately wrote the word "Attention." He was then asked if there was nothing more. Ikkyu responded "Attention. Attention. Attention." See, Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000).

[113] It is telling that toward the end of Muir's life, being widely known as a mountaineer, writer, and preservationist, he listed on his passport as occupation "botanist."

[114] Frederick Turner says it was Ezra Carr who taught Muir "the supreme virtue of looking" or of painstakingly scrutinizing the landscape to see what it had to tell. Frederick Turner, *Rediscovering America: John Muir in His Time and Our* (New York: Viking, 1985), 104.

[115] John Muir, *John Muir, Letters to a Friend*: *Written to Mrs. Ezra Carr, 1866-1879* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915), 157-158.

[116] Michael Cohen, *The Pathless Way: John Muir and American Wilderness.* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 35.

[117] John Muir, "Exploration of the Great Tuolumne Canyon," *John Muir: A Reading Biography* ed.William F. Kimes and Maymie B. Kimes (Fresno: Panorama West Books, 1986) #22.

[118] An example from the first Director to the US Geological Survey, Clarence King, who wrote in his book *Systematic Geology* (1878), "Mr. Muir's vagaries will not deceive

geologists who are personally acquainted with California" and hope that "the ambitious amateur himself may divert his evident enthusiastic love of nature into a channel, if there is one, in which his attainments would save him from hopeless floundering." For a detailed discussion of the dispute see; Dennis Dean, "John Muir and the Origin of Yosemite Valley" *Annals of Science* 48 (September 1991), 453-485. And, Samuel Kneeland, *The Wonders of Yosemite Valley and of California*, 2nd ed. (Boston: A. Morrow, 1872), 90-91.

[119] It remained for later scientists to determine the outcome of this controversy. By the late 1930's it became clearer that Muir was essentially correct. In 1938, Francois Matthes of U.S. Geological Survey wrote, "In neither the Yosemite nor in any other valley of its type is there evidence of any dislocation of the earth's crust. …on the other hand, there is abundant proof of powerful glacial action such as Muir had recognized. To be sure, the glaciers did not reach down to the foothills, nor did they excavate the canyons in their entirety, as Muir supposed. The Ice Age, it is now clear, was preceded in the Sierra Nevada by long periods of canyon cutting by the streams … But let no one cite these recently determined facts to Muir's discredit, for geologic science in the sixties and seventies … had not advanced to the point where any man, however expert, could have detected and proved them. Whatever shortcomings may be found today in Muir's geologic interpretations, they are to be attributed primarily to the limitations of the science of his day. To one thoroughly at home in the geologic problems of the Yosemite region it is now certain, upon reading Muir's letters and other writings, that he was more intimately familiar with the facts on the ground and was more nearly right in their interpretation, than any professional geologist of his time. …It was John Muir … who first saw clearly that the glaciers themselves had done most of the excavating." Francois Matthes, "John Muir and the Glacial Theory of Yosemite" *Geologic History of the Yosemite Valley*, (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1962), 4.

[120] Muir, *Letters to a Friend*, 125-126, 128, 140.

[121] John Muir, *The Writings of John Muir: 1916-1924* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), 13.

[122] John Muir, *The Writings of John Muir*, 15.

[123] In a highly provocative 1967 article Lynn White argued that the Judeo Christian metaphysical claim of dualism between humans and the rest of the planet was one of the root causes of the environmental crisis. White's ideas set off an extended debate about the role of religion in creating and sustaining the West's destructive attitude toward the natural world. The article is also sometimes credited with being the impetus behind the creation of several new fields of study including environmental history and eco-theology. Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," *Science* (March 10, 1967).

[124] John Muir, *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917), 54.

[125] Fredrick Turner says, "Muir was stating the bedrock principle that would become the basis of the environmental movement." Frederick Turner, *Rediscovering America: John Muir in His Time and Ours* (New York: Viking, 1985), 147-149.

[126] Muir, *Thousand Mile Walk*, 122.

[127] Muir, *Thousand Mile Walk*, 135.

[128] Muir maintained that killing was a way for young boys to learn and feel more deeply about Nature. Yet when asked to support the conservation organization called the *Boone and Crockett Club*, he refused, citing their emphasis on hunting. He also declined to support the *Sons of Daniel Boone* (later to become the Boy Scouts of America) because their activities included hunting for young boys.

[129] John Muir, *Our National* Parks (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1901), 204.

[130] Muir may have developed a protective attitude for snakes because of the predominant view that everything was created by god for humans except poisonous snakes which were created by the devil. Given Muir's legendary stubbornness he may have seen it as a challenge to see snakes through god's eyes.

[131] By the time he was thirteen years old Muir had all of the New and three quarters of the Old Testament memorized. He describes his father's insistence on memorizing Bible verses as a military campaign. He says he and his siblings were often whipped when not having learned their verses. His father's interpretation of the Bible was conservative and literal. Muir was deeply indoctrinated into the Judeo/Christian ethic of his father's world. This view was not at all sympathetic to non-anthropocentrism. Muir was raised with the belief that the world is dualistic, God is transcendent not imminent, and the world was made for man. See, John Muir, *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), especially chapters 1 and 2.

[132] Lee Stetson, *An Evening with John Muir*: *Conversations with a Tramp* (Midpines: Yosemite Association, 1985).

[133] Gifford Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1947), 103.

[134] For an interesting collection of arguments surrounding the question of anthropocentrism and environmental ethics, see, *The Monist: An International Journal of General Philosophical Inquiry*, "The Intrinsic Value of Nature," April, 1992, vol. 75.

[135] Simon Blackburn, *Being Good: A Short Introduction to Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 47.

[136] "Intrinsic Value" *The Monist 75* (April,1992).

[137] The phrase "fellow mortals" is one coined by Muir's favorite Scottish poet, Bobby Burns in his1785 poem, *To A Mouse*

I'm truly sorry man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union,
And justifies that ill opinion
Which makes thee startle
At me, thy poor, earth born companion
And fellow mortal!

Muir brought a book of Burns poetry with him during his thousand mile walk. Muir uses the phrase "fellow mortals" and the word "kinship" throughout his writings. The book *Stickeen*, perhaps his most charming and exciting adventure tale, is a heart-felt exploration of the themes of kinship with fellow mortals. John Muir, *Stickeen: The Story of a Dog* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909).

[138] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 172, 174.

[139] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 175.

[140] A contemporary of Muir writing in 1906 said, "His accounts of the bird or animal which got next to his heart can never fail to find readers and hold them." Henry Meade Bland, "John Muir," *Overland Monthly* 47, June/July 1906, 522.

[141] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 188-193.

[142] Being able to live anywhere was not a virtue exclusive to deer. As Muir observed it, wild animals as a group had one overarching virtue: They fit in seamlessly with their environment. The Sierra bear who taught Muir the "right manners of the wilderness" and put him on his "good behavior" is an example. He was a "happy fellow" who "harmonized with the trees and rocks and shaggy chaparral" and was "everywhere at home." Water ouzels, special birds for Muir, are another example. They start singing "before they are born as the river vibrates the egg. The bird and stream are inseparable." The sense of animals fitting in with their environment was present through his writings about wildlife. See, John Muir, *Muir Among the Animals: The Wildlife Writings of John Muir*, ed. Lisa Mighetto (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1986).

[143] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 194-199.

[144] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 194-199.

[145] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 195.

[146] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 196.

[147] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 203.

[148] Muir, *Among the Animals,* 34.

[149] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 172.

[150] Muir, *Among the Animals,* 176-177.

[151] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 215.

[152] After blue grouse have scattered because of a disturbance the parents and chicks will call to each other. Muir has this to say, "One touch of Nature makes the whole world kin; and it is truly wonderful how love-telling the small voices of these birds are, and how far they reach through the woods into one another's hearts and into ours. The tones … are so full of anxious affection that few mountaineers can fail to be touched by them." Muir, *Our National Parks*, 216-220.

[153] Today the water ouzel is called a dipper. Muir, *Our National Parks*, 238-240.

[154] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 220-222.

[155] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 226.

[156] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 227.

[157] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 228-229.

[158] Muir finds these birds particularly reassuring. He says oftentimes wandering alone in the High Sierra one will hear the robin, as if it were singing "Fear not, fear not. Only love is here." In the most severe solitudes they seem as "happy as in gardens and apple orchards." Muir, *Our National Parks*, 231-233.

[159] John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 139-141.

[160] Muir, *First Summer,* 43-47.

[161] Generally when Muir speaks of "industriousness" he is speaking not of virtue but rather of the vice of over-industriousness as exhibited by his father and other expansionists. But bees are exemplary because industry ought to produce a better, more peaceful life, and bees industry does. Muir says that in stark contrast to domesticated sheep bee industry makes for more flowers not fewer. John Muir, *John Muir: A Reading Biography*, ed. William F. Kimes and Maymie B. Kimes, (Fresno: Panorama West Books, 1986), #65.

[162] Muir, *John of the Mountains*, 277.

[163] Today they are called Sierra Nevada Big Horn sheep. They were listed as endangered January, 3, 2000. At the time the population was estimated at 100 individuals. According the

US Fish and Wildlife department, as of July 2010, because of ongoing recovery work, estimates place the number of individuals at around 250.

[164] John Muir, "Wild Wool," *Overland Monthly* 4, April 1875, 361.

[165] Muir, *Wild Wool*, 362.

[166] Muir, *Wild Wool*, 362.

[167] Muir, *Wild Wool*, 364.

[168] Muir, *Wild Wool*, 364.

[169] Muir, *Wild Wool*, 365.

[170] Lisa Mighetto, ed. *Muir Among the Animals: The Wildlife Writings of John Muir*, "Editor's Preface: John Muir and the Rights of Animals," (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1986), xxv.

[171] Muir, *Wild Wool*, 366.

[172] As a young adult Muir's predilections were reinforced by romantic poets and transcendental philosophers. For an interesting discussion about the influence these writers may have had on the young Muir, see; Donald Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 30-35. Also see, James McKusick, *Green writing: Romanticism and Ecology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

[173] Turner, *Rediscovering America*, 132.

[174] His language during his early years in the Sierra was becoming increasingly pantheistic as both Turner and Cohen point out. His words began to resemble language of the plains tribes. In a letter to Catherine Merrill in 1871, he wrote, "Thank God for this glorious mountain Yosemite barbarism." Turner, *Rediscovering America*, 192; also see, Cohen, *Pathless Way*, 68.

[175] John Muir, *The Mountains of California* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1894), 64-65.

[176] Cohen, *Pathless Way,* 68.

[177] Turner, *Rediscovering America*, 216.

[178] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar: An Oration Delivered before Phi Betta Kappa Society Cambridge Massachusetts, August 31, 1837," Nature*, Addresses, and Lectures* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1849).

[179] Turner, *Rediscovering America*, 216.

[180] Emerson's letter to Muir, Concord, February 5, 1872, (Yosemite National Park Research Library).

[181] John Muir's annotated copy of Emerson's, *Prose Works* (Boston 1870), vol. 1 (Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library).

[182] For an interesting discussion of Emerson's critique of Thoreau's character, see, Philip Cafaro, *Thoreau's Living Ethics: Walden and the Pursuit of Virtue* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 104, 135,137.

[183] Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness*, 170.

[184] Muir's telepathic experiences have been well recounted. Three such experiences in particular seem most interesting: First was his sense that his former professor, James Davie Butler, was in the Yosemite Valley when Muir was in the high country. This premonition sent Muir running down the mountains to meet Professor Butler. Second and third, on separate occasions several years apart, Muir had premonitions that if he didn't return to the East immediately, he would not be able to see either of his parents alive. Each time when he left for the trip, his parents were seemingly healthy and in each case he arrived shortly before they died. For an account of each of these occasions, see, Linnie Marsh Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945),122, 150, 233, 256-257, 269.

[185] Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness*, 257.

[186] A discussion of the séance was originally in unpublished notes called "Mysterious Things." A humorous account of the evening can be found in Wolfe, *Son of the* Wilderness, 172-73.

[187] Spiritualism is a belief system, which maintains that spirits of the dead, currently in the spirit world, can be contacted by mediums. Spiritualism reached its peak growth from the1840s to the 1920s. By 1897, it was said to have more than eight million followers in the United States and Europe, mostly members of the middle and upper classes. Muir was not impressed by or interested in spiritualism. But many of his friends living in the Bay Area were.

[188] John Muir, "The Wild Sheep of California," *Overland Monthly* 12 (April 1874), 359, 361.

[189] Muir, *Wild Sheep*, 362.

[190] Muir, *Wild Sheep*, 359.

[191] John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 77.

[192] Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness*, 168.

[193] Muir, *Wild Sheep*, 361.

[194] Muir, *Wild Sheep*, 359.

[195] Muir, *Wild Sheep*, 362.

[196] Muir, *Wild Wool*, 366.

[197] As with most things Muir's believed the "wilder the better" and he could see a spark of wildness trapped inside of domesticated animals human and non-human alike.

[198] John Muir, *John Muir Papers*, ed. Ronald Limbaugh and Kirsten E, Lewis, reel 40, frame 7739-7743. http://library.pacifica.edu/ha/digital/index.asp.

Chapter Four

[199] He was feeling ambivalent about factory work. "I should like to invent useful machinery, but it comes, 'you do not wish to spend your lifetime among machines and you will die ere you can do anything else." Michael Cohen, *The Pathless Way: John Muir and the American Wilderness,* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 8.

[200] Letter Muir to the Merrills mar 4 1867 John Muir Papers 1:492; Letter Muir to J Carr Apr 3 1867 JMP 1:511.

[201] John Muir, *The Life and Letters of John Muir vo1,* ed. William F Bade (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1923), 154.

[202] John Muir, *John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir*, ed. Linnie Wolfe Marsh (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1938), 317.

[203] In a letter to Muir from Jeanne Carr she suggests to Muir that he might take the opportunity to cultivate his inner vision. He was too depressed at the time to find much comfort in the suggestion but later was able to say that that is exactly what happened during this time. This incident was in fact pivotal in his faith in following his deeper tidal impulses. Letter jean Carr to Muir, April 6, 1867, JMP 1: 519.

[204] Oxford English Dictionary on-line http://www.oed.com

[205] Edward Way Teale, *The Wilderness World of John* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954), back cover.

[206] John Muir, *The Yosemite* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912), 55, 56.

[207] The earth quake is now called the Great Lone Pine earthquake and is generally considered one of the largest California quakes in recorded history. The size of the earthquake is uncertain, but historical evidence detailing the damage it caused in settlements and landforms near the epicenter, and the geographic extent to which noticeable movement was felt, leads researchers to estimate a Richter magnitude of 7.6 to 8 or greater; similar in size to the1906 San Francisco earthquake.

[208] Cohen, *Pathless Way*, 134.

[209] Cohen, *Pathless Way*, 135.

[210] Muir was quick to point out that though ill-informed humans were terrified other members of Nature's community were not. The waterfalls and frogs still sang and the owl was not at all flustered. When Muir saw two violets up the canyon he stopped to ask them their opinion of the situation. "It's all love" they told him. In, Linnie Marsh Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1945), 157.

[211] Cohen, *Pathless Way*, 135.

[212] Muir, *The Yosemite*, 59.

[213] Cohen, *Pathless Way*, 135

[214] Cohen says that Muir used this occasion to set up the distinction. "If Emerson spoke for civilization, Muir would respond for wilderness." Cohen, *Pathless Way*, 134.

[215] Muir, *The Yosemite*, 86.

[216] Muir, *The Yosemite*, 60.

[217] Teale, *Wilderness World,* 311.

[218] Cohen, *Pathless Way*, 124-147.

[219] Cohen, *Pathless Way,* 139

[220] Michael J. Gillis, "John Muir and the Bidwells: The Forgotten Friendship" Dogtown Territorial Quarterly, (Spring 1995) 4-5, 18-23, 26, 31.

[221]Gillis, *Muir and the Bidwells*, 18-23, 26,31.

[222] Muir developed a reputation as someone fun to tease because of his exuberance. In 1909 Muir accompanied President Taft to Glacier Point in Yosemite. At one point they stopped to look at Yosemite Valley and Taft, a man who loved to tease said slyly, "now don't you think

that would make a fine farm?" Then later he suggested that "since the valleys are so far from the centers of population, then might a well be used commercially." Later, while pointing to the gateway to the valley he said, "Now that would be a fine place for a damn!" Finally taking the bait Muir responded, "Yes! But the man who would dam that would be damning himself. Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness*, 323.

[223] Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness*, 194-95.

[224] His friends knew Muir was fairly obsessed with the actions of glaciers in ages past. He once wrote, "The grandeur of these forces and their glorious results overpower me and inhabit my whole being. Waking or sleeping I have no rest. In dreams I read blurred sheets of glacial writing, or follow lines of cleavage, or struggle with the difficulties of some extraordinary rock-form." John Muir, *Stickeen* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin,1909), 78.

[225] Melvin B. Anderson, "The Conversation of John Muir" *American Museum Journal* XV (March 1915): 116-21.

[226] Muir, *Stickeen*, 21.

[227] Muir, *Stickeen,* 57.

[228] Muir, *Sticken,* 62, 63.

[229] Jean Hanna Clark, ed., *Dear Papa: Letters between John Muir and His Daughter Wanda* (Fresno: Panorama West Books, 1985), 37.

[230] Donald Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 260.

[231] Muir, *Stickeen*, 58

[232] Muir, Stickeen, 4.

[233] In this view Muir was one with the transcendentalists. We see elements of the ensnarled versus oppressed question being played out today between Deep versus Social Ecologists and Radical versus Liberal Feminists. See, Joseph R. Des Jardins, *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy*. 4th ed (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2006), 243-254.

[234] Muir, *Stickeen*, 64.

[235] Muir, *The Yosemite*, 256.

[236] Hearing held before the committee on the Public Lands of the House of Representatives, December 16, 1908, on House Joint Resolution 184.

[237] Plato concluded in categorical terms that "only in the contemplation of beauty is life worth living." Plato, Symposium 211d.

[238] Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, "Aesthetic Perfection," *Dialectics and Humanism* (autumn 1980): 145.

[239] For an overview of the importance of Beauty in Philosophy see George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty,*(New York: Modern Library,1896); Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 2001).

[240] As with his arguments with regard to ethics, Immanuel Kant's conception of beauty represents rigidity on the continuum. Kant understood beauty as universalizable. He believed with sufficient understating, all rational agents would be able to come to agreement about what is beautiful. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of* , trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, MacMillan Publishing, 1951). My understanding of this concept of beauty in Kant comes primarily from Ted Cohen, "Why Beauty is a Symbol of Morality," in *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics*, ed. Ted Cohen & Paul Guyer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 221-236.

The cost of understanding beauty in a Kantian way can be quite high. If objective beauty exists in the world and I see it and you do not, am I not committed to seeing you as defective in some way? By insisting that beauty is objective and definable we also run the risk of making it formulaic.

On the other hand, if we understand beauty as existing exclusively in the eyes of the beholder, a strictly private matter, then the word has little meaning beyond that of a vehicle to express individual experiences and preferences. Simon Blackburn argues that subjectivism is birthed from relativism and is a threat to ethics because it is a "communication stopper." See Simon Blackburn, *Being Good: A Brief Introduction to Ethics,* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2001).

[241] Alexander Nehamas says "Beauty is a discredited notion" and yet there is difference between that which is "good/beautiful" and "I like it." For my understanding of Nehamas I have drawn from two sources. Firstly, Alexander Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art* **(**Princeton: University of Princeton Press 2007)**.** *Only a Promise of Happiness* won the 2007 Best Professional/Scholarly Publishing Book in Philosophy, Association of American Publishers. Secondly, Nehamas, Alexander. "The Place of Beauty." Lecture, California State University, Chico, February 26, 2009. The lecture is available on DVD from Troy Jollimore, Philosophy Department, CSU, Chico.

[242] Nehamaus is outlining an understanding of beauty which is in line with Aristotelian ideas of virtue.Aristotle saw beauty as synonymous with excellence.

[243] "The Scenery of California," *California Early History: Commercial Position: Climate: Scenery*. San Francisco: California State Board of Trade, 1897, 16. This statement is found in a little known state promotional brochure.

[244] Nehamas, *lecture at CSU, Chico*.

[245] Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness*, 267.

[246] For a scholarly and very readable analysis of Muir's literary style and his development as a writer, see Herbert F. Smith's "John Muir," *Twayne's United States Author Series*, no. 73 (New York, Twayne Publishers, 1965).

[247] John Muir, *John of the Mountains; The Unpublished Journals of John Muir,* ed. Linnie Marsh Wolfe, (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1979), 267.

[248] There is a great deal of disagreement with regard to Muir's religious beliefs. Michael P. Cohen has argued that Muir became more of a Western Taoist or pantheist than is normally recognized. Stephen Fox's asserts that Muir rejected Christianity yet Bonnie Gisel claims that Muir was "A Christian until the day he died." Mark Stoll argues that Muir's emphasis on divine immanence and de-emphasis on Jesus were quite consonant with liberal religious trends of the day. Stoll also argues that Muir's ecological and religious ideas were somewhat mainstream for the time. See Cohen, *Pathless Way, 1984;* Stephen R. Fox, *The American Conservation Movement: John Muir and His Legacy*. (Madison: Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1985),107-108; Mark Stoll, *God and John Muir: A Psychological Interpretation of John Muir's Life and Religion* "The John Muir Exhibit", www.sierraclub.org/johnmuir_exhibit, 1993; Richard Cartwright Austin, *Baptized into Wilderness: A Christian Perspective on John Muir* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987); Denis C. Williams, *God's Wilds: John Muir's Vision of Nature*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002).

I produced a radio series titled *Wilderness, Reverence and John Muir* for *EcoTalk Radio* in 2006. While interviewing dozens of Muir scholars, I discovered many competing ideas with regard to Muir's religious beliefs. Many are interested in claiming Muir as a member of their own religious tradition. What seems indisputable is that although Muir's ideas of God evolved, he never stopped believing in a loving, creative force behind Nature.

[249] This was the first meeting of Muir and William Keith, two nature-loving, opinionated Scotsmen who became immediate and life-long friends. Muir called Keith's painting *The California Alps* an "inspired bible of the mountains." In the early years of their friendship Muir applauded Keith's "devout truthfulness to nature." According to Brother Cornelius, Keith's biographer, in the 1870's "the Muir ideals of the truth, character, and grandeur of nature, especially of the mountains, were now Keith's artistic aim." Cornelius calls the Keith paintings of this period "Muir-Keith's." As long as Keith was painting realistic depictions of Nature Muir was his biggest fan. But when Keith's artistic sense began to drift toward impressionism Muir took exception.

The gist of Muir's criticism of Keith's later works was that he sometimes ignored the logic of the land by placing a glacier or a river where the geography made it impossible. Keith felt free to depart from topographic reality to add to the beauty of the work. To Muir, this was profane and certainly added no beauty. Order existed in Nature and beauty divorced from truth was an ugly blemish. Muir claimed Keith was no longer seeing Nature clearly distracted by his own moods and self-absorption. While Muir the scientist increasingly preferred the realism of photography Keith's paintings became increasingly subjective and personal. The two friends argued frequently about artistic license. For Muir the debate was about more than art; it encompassed important questions about the proper attitude of humans toward the natural world. From Muir's perspective, impressionistic art represented an attempt to improve Nature an idea fraught with arrogance and ignorance. Humans might as well attempt to improve Nevada Falls by "white washing the storm-stained face of El Capitan or gild the domes." By conflating Nature with civilization, one was confusing the sacred with the profane. Far better, Muir believed, to be on hands and knees in gratitude repose in "Nature's cathedral, a place to worship in" than trying to improve Nature. See, Brother Cornelius, *Keith, Old Master of California* (New York: Putnam, 1942), 75; "Art Notes" *San Francisco Evening Bulletin,* June 20, 1874, 3.

[250] John Muir, "The Mountains of California" *A Near View of the High Sierra* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1894), 55-85.

[251] Muir, *Mountains*, 56

[252] Muir's often said it is "better to be in a storm than not be in one." Because he was so excited about seeing "landscape making" he would relish the opportunity to play in storms. Storms and the young Sierra share in common the idea of early stages of creation.

[253] Muir came to know the much older Appalachians during his 1000 mile walk to the gulf. For the last 100 million years, erosion has been carving them away, leaving only their cores standing on the ridges of today.

[254] Muir, *Mountains*, 58.

[255] Muir, *Mountains*, 65.

[256] Muir, *Mountains, 69.*

[257] "Summering in the Sierra …" San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin, June 22, 1875, p.4 col 1. In Kimes, p. 13.

"As far as the Falls are concerned …" Summering in the Sierra, John Muir the Naturalist, Tells us something…" Kimes #44.

[258] "no special significance: Kimes #48.

[259] Muir on Evolution: "Three Days with John Muir, "*World's Work"* (March, 1909),11355-56.

[260] Muir, John. "Snow-Storm on Mount Shasta." *Harper's New Monthly Magazine.* Vol.55, No. 328 (September 1877). 521-530.

[261] Muir, *Snow Storm*, 524.

[262] Muir, *Snow Storm*, 528.

[263] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (New York: Random House, 1958), 321.

[264] The virtue of gratitude has been considered extensively by moral philosophers such as Adam Smith and with the advent of positive psychology, around the year 2000, has become a mainstream focus of psychological research as well. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 6th ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Classics).

[265] Eric Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956).

[266] Margaret Allen, *Philosophers to Astronauts* (Huntington Beach Ca: Creative Teaching Press, 2004), 52.

[267] Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness*, 44, 245.

[268] One of Muir's most enduring expressions of political involvement was the formation of the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club was a practical answer to his ongoing question of whether or not people should be encouraged to go to Nature. The Sierra Club was formed to help establish Yosemite as a National Park and to encourage people to "explore, enjoy and protect the planet." Today it is America's largest, oldest and generally considered most influential environmental organization. It is also the world's largest outings organization. In fact, the Los Angeles chapter of the Sierra Club is the largest outings organization in the world all by itself. The Sierra Club consists of two equally important arms. The conservation arm and the outings arm. The conservation arm consists of politicking and legal action; the outings arm encourages and supports people exploring Nature. Muir was President of the Sierra Club until he died in 1914.

[269] "John Muir Memorial Issue." *Sierra Club Bulletin*, vol. 10, no 1 January 1916.

[270] http://www.californiahistoricalsociety.org

[271] http://ecotopia.org/ecology-hall-of-fame/john-muir/biography

[272] Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness*, 329.

[273] Like the Brazilian tribal leader Kiin, in order to affect change Muir placed himself in the middle of a situation he feared was the root of the problem. Kiin was leader of an indigenous group which lived in the Amazon basin. He felt his home was being destroyed, in large part, because of the majority's inability to see the spirit in Nature. Kiin lived with a certain cognitive dissonance when he found himself in large cities arguing, with the facts and figures, to save his land. He was becoming part of the very system which he blamed for the destruction of that which he was trying to save. As unsettling as this may have been for Kiin, perhaps he found some solace in the fact that his words and actions gained a large measure of success for indigenous tribes throughout the Amazon basin.

[274] Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness,* 89.

[275] Worster, *Passion for Nature*, 313.

[276] In the midst of the battle to save Hetch-Hetchy, Muir said to the Sierra Club, "That anyone would try to destroy such a place seems incredible; but sad experience shows that there are people good enough and bad enough for anything." "The Hetch-Hetchy Valley," *Sierra Club Bulletin*, January, 1908, 219.

[277] Muir, *Thousand Mile Walk,* 22.

[278] Muir, *First Summer*, 147

[279] It was perplexing to the point that it complicated his vision of Nature conservation. On one hand, he believed if people could get to know Nature there would be no need to defend her. On the other hand, the cumulative result of his experience was that this wasn't true. Some people fell in love with Nature the way he did and others didn't. More disconcerting was Muir's belief that those who had a tendency to exploit would exploit wherever they were. It made practical sense to Muir to keep those people away from Nature. He eventually would decide that, on balance, it was best to get people into Nature. But he remained skeptical of people and highly protective of wilderness from those who would attempt to exploit her throughout his life.

[280] John Muir, "The National Parks and Forest Reservations," *Sierra Club Bulletin,* January, 1896, 282-83.

[281] Turner says Muir was not incapable of making practical arguments. But the ultimate plane of his reference was elsewhere, "and to those disposed to listen to him this lent a mysterious and even awesome power to his worlds. To others, he would always appear impractical, God-haunted, self-righteous." Frederick Turner, *Rediscovering America*: *John Muir in his Time and Ours* (New York: Viking, 1985), 283.

[282] John Muir, *John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir* ed. Linnie Marsh Wolfe, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1938), 79-86.

[283] Muir was hesitant to write an autobiography until he saw an opportunity to "say a good word for Nature." In 1900, Walter Hines Page Muir's editor with the *Atlantic* asked Muir to write an auto-biography Muir responded that he'd like to write five other books first. The fifth book on his list was "a book of studies … my main real book in which I'll ask my readers to celebrate." Muir, *Life and Letters vo 2,* 342-42.

[284] His friend John Swett tried to pry Muir out of his overly rigid way of writing. He told Muir, "Write as you talk. Stop revising so much. You make your style so slippery a man can't stand on it." Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness*, 174.

[285] This was a common criticism of Muir's writing during the time of his writing. David Brower told me that his father in law was an editor and hated Muir's writing specifically because there was too much exuberance and that it seemed forced and unnatural. Brower admitted that he had become "infected with this view" as well.

[286] Steven Holmes has noted that Muir also used the words glory' and 'glorious' to suggest that light was taking on a religious dimension. Holmes states, "It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the notion of glory in Muir's published writings, where no other single image carries more emotional or religious weight." He also observes that because Muir had been raised with the Bible, "his decision to use the term would not have been random." In fact his usage of "glory," according to Holmes, "exactly parallels its Hebraic origins," in which biblical writings often indicate a divine presence with light, as in the burning bush or pillar of fire, and described as "the glory of God." Steven Holmes, *The Young John Muir: An Environmental Biography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).

[287] John, Muir, *Travels in Alaska* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915), xviii.

[288] John Muir, *Sierra Club Bulletin* 10, no 1, (January 1916).

[289] Cohen says this created problems for Muir because Thoreau's strategy was to assault rather than coax his readers. Thoreau was more interested in confrontation than mediation. So, Muir sometimes attacked his audience with the contradictory goal of charming them. Cohen, *Pathless Way*, 133.

[290] Thoreau wrote, "I am too cold for human friendship. I trust I shall not soon be too cold for natural influences. It appears to be a law that you cannot have a deep sympathy with both man and nature. Those qualities which bring you near to the one estrange you from the other." Muir's life would indicate something different. Henry David Thoreau, *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau Journal 4* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 435.

[291] John Muir, *Sierra Club Bulletin* 10, no 1, (January 1916).

[292] Muir, *Life and Letters*, vol. *2,* 6-7.

[293] Many of his friends pushed him publish. None more so than Jeanne Carr who received many of his letters filled with his most effusive wilderness prose. In his lifetime he published 300 articles and twelve books. Several other books were published posthumously.

[294] Kimes #55

[295] M.E. McCullough and M. E. Emmons, “The grateful disposition: A conceptual and empirical topography,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 82*, (2002). 112-127.

[296] Alex Wood and Stephen Joseph, “Gratitude predicts psychological well-being above Big Five facets,” *Personality and Individual Differences, 45*, (2009): 655-660.

[297] Alex Wood and Alex Linley, “Coping style as a s psychological resource of grateful people,” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology 26(2007)*: 1108–1125.

[298] Alex Wood, “Gratitude influences sleep through the mechanism of pre-sleep cognitions,” *Journal of Psychosomatic Research 66*, (2008):43-48.

[299] Alex Wood and Stephen Joseph, “Gratitude predicts psychological well-being above Big Five facets,” *Personality and Individual Differences 45,* (2009): 655-660.

[300] Victor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1946), 99.

[301] Frankl, *Search for Meaning,* 108.

[302] Holmes Rolston III, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole" in Ronald Sandler and Philip Cafaro, eds., *Environmental Virtue Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 61-78.

[303] Muir, *Life and Letters,* 29.

[304] It has also been argued that given the connection between health of the planet and health of those who live on the planet that part of the criteria for leading a good life ought to be success as an environmental champion. From a larger perspective, a life which is good for a committed and successful environmentalist like Muir is also good because it supports his effectiveness. Ronald Sandler, *Character and Environment: A Virtue-Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics* (New York: Columbia Press, 2007).

Chapter Five

[305] For this expedition, which he imagined would take one or possibly two years, he packed in a rubberized bag: comb, brush, towel, soap, and a change of underclothing, copy of Robert Burn’s poems, Milton’s Paradise Lost, journal, and a map. Interestingly, we learn about the meagerness of Muir’s personal effects when he writes about a disappointed young man checking his booty after having robbed Muir. Finding such meager loot, the robber “handed

me back my bag, and returned down the hill, saying he had forgotten something." John Muir, *A Thousand-Mile Walk* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), 16-17.

[306] He didn't make it South America on this trip because he contracted malaria in Florida. He took a boat to Cuba before eventually feeling too sick to continue. Muir, *A Thousand-Mile Walk,*1-2.

[307] Linnie Marsh Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir* (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), 110.

[308] John Muir, *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), 128.

[309] It was the generosity of a kindly mother of six, Mrs. Hodgson, who poured in the quinine and calomel, which returned him to health. He was grateful and indebted to her for the rest of his life.

[310] Muir, *Thousand Mile Walk*, 141.

[311]Paul Woodruff, *Reverence: Renewing of a Forgotten Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford, 2001), 8.

[312] The word cardinal comes from the Latin: *cardo*, or hinge.

[313] Woodruff, Reverence, 95.

[314] Woodruff, Reverence*,* 80.

[315] John Muir, *Our National* Parks (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1901), 97.

[316] Bruce Alberts, President, National Academy of Sciences, 2005; http://sciencetruth.com/limits_of_science.htm

[317] Woodruff, *Reverence,* 56.

[318] During a radio interview I asked Holmes Rolston III if he was amazed, as I had been, by the incredible red desert-like photos beaming back from Mars courtesy of NASA's rovers Spirit and Opportunity. He said that the most amazing thing about the pictures of the red planet was how beautiful our planet was in comparison. *EcoTalk Radio.*

[319] Loren Eiseley, *The Immense Journey: An Imaginative Naturalist Explores the Mysteries of Man and Nature* (New York: Random House, 1946), 72.

[320] Says Francisco J. Ayala, "The Concept of Biological Process" *Studies in the Philosophy of Biology,* ed. Francisco Ayala and Theodosius Dobzhansky (New York: MacMillan, 1974), 353.

[321] Holmes Rolston III, "Caring for Nature: From Fact to Value, from Respect to Reverence" *Zygon* 39, (2004): 299.

[322] Rolston, *Caring for Nature,* 301.

[323] Eiseley, *Immense Journey*, 63.

[324] Loren Eisely speaks of the angiosperms' effect on mammals:

"Specialized groups of insects were arising to feed on the new sources of food and, incidentally and unknowingly, to pollinate the plant. The flowers bloomed in ever larger and more spectacular varieties. Some were pale, unearthly night flowers intended to lure moths in the evening twilight, some among the orchids even took the shape of female spiders in order to attract wandering males, some flamed red-fly in the light of noon or twinkled modestly in the meadow grasses. Intricate mechanisms splashed pollen on the breasts of hummingbirds, or stamped it on the bellies of black, grumbling bees droning assiduously from blossom to blossom. Honey ran, insects multiplied, and even the descendants of that toothed and ancient lizard-bird had become strangely altered. Equipped with prodding beaks instead of biting teeth, they pecked the seeds and gobbled the insects that were really converted nectar." Eiseley, *Immense Journey,* 73.

[325] Paleontologist and evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould argues there is no overlap between what the universe is made of (facts) and the value and meaning of those facts. However, in his last published words he was compelled to use the word *holy*:

"Something almost unspeakably holy—I don't know how else to say this—underlies our discovery and confirmation of the actual details that made our worlds and also in realms of contingency, assured the minutia of its construction in the manner we know, and not in any one of a trillion other ways, nearly all of which would not have included the evolution of a scribe to record the beauty, the fascination, and the mystery." Stephen Jay Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1342.

[326] E.O. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 345.

[327] E.O. Wilson, *The Future of Life* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 21.

[328] Richard Fortey, *Life: A Natural History of the First Four Billion Years of Life on Earth* (New York: Knopf, 1977), 11.

[329] Ernst Mayr, *The Growth of Biological Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 81.

[330] Barry Commoner argues this point in *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology* (New York: Knopf, 1971).

[331] Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Alamanc: And Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946),

[332] Edward Way Teale, writing in 1954, was able to talk with several people who knew Muir personally. Teale notes that everyone he talked to had a different view of which part of natural history held first importance in Muir's mind. Some thought it was trees; another thought it was geology, another plants. Teale points out the fourth view, probably the nearest right of all: ". . . . . . the whole interrelationships of life, the complete rounded picture of the mountain world. Today, Muir probably would be called an ecologist." Interestingly, Teale's assessment of Muir as an "ecologist" pre-dates the "ecology movement" of the 1970s by at least 15 years. From the Introduction of Edward Way Teale, *The Wilderness World of John* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954).

[333] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 174.

[334] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 174.

[335] Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 60.

[336] Additionally, Peter Singer points out that we make a class mistake here because not all humans are more intelligent than panthers. New-borns or those comatose or somehow mentally impaired may have less intelligence than a panther but nonetheless get the benefit of the class norm which is then applied to them specifically. Singer says, in fact, that all humans get the advanced moral considerability of being a member of a species even if they as individuals don't meet the criteria against which we measure other species. Singer says this is a form of thinking akin to racism or sexism. He calls it speciesism. Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for our Treatment of Animals* (New York: Random House, 1975).

[337] For a thorough discussion of oppressive frameworks and the logic of domination see the work of Karen Warren, especially, "Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections," *Environmental Ethics 9* (Spring 1987), 3-20; "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism," *Environmental Ethics 12* (Summer 1990), 125-46.

[338] John Muir, "Wild Wool," *Overland Monthly* 4, April 1875, 361.

[339] Holmes Rolston considers following nature in an ethical and ultimately dismisses the idea. Holmes Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 34.

[340] Muir, *John of the Mountains,* 277.

[341] John Muir, *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 10.

[342] There are real implications here for outdoor education. It isn't enough to teach certain activities in Nature. It is more important to help cultivate a certain attitude while engaged. This is especially true with kids. Stephen Kellert says reverence for Nature is inherent in us but not hard wired. "It needs to be nurtured and developed through experience." And what is most important toward that development is an open mind and awareness. Jane Goodall says children need to be told and shown that Nature is amazing. Once their mind takes hold, there is no stopping them. *EcoTalk* interviews, 2006.

[343] Cohen, *Pathless Way,* 224.

[344] John Muir, "The Mountains of California" *A Near View of the High Sierra* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1894), 70.

[345] Cohen says Muir concluded "There are no harsh, sharp dividing lines in Nature." Michael Cohen, *The Pathless Way* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 40.

[346] John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 52.

[347] Cohen, *Pathless Way,* 82.

[348] Muir, *First Summer,* 52

[349] Muir, *First Summer,* 106.

[350] Muir, *First Summer*, 117.

[351] John Muir, *The Yosemite* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912), 30

[352] For an interesting exploration of the role of risk taking in living a good life, see, Gary Leboff, *Dare: Take Your Life On and Win* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2007).

[353] Worster, *Passion for Nature,*182.

[354] Muir, *Yosemite*, 29.

[355] http://www.clarifyingchristianity.com/get_wet.shtml

[356] Letter to Charles Warren Stoddard, Feb. 20, 1872. *The Letters of Western Authors,* no. 5, May 1935.

[357] John Muir, *The Mountains of California* (New York: The Century Co., 1894), 129.

[358] Æolus is the mythic god of the winds. In geology Aeolian formations are produced or deposited by the action of wind.

[359] Muir, *Mountains of California*, 130.

[360] Muir, *Mountains of California,* 131.

[361] Muir, *Mountains of California*, 134.

[362] Muir, *Mountains of California*, 133.

[363] Muir, *Mountains of California*, 132.

[364] Muir, *Mountains of California*, 136

[365] Muir, *Mountains of California*, 256.

[366] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1900).

[367] For a fascinating discussion of Emerson's thoughts on infinity, see Richard Geldard, *God in Concord: Ralph Waldo Emerson's Awakening to the Infinite* (Burdett, NY: Larson Publishing, 1999).

[368] The term multiverse was coined by William James in the 1895 book, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (Dover Press: Mineola, 1895).

[369] Lynn Townsend White, Jr, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis", *Science* 155 (1967): 1203–1207.

Chapter Six

[370] http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1346284/Blowback-Obama-Gulf-oil-spill-inquiry-report-suggests-U-S-government-share-responsibility.html#ixzz1MpriwVKp

[371] Two months later technology and natural disaster were again in the headlines. The twin traumas of a huge earth quake and a massive tsunami hit the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan. The stricken facility experienced a string of crises: core meltdowns, station blackout, exhausted backup batteries, hydrogen explosions, fires in spent-fuel pools, failed cooling systems, and radioactive water and air released into the ocean and sky. In the US, 23 reactors have the same design as those at Fukushima.

[372] Gifford Pinchot *Breaking New Ground* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1947).103

[373] ibid

[374] In reference to the Commission's task of determining "best uses" of the National Forests Muir later wrote of "the beauty, grandeur, and all-embracing usefulness of our wild mountain

forest reservations and parks." He argued that the highest uses of the forests were "spiritual uses." John Muir, *Our National Parks* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1901), 4.

[375] Having "too much indoor philosophy" is how Muir described Emerson's handlers when they dismissed the idea of spending the night in the Mariposa Grove. Muir, *Our National Parks*, 145.

[376] John Muir, *The Yosemite* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912), 261-62.

[377] Muir makes this point elegantly in *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf.* John Muir, *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917), 54.

[378] Nobel Prize winning economist and philosopher Amartya Sen further explores the distinction between freedom of choice and autonomy. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999).

[379] He would point out Nature's peace is enhanced when we "go quietly, alone." John Muir, *Steep Trails,* ed. William Bade (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), 82.

[380] Muir said he imagined his brother would see him as "silly and imprudent" for choosing to live in the mountains rather than desiring to make money. This phrase was discussed in Chapter Two. Linnie Marsh Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir* (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), 124.

[381] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 5.

[382] One of the best-known and most widely-quoted texts of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is this pithy slogan: "thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind." This slogan encapsulates what can be called *the togetherness principle*. The "togetherness" here is the necessary cognitive complementarity and semantic interdependence of intuitions and concepts. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge University Press, February, 1999), 51.

[383] The Union of Concerned Scientists issued and widely circulated this appeal in November 1992. *The World Scientists' Warning to Humanity* was written and spearheaded by the late Henry Kendall, former chair of Union of Concerned Scientists board of directors. The complete statement can be read at: http://www.ucsusa.org/ucs/about/1992-world-scientists-warning-to-humanity.html

[384] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (New York: Random House, 1958), 321.

[385] John Muir, *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913).

[386] John Muir, *The Wilderness World of John Muir* ed. Edwin Way Teale (New York: Mariner Books, 1954), xx.

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________. “The Wild Sheep of California.” *Overland Monthly 12*, April 1874, 359- 61.

________. “Wild Wool.” *Overland Monthly* 4, April 1875, 361.

________. "Snow-Storm on Mount Shasta." *Harper's New Monthly Magazine,* September 1877.

________. “Nevada’s Dead Towns.” *San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin,* 15 January 1879.

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