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SHARING NATURE: RIVAL VISIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSE

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Sharing Nature: Rival Versions of Environmental Discourse

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Abstract: In this paper I compare and evaluate the work of Steven Vogel, Akeel Bilgrami, and Jedediah Purdy regarding the place of normative conceptions of nature in political discourse. I argue that it is not in principle undemocratic, nor is it theoretically illegitimate, nor domineering to hold and express ideas involving normative conceptions of nature. On the contrary, it is often exemplary political discourse, well suited for deeply questioning our impact on the world and for inspiring collective change.

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Introduction

This Earth Day, 2017, was celebrated most visibly with the March for Science. Thousands gathered in Washington, DC, along with smaller groups across all seven continents, to support the importance of science in making political decisions about the future of our planet. Although this march focused primarily on the need for governments, particularly the United States government, to accept and respond to the fact of climate change, the march echoed the general purpose of the first Earth Day march: the need for politics to address the environmental crisis. Some issues have changed since the first Earth Day in 1970, but the scope of our environmental crises and the need for political processes and policies adequate to address them has only grown. But an Earth Day march is also an occasion to ask a basic question: What does it mean to hold a political march for the Earth? It clearly means many things for many different marchers. Amidst the unifying call that our politics must address our impact on nature there are a great many ideas about just what nature is and how it ought to be treated. In this essay I look at the broader question of how nature, whatever nature might be, should enter politics.

Since the first Earth Day there has been no shortage of theoretical work on the subject. One major question splitting various camps concerns what, if any, normative guidance the natural world can lend to politics. Following a few others writers, I divide this field roughly into *humanist* versus *post-humanist* positions. The latter hold that our politics must be significantly informed by, or must even include, the interests or values of the non-human world. This inclusion is defended as a long overdue remedy for a broad worldview that has denied non-human value and thus legitimized and even encouraged the destructive practices that have led to our environmental crises. The humanist responds that the post-humanist goal is both theoretically flawed and politically dubious. The value of nature and the interests of non-humans are concepts

that simply cannot survive philosophical scrutiny. Moreover, these concepts can only enter democratic politics as manipulative or authoritarian forces, perverting political power to serve whichever humans wield the authority of representing nature.

This essay responds to the last challenge, that normative conceptions of nature harm democratic processes. I will use the phrase “normative conception of nature” very broadly to include ideas that the non-human world, by just being what it is, makes moral claims upon us. I do not want to too strictly limit what counts as a normative conception of nature. The phrase clearly includes religious conceptions of nature and intrinsic value theories of nature. But I also mean to include less comprehensive and systematic views that nature, or non-human animals, or even specific places can make moral claims on us of different kinds. The thread that unites very diverse normative conceptions of nature is the idea that some kind of value in the non-human world can be discovered and responded to. This kind of discovery is not only a matter of human imagination, construction, sentiment, etc. The general idea is that something about the world itself can show us it deserves some kinds of responses and not others. Even “moral claims” and “deserving” can be read too formally here. Some normative conceptions of nature may prefer something more general, like the world reveals its goodness. Recognizing that goodness moves us to engage it in some ways and not others. The idea is simply that such goodness is there in the world, available for us to find. By way of introduction, let me start with one brief historical account of this divide.

Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess’ influential distinction between a shallow and a deep ecology held that policies enacted only to reduce pollution and preserve resources (that is, preserving nature only for human benefit) are insufficient for curbing civilization’s destructive

relationship with our environments.¹ Naess envisioned a post-humanist politics, a democracy informed by rich ecological knowledge that could point us toward lifestyles and forms of political organization that are both more just, human to human, and more sustainable, civilization to nature. Naess' theoretical move from ecological observation to political value was not strictly deductive. His point was that political values could be strongly "suggested, inspired, and fortified"² by a common knowledge and experience of the natural world. He then argued that ecologists, those equipped to appreciate and testify to the knowledge that inspires ecological values, are "irreplaceable informants in any society."³

Twenty years later, French philosopher Luc Ferry, responding to Naess and others, provided perhaps the most strident rejection to any kind of post-humanist politics.⁴ Where Naess saw the hope of a more equal and sustainable culture, Ferry heard only the foundation for a new, but all too familiar, authoritarian order. He cautions,

We are witnessing the development of the idea that knowledge of the secrets of the universe or of biological organisms endows those who possess it with a new form of wisdom, superior to that of mere mortals. ... For there is always considerable danger that a new dogmatism will resurface when one claims to have found 'natural,' thus 'objective,' models of behavior, and to be able to decide *more geometrico* where good and evil lie.⁵

Ferry understood Naess' "irreplaceable informants" as only a few steps away from a new class of ideological masters. With all earnestness Ferry warned that the post-humanist development in ecological politics bears all the signs of an inevitable eco-fascism.

While I think that Naess can be too bold about how easily ecology translates to politics and Ferry is too polemical concerning the threat of people like Naess (who was also a progressive defender of democracy who explicitly rejected all forms of domination and

¹ Naess, 1972

² *ibid.* p. 97

³ *ibid.* p. 98

⁴ Ferry, 1992

⁵ *ibid.* p. 84

oppression as part of his “ecosophy”), I think that they both make important points. Over the course of this essay I highlight a few humanist and post-humanist positions and, in the end, point towards a middle position, but one that is much more aligned with post-humanist goals. To do this, I restrict myself to three recent writers who address the role of normative conceptions of nature in environmental politics. Steven Vogel, Akeel Bilgrami, and Jedediah Purdy provide versions of a humanist, post-humanist, and middle position respectively. I review each of their work in turn, bringing them into conversation and providing criticisms of each position. In what follows I do not make a case for any particular version of intrinsic natural value, nor for any particular normative conception of nature. Rather, I argue that it is not in principle undemocratic, nor is it theoretically illegitimate nor domineering to hold and express ideas involving normative conceptions of nature. On the contrary, it is often exemplary political discourse, well suited for deeply questioning our impact on the world and for inspiring collective change.

Chapter 1: Alienation and Exclusion

In this section, I bring together two recent writers who address the role of normative conceptions of nature in democratic discourse. Steven Vogel and Akeel Bilgrami both agree that addressing current environmental concerns demands far more inclusive and transparent democratic processes. They disagree, however, about how normative conceptions of nature might help or hinder this democratic goal. Neither author has written directly about the other. By bringing them together I hope to reveal their shared concern for a more vital democracy, to examine the depth of their disagreement over the normativity of nature, and to provide a critique of the humanist argument that fair democratic discourse demands the avoidance of normative conceptions of nature. I argue that the humanist position, rather than bringing more equality to our discourse, results in an unwarranted exclusion of many points of view. Moreover, the kinds of opinions excluded are often the most promising insights for transforming the destructive ways we think about and work together to shape our environments.

Powerlessness and Distance

I'll begin by comparing Bilgrami's and Vogel's two very different conceptions of what we might call *environmental alienation*. The rough distinction here will be fleshed out more in the following sub-section. Steven Vogel and Akeel Bilgrami have both argued that one of the central tasks for becoming collectively responsible for our environment is to overcome our current alienation from it. They disagree rather starkly, however, over what this alienation is. On the one hand, Vogel's concept of alienation describes a collective feeling of *powerlessness* about the state of our environments. We are alienated from our environment when we do not

understand that it is our collective action that has shaped it and thus it lies in our collective power to improve it. We are alienated from our environment when we think the environment ultimately determines the rules for how we ought to inhabit it, rather than recognizing that we are the determiners of our environment.

On the other hand, Bilgrami's concept of alienation describes a certain kind of *distance* we have from the world we inhabit. This distance is a conceptual gap between the depth of our experience of the world – the feelings it stirs in us, the significance we find in it – and our ideas about how the world is in itself. This gap is related to the familiar divide between fact and value. Valuing occurs within us, in our heads or hearts, as it were, while the world outside us remains value neutral. If this is the case, then there is no sense in the idea of respecting the value of the world, of honoring its worth or preserving its goodness. We have no reason to think that what we do value is what we should value, given what the world is. This broadly Humean understanding of the gulf between value and fact is what Bilgrami calls “alienation.” Becoming unalienated requires affirming that the value we do experience in the world is real and worthy of respect.

These two ideas of alienation involve different ideas about what environmental politics should strive for. For Bilgrami, we must find a way to introduce the value of nature into our politics. We need to find ways of living that respect and even celebrate this value. In Bilgrami's environmental politics, some kind of *respect* will restrain our destruction of nature. For Vogel, we must cease looking to nature to find environmental answers. We must give up the search for some unequivocal call from nature to justify our respect for it. Instead, we should look at how our human practices have shaped environments, how they have even shaped what we identify as “nature.” By understanding how we have shaped our environments (and our ideas about nature), we can become more deliberate and democratic about organizing our practices to build

environments we *all* approve of. In this kind of environmental politics, some kind of *cooperation* is what will keep us from building bad environments.

These two visions of an environmental politics can seem to be in tension with one another. The tension that concerns Vogel is that the idea of respect for nature can damage cooperation. More specifically, calls to listen to and respect the voice of nature too easily keep us from listening to and respecting one another the way we must for democracy to be as inclusive and transparent as it needs to be. Fair democratic discourse requires equality among participants. Those who claim to speak for nature – those who claim to know its value and know what we must do to respect it – aggrandize authority to their voices. Instead of having a cooperative and creative conversation about what kind of environments we want to build together, the conversation is easily dominated by self-proclaimed experts who use “nature” (however they conceive it) as an authority that everyone else must simply listen to. Who can argue against nature? Only when we free our discourse from appeals to normative conceptions of nature, Vogel argues, will we be able to converse as equals who are empowered to work together to determine the shape of our environments.

I argue that this tension, though certainly a worry, is not insurmountable. We can have a discourse that involves useful and inspirational normative conceptions of nature that neither damage equality nor diminish cooperation. Moreover, I argue that the worry over normative conceptions of nature can become more exclusionary in practice than it is preservative of equality. There is a danger of “over-policing” public discourse. By demanding that participants accept the same theoretical basis of both what nature is and what discourse should be we may do more to prevent rather than safeguard free and inclusive dialogue.

Overview of the Divide

Vogel and Bilgrami provide a particularly germane comparison for clarifying what is at stake in the humanist / post-humanist divide. They both set out to address what they see as flawed understandings of nature. Both diagnose a number of current political ills, including our environmental crises, as a form of collective alienation that is perpetually reinforced by these problematic understandings of nature. They then both prescribe a type of unalienated politics that is more radically inclusive and transparent about how we choose to shape our environments. Although their arguments share this same loose outline, they disagree at each step along the way. But it is worth noting their similar concerns if for no other reason than to emphasize their shared goal of empowering more inclusive and transparent democracy.

These three similar concerns – the nature of our environmental crises, our collective alienation, and the hope of an unalienated politics – will frame an overview of their disagreement. As for the first, Bilgrami offers a fairly familiar historical explanation of the nature of our environmental crises. It is a story of the cultural, intellectual, and economic changes that came together largely in 17th and 18th century Europe to produce what Max Weber most famously called modern disenchantment.⁶ The rise of modernity involved an epochal shift from understanding the non-human world as normative in some way (as sacred creation, etc.), to understanding its value as only resources to serve human ends. This modern view of the world is what has ultimately encouraged and justified our destructive environmental practices, from unsustainable agriculture, to destructive resource extraction, and on to the current sixth great extinction. Addressing environmental degradation and the political injustices that have always accompanied it requires addressing the worldview of modern disenchantment.

⁶ Bilgrami praises and pulls heavily from Carol Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1980). He also explicitly references Heidegger's concept of "resource" (*Bestand*) to describe the instrumental understanding of the world that marks modern disenchantment.

In contrast, Vogel does not provide a historical account. He provides instead a perspicuous version of “the tragedy of the commons.” He sees our environmental crises as a collective failure of recognition and organization. We fail to recognize that our individual actions are part of larger social practices that together make our environment. This lack of recognition keeps us from seeing that it is within our power to work together to build the environments we actually want. Instead, through our lack of intentional dialogue and collective planning, the rational behavior of many individuals has produced the bad, but unintended consequences of ugly, unhealthy environments.

In the second step, each writer links his account of our environmental crisis to his account of alienation. Bilgrami understands alienation as a kind of disenchantment, what I called *distance*. Vogel understands alienation as kind of political disorganization, what I called *powerlessness*. It is important to add here that Bilgrami’s historical account of modern disenchantment is not the story of a smooth, universal shift in European thought. The story is marked by fundamental and vocal dissent.⁷ Tying together examples as diverse as the Diggers and Gandhi, Bilgrami tells the story of disenchantment as the rise of a specific form of rationality being used to exclude and delegitimize dissenters as irrational. Being alienated, then, is not only a matter of the moral psychology mentioned above (the *distance* involved in being unable to affirm that what one values is in fact worthy of this valuation). Alienation also involves a new orthodoxy about what counts as rationality. Informed fundamental dissent against disenchanted rationality has been time and again either delegitimized as simply irrational or it is dismissed to the domain of private belief. Only disenchanted speech counts politically. Bilgrami argues that the ability to delegitimize dissent as irrational served as a rationalization for colonialism and

⁷ For these points Bilgrami relies upon Margaret Jacob’s *The Radical Enlightenment* (1981) and Christopher Hill’s *The World Turned Upside Down* (1975).

other types of oppression.⁸ People who did not agree that nature was only valuable as resource could be dismissed as primitive and infantile. Thus, like all other parts of nature, these infantile people were fit for being managed and exploited along with their lands. In this way, alienation as distance is also a political alienation.

For Vogel, we are alienated when we fail to understand that our environment is something that our disorganized social practices have made. Failing to see our environments as our own products, we do not see that we can and must organize ourselves to produce a better environment. Instead we live alienated, in the sense of feeling helpless in the face of an environment understood as a given, an unchangeable fact. Vogel makes an explicit connection with Marx here, explaining that we are alienated from our environments “in the same way that Marx says that alienated workers see the capitalist social order: as an externally given reality they cannot change but must simply accept, instead of something that their own practices have helped to produce.”⁹

Both conceptions of alienation contain related concerns about political exclusion and disempowerment. But this possible common ground is overshadowed by very different prescriptions for an unalienated politics, the third step in this overview. Vogel holds that the democratic conversations we need to have are those where we acknowledge that our environments are things we have built. A corollary of this acknowledgement is that our environments are not capable of instructing us on how to build them. This idea of an unalienated politics should motivate communities to take collective responsibility for the shape of their environment. More than motivation, an unalienated politics should bring greater equality to discourse. Since the environment is not something that can offer instruction, participants in

⁸ Bilgrami, 2014 p. 299

⁹ Vogel, 2015 p. 89

democratic discourse must admit that individual opinions about what the environment should be are simply that, individual opinions. No one can claim to speak for nature. No one's voice gets more authority than any other. Vogel advocates for a two-fold responsibility, a collective responsibility for the shape of our environments and a personal responsibility for our opinions as we enter dialogue about how to go on shaping our environment. The good citizen will understand that her preferences do not carry greater authority than other's; the good society will build environments with the equal input of everyone's informed preferences.

Bilgrami holds that a truly unalienated politics must correct the historical shift in thought that delegitimized normative conceptions of nature. Without doing so, we can expect more of the same abuses and crises. Summing up his position, he writes,

The idea we can come to a satisfactory relation [with the non-human world] simply by invoking elements entirely from within our own interests and utilities and moral sentiments, independent of normative constraints from the world itself, is not merely shallow. It is a false optimism that makes no dent in the framework that landed us with the alienation in which the urge for 'mastery and control' has undermined the ideal of merely 'living in' and morally engaging with the world.¹⁰

Addressing the root of the problem means allowing space for a normative conception of nature. Democracy must provide this space. Unlike some post-humanist positions, or perhaps only their less than charitable interpretations, Bilgrami is quick to clarify that broadening democratic discourse is not an attempt to actually include non-humans in democratic processes, whatever that might mean. Nor does Bilgrami suggest that natural value can be uncontestedly determined, as if an appeal to natural value provides an unchallengeable authority.¹¹ Bilgrami is not clear about how to adjudicate disagreements over nature's value. Nor is he clear about how our political institutions should foster discourse about nature's value and actually incorporate these ideas into law and policy. His point is more preliminary. In order for us to work out these problems together we must first allow our environmental discourse to actually be about the value

¹⁰ Bilgrami, 2014 p. 160

¹¹ Bilgrami, 2014 p. 161ff

we find in nature. Bilgrami admits that we are far from having clear models of how this can best be accomplished. He is confident, however, that an answer will only be developed through practice. To call the task impossible is to be “faint of heart and mind” and refusing this task can only ever amount to more of the same destructive exploitation of our world.¹²

Vogel and Heteronomy

Vogel hopes to move environmentalism away from the search for how we ought to treat nature (as if nature is a normative concept that instructs us how to treat it) and reframe it as a project of empowering people to take collective responsibility for shaping better environments. Vogel claims that the former project is not only theoretically untenable, but also an active hindrance to beginning the latter project. I want to elaborate on what this hindrance is in order to better understand Vogel’s criticism and to highlight the kind of discourse Vogel hopes will define an unalienated environmentalism.

How could normative conceptions of nature keep us from taking collective responsibility for our environment? On the face of it, this runs against experience, where we see that many of those fighting hardest for environmental change are motivated by an idea of the intrinsic value of the landscapes and animals they are trying to protect. What’s more, it seems likely that by taking away the idea of intrinsic value or other normative ideas of nature we take away these people’s motivation, rather than empowering them to take responsibility. If old growth forests aren’t worth saving in themselves, if the loss of biodiversity isn’t a real tragedy, if the goodness of land set aside for re-wilding is only a matter of whimsical individual preference, then surely environmentalism loses both motivation and direction. It seems Vogel gives us reason to be more indifferent towards the environment we shape, rather than more responsible.

¹² Bilgrami, 2014 p. 163

Vogel begins his case with the difficulty of maintaining any meaningful distinction between the natural and the artificial. In the short history of environmental philosophy there have been deep and drawn out attempts to define, defend, or destroy a distinction between the natural and the artificial. Even when not approached directly, some version of the dichotomy lies beneath a great deal of environmental discourse, not to mention everyday speech and advertising slogans where the ‘natural’ is consistently raised above the ‘artificial.’ Some versions of this dichotomy support the idea that politics only pertains to the realm of the artificial. But what makes something artificial? Vogel spends the first half of *Thinking Like a Mall* debunking any meaningful metaphysical distinction between the natural and the artificial. Any metaphysical distinction between the natural and the artificial, he argues, relies upon an untenable dualism that fundamentally denies that humans are also part of nature. But if one concedes that humans really are part of nature, then the concept ‘nature’ loses any normative force. What humans do is just as natural as what trees do, so respecting ‘nature’ offers no meaningful guidance for human action.

But more than being metaphysically problematic, Vogel argues that a natural/artificial dichotomy is ethically and politically damaging. Any time we set up an aspect of the world as natural, in the sense of being superior to the artificial or unnatural, we remove that aspect of the world from debate and criticism. We allow the natural world to become a power over against us, rather than a place we are building together and can choose to build differently. His conclusions are worth quoting:

By emphasizing nature’s independence from us, its indifference to and its power over us, and by proposing that the appropriate relation to nature involves a kind of submissive obedience, it treats humans as impotent objects of an external force whose structures they must acknowledge but can never question or change.¹³

He continues,

¹³ Vogel, p. 91

If the normative standards for our actions lie in nature, then we're off the hook: if we want to know how to live, we need only consult nature and let it determine for us what we should do. ... Such a view seems to me instead another example of the constant temptation that Kant called heteronomy – allowing something other than oneself to make one's decisions – and thus as an avoidance of responsibility. ... To think [answers] can be found in "nature" is to recapitulate our alienation, failing to accept that the world is our doing and hence our responsibility.¹⁴

The alienation mentioned in the last quote captures Vogel's central concern. We are alienated from our environment when we fail to see it as something of our own making. We let our own products rule us, instead of seeing ourselves in our products and thus knowing we have the power to change them. The need for responsible reasoning and democratic discourse about how to shape the environment is annulled by an understanding of nature as a new lawgiver. For instance, ecological integrity and biodiversity become new commandments, external standards that our environment demands we respect. The business of environmental ethics is then no longer a human conversation about how we wish to be environed, but a matter of how to best find and follow the dictates of nature. Vogel understands this as heteronomy, as limiting or even relinquishing our full moral agency.

Vogel's point is clearest in the closing chapter of his book. Here he describes the kind of democratic discourse we should have about shaping our environment. He specifies the kinds of reasons we should give for our positions, reasons that avoid introducing normative conceptions of nature into our discourse. This will keep our discourse equal, no speaker can claim the authority of nature. What's more, it promotes the unalienated idea that shaping our environment is something we decide upon and do together, not a rule we discover in nature and then try to enforce. He writes,

All I want to avoid is the appeal to 'nature' as a metaphysically significant category with intrinsic moral implications. Simply to say that so-called 'natural' areas are attractive and significant to us for a whole series of reasons, and therefore deserve our concern and care, is fine; the problem is with going further and granting the category a normative priority over what can be discursively justified.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 94

¹⁵ ibid. p. 237

The key point lies in the words “to us.” We can argue that we ought to care for “natural areas” so long as we take full ownership of our position as our own, as a preference significant *to us*, rather than significant in itself. We can then be called upon to defend our position as our own, which is what he means by “discursively justified.” What we should not do is argue for “natural areas” as if the world itself dictates that these areas deserve our concern and care. When we argue this way we are not taking personal ownership and responsibility for our position. When called upon to defend our position we defer to “the world” or “nature” or some other category to give our position authority. This kind of appeal directs us outside the conversation to some authority that does not speak for itself and cannot be called upon to defend itself. Vogel explicitly links this kind of appeal to nature with appeals to the will of God.¹⁶ We stop debate with the terse and unconvincing rejoinder, “because God (or nature) says so.”

I think this point makes Vogel’s worry about heteronomy much clearer. He argues that we need to admit that our preferences about our environment are just that, *our* preferences. And we need to admit that our environment is just that, *ours*. Thus, the most appropriate conversation to have about the environment, and the only one that lives up to being an unalienated and responsible conversation, is when we fairly consider each other’s preferences and decide to work together in ways that shape the environment we want. Anything less involves unjustified appeals to authority, namely, the normative demands of the world.

Bilgrami and Unalienated Agency

As introduced above, Bilgrami’s idea of alienation stands in stark contrast to Vogel’s. Environmental alienation is not our collective, internalized powerlessness. Rather, it is our

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 238

inability to believe the world has value that can be discovered, enjoyed, and cultivated in how we inhabit and shape our environments. The idea that value can be discovered stands in opposition to Vogel's use of "preference." A preference is certainly *developed* through one's interaction with the world (e.g., one's tongue interacting with flavors of ice cream), but it is not *discovered* in the sense of finding something true independent of oneself. The development of a preference for, let's say, central Appalachian forests versus the discovery of the value of these same forests differ in that the latter makes a normative claim about the world. The latter claim is not simply that I like (prefer) these forests, but that these forests are valuable in themselves. The value is not only in one's head; the value is in the forest.¹⁷ Moreover, I might even say that appreciating this value, while not a utilitarian project, is part of a good life. Engaging with the world in ways that better appreciate the value it has is superior to seeing the world as an essentially neutral field to be manipulated to fit my preferences. A world one comes to appreciate is better than a world one constructs to appreciate oneself. This is what Bilgrami is getting at in the passage quoted above, defining alienation as the state "in which the urge for 'mastery and control' has undermined the ideal of merely 'living in' and morally engaging with the world."¹⁸ Bilgrami's conception of alienation, then, can be summarized as the belief that all valuing is only preferring. An alienated person interacts with the world under the idea that there is no value to discover in it; the world can only be preferred in different ways. Vogel welcomes this conclusion, not as alienation, but as the road toward a better environmentalism.

¹⁷ Just how value is "in the forest," or how value can exist independent of a valuing subject, is another debate with many nuanced factions. Even among defenders of natural value, debates continue around the "mind-independence" of value. Bilgrami does not enter into this discussion in any way that demands attention here. His views are closer to the strongly mind-independent side, since he argues for the existence of "value properties" that, while not measurable, can be said to exist as properties of things in the world (2014, pp. 159-160). In this sense value is objective, existing as properties independent of valuing subjects. His view may be tempered toward the softer idea of mind-independence, however, when he suggests that only a valuing subject can become aware of these value properties (2014, pp. 157-158). In this sense, value may be relational, obtaining in the right kinds of interactions between subject and object. Bilgrami, however, does not categorize his position within the relevant literature.

¹⁸ Bilgrami, 2014 p. 160

Apart from the many debates in the large world of value theory, Vogel and Bilgrami are concerned with how the general idea of natural value affects democratic discourse. For Vogel, admitting that our values are preferences is important for maintaining equality in our discourse. Bilgrami's position can be explained under two theses. First, the attempt to purge discourse of normative conceptions of nature is exclusionary in practice. And second, there is a greater integrity in the idea that moral agents are capable of responding to value in the world, against the alternative view that value is only the projection of preference onto a value-neutral world. The remainder of this section concerns the first thesis, while the second is taken up in the next section.

Bilgrami's diagnosis of the historical development of our environmental crisis guides his prescription for the kind of democracy needed to confront it. He argues, following many others, that the European enlightenment ushered in a specific kind of rationality that, aside from its many benefits, grievously erred in holding that its particular assumptions and methods constituted rationality itself. This error justified the idea that other forms of reasoning which did not share the same assumptions and methods are not simply matters of disagreement, but are irrational.

Key to enlightenment rationality has been the separation of objective fact from subjective value. Since the world is a value free, mechanistic system, all value we find there must be understood as preference and sentiment, projections of our subjectivity out onto the world. One product of this has been a broad and firm insistence upon the naturalistic fallacy. The attempt to determine how one ought to live or what one ought to value with an appeal to the way the world *is* is ruled out. This is because the world never *is* normative. A further product is the conception of politics as a matter of justly balancing individual preferences. Nothing greater than the will of

the people ought to found or direct government, in short, because there is nothing greater. The standard of “one man one vote” was a start, but a radically democratic politics will implement processes that meaningfully include all voices. Domination is prevented by truly inclusive and transparent decision-making procedures. Bilgrami argues that the goal of this kind of radically democratic politics is limited, or in some cases undermined, by its acceptance of the enlightenment separation of fact and value. Although modern democracy and a value-neutral world have similar origins, the goal of a more vital democracy will become visible when we see that the insistence on a value-neutral world has functioned as a form of exclusion and dominance undermining its own goals.

Departing a bit from Bilgrami’s presentation, I can best explain the problem he describes as two kinds of political exclusion, one *public* and one *private*. By “public and private” I mean to emphasize that the first is something we do to others and the second is more something we do to ourselves. I will start with public exclusion and come to private exclusion a bit later. Public exclusion is simply the idea that any opinion that questions the metaphysical orthodoxy of a value-free world is irrational. Bilgrami argues to great effect that this kind of delegitimization of dissent justified the suppression of significant opposition to the rise of industrialization and later justified colonialism. Westerners, even later champions of democracy, were able to support colonialism by, “portraying inhabitants of the colonized lands in infantilized terms, as a people who were as yet unprepared to have the right attitudes toward nature and commerce and the statecraft that allows nature to be pursued for commercial gain.”¹⁹ Those who misunderstand what nature is, especially those who cling to a kind of religious enchantment that Europe understood itself as having grown out of, are not ready to discuss how nature is to be treated. Only those who understand that nature is a resource have a voice.

¹⁹ Bilgrami, 2014 p. 299

It would be completely unacceptable to claim that Vogel is guilty of this kind of public exclusion. But I will suggest that the germ of it remains. In the closing pages of *Thinking Like a Mall* Vogel distinguishes between *formal* and *substantive* disagreements in political discourse.²⁰ Substantive disagreements are those where all parties agree that discursive democracy is the only authoritative way to resolve environmental questions and thus offer competing reasons for their positions to that discourse. For instance, two parties may disagree about building a hotel near a canyon. One offers reasons dealing with the economic opportunities created by the hotel. Another offers reasons dealing with the impact on water quality, wildlife disturbance, and the loss of particular kinds of recreation opportunities. Democratic discourse welcomes both parties, obviously.

A *formal* disagreement obtains when one party does not agree that discursive democracy is the only authoritative way to resolve environmental questions. In Vogel's words, "Arguments that appeal to 'nature' as a source of normative authority superior to the discourse itself can have no role to play here." Such an appeal introduces "extradiscursive truth."²¹ This kind of appeal is not the submission of a reason to be considered by all, but only a dogmatic power play to end the discourse.

One wants to quickly agree that arguments against democracy cannot be countenanced by democracy. Indeed, as Vogel claims, such arguments involve the performative contradiction of seeking to validate non-democracy with democratic authority (a real contradiction, no matter how often it actually happens). But Vogel takes this standard too far in his idea of a formal disagreement. Concerned folks may ask just what counts, then, as the introduction of extradiscursive truth? We know that whoever introduces extradiscursive truth is refusing to

²⁰ Vogel, 2015 p. 233ff

²¹ Vogel, 2015 p. 235

provide reasons. They are resorting to power and manipulation. They are being, we must admit, irrational. The stage seems set for the same kind of delegitimization of fundamental dissent that Bilgrami notes. Only those who accept a particular theory about what nature is can properly participate in environmental discourse. The keepers of democracy are thus tasked with determining what counts as giving a reason and what counts as an irrational appeal to extradiscursive authority.

To return to the hotel example, what will we say to participants who claim the hotel is being built on sacred land? I do not suggest there is any easy answer to this question, but I do think it is a very bad answer to suggest that those participants are irrational and corruptors of democracy. In the very last footnote of Vogel's book he writes, "To say [extradiscursive appeals] are 'ruled out,' of course, is not to say they are prohibited, since freedom to express any view is itself one of those necessary procedural presuppositions. It is simply to say that they do in fact possess this self-contradictory character."²² So, the appeal to the sacredness of the land is ruled out, but not prohibited. It takes a keen and sympathetic eye to appreciate the difference.

Thus, the exclusion of many voices from democratic discourse – on the basis that they are essentially irrational voices – has been a significant concern and remains of some concern in Vogel's presentation of discursive democracy. Bilgrami's point about *private* exclusion, however, is much deeper. This second kind of exclusion can be thought of as a kind of self-censorship. Bilgrami argues that there is a great divide between the kinds of reasons that guide our individual lives and the kinds of reasons we think matter politically. One failure of our democracy to become radical is that the richness of what matters to us as individuals finds little expression in our politics. In different places, Bilgrami describes this as a "two frame" problem,

²² Vogel, 2015 p. 263 n. 41

the frames being the first-person *quotidian frame* and the third-person *collective frame*.²³ There are many questions Bilgrami addresses in his account of the two frames, but the overarching point is to show that in our day to day life we continue to experience our world with a high level of significance and value.

Bilgrami explains this point with an example about noticing a starving person.²⁴ In our first-person experience, noticing a starving person usually confronts us in strikingly normative ways. The person's state makes a demand upon us. The experience itself is to be 'called' to respond. The fact cannot simply be known, it can only be responded to in either cold or compassionate ways. And yet all too often starving people become facts to be merely known. Bilgrami explains this transition – where the normativity disappears, where the call is not heard – as a movement to the third-person collective frame. Here a starving person is a fact about something occurring in the world, namely, this person's average caloric intake. Even the desire to help this person is another fact, this time about a sentiment springing somewhere within us. Bilgrami's poignant diagnosis is that our political discourse is organized to only accept third-person speech. We cannot talk about, nor collectively respond to, starving people. The discourse only allows for the submission of facts about a population's caloric intake and our sentiments (which are really something like preferences) about those facts.

Someone may respond that this is as it should be. We recognize facts about the world, register our sentiments, and put forth arguments for how to act that everyone can consider. The process is fair and, often, works very well. Indeed, it can. We have a wealth of ethical arguments to draw upon to support a compassionate response, both deontological and utilitarian. But there

²³ Bilgrami changes his terminology in different essays. His briefest discussion of the two frame problem is in his essay "The Political Possibilities of the Long Romantic Period" – Bilgrami, 2014 pp. 206-209. For a longer discussion see also "Occidentalism, the Very Idea."

²⁴ See Bilgrami, 2010 p. 164 and Bilgrami, 2006 p. 257

remains a problem. If our political discourse cannot really countenance the introduction of ‘a starving person’ with all the direct normative force we actually experience, then how can it welcome the less dramatic, but still important ways our world impresses itself upon us. The transition from first-person to third-person presentations loses the texture and significance we hope for local democratic processes to accommodate.

Ultimately, I want a democracy that can collectively respond to pain, and understand itself as doing so, not simply a forum for fairly choosing a political response. Our discourse is organized so that appeals to pain, appeals to beauty, appeals to intrinsic goodness are all already suspect and can all the more readily be cast aside as improper reasons or forms of manipulation. It is little wonder, then, that calls to help the hurting fall on deaf ears when our discourse itself is essentially structured as a filter for such cries.

My take on Bilgrami’s critique so far has focused on the undesirable effects of ruling out normative conceptions of nature from democratic discourse. The effects of public and private exclusion are the most intriguing parts of Bilgrami’s work for questions concerning the kind of discourse we need. We need a discourse that welcomes expressions of value and testimonies to ways of life that question and constrain the march of mastery and control. As a last note here, Bilgrami’s two frame idea goes some way to explain how it is that people can hold inconsistent beliefs between their individual and political opinions. It is surprisingly easy to live according to one value and yet vote against that same value. Sometimes this is self-conscious and even pragmatic. But Bilgrami suggests its purported prevalence is due to living in two frames. In our first-person experience it is easy to feel called to, e.g., volunteer at a homeless shelter, but in our politics even volunteers may find it easy to deny any collective duty to shelter our whole population. Again, this may be self-conscious and not inconsistent, given one’s political

philosophy. Bilgrami suggests, however, that many times there are dramatic inconsistencies and they are perpetuated by a systematic exclusion of our first-person experience from our political discourse. What we know to be true and valuable when we interact with those in need suddenly fades from view in the transition to a third-person collective frame. We suddenly find ourselves unable to justify or feel the need to argue for, to continue the example, raising taxes and regulating landlords. Our private convictions stay private, their power and relevance diluted in a sea of equal preference. The remedy is to encourage discourse to become more of a first-person conversation. This means not over-policing expressions of value, not interpreting appeals to goodness as manipulation and power play. It means allowing testimonies and experience to texture our discourse as a legitimate ways of providing reasons, alongside theory and our more formal arguments.

In this section I have spent some time introducing Vogel and Bilgrami's differences. The main argument of the last half of this section has been that the attempt to free political discourse of normative conceptions of nature results in an impoverishing and undemocratic exclusion. This exclusion is not only prone to delegitimize fundamental dissent, but it also discourages us from giving attention to those insights and aspects of our experience that are best fit to challenge the framework of mastery and control of the landscape, namely, the idea that reality has value.

In the next section, I take up Bilgrami's second thesis that a proper understanding of human agency lends support for holding that nature has value. Whereas Bilgrami's first thesis concentrated on the negative results of separating fact from value, his second thesis lends positive support for believing that the world can contain value. Alongside Bilgrami's argument I look more closely at how we regularly share ideas of natural value in non-dominating ways.

Chapter 2: Agency and Value

In this section, I pick up on the idea of bringing our first-person experience into political discourse. I present examples of familiar ways of sharing and sympathetically listening that model what it means to testify to value in non-dominating ways. To begin these points I draw upon Bilgrami's more abstract arguments about human agency in order to identify the intuitions behind why talking about value and our first-person experience is legitimate and important for conversations about the environment.

Value and Moral Agency

In the first section I drew from Bilgrami to show how enlightenment rationality, specifically the separation of fact from value, has been used to exclude and delegitimize fundamental dissent about the nature of nature. Aside from the unacceptability of this exclusion, Bilgrami offers a stand-alone argument supporting the idea that the world does in fact contain value. The argument takes an interesting starting point, beginning with humans instead of nature. Instead of identifying some feature of the natural world that demands our moral consideration, Bilgrami begins with an examination of human practical agency. He argues that the most compelling conceptions of human agency depend upon there being value in the world to which our agency can respond. The argument is similar to a transcendental proof. If value in the world can be shown to be a necessary condition for human agency, and we agree that we have agency, then there must be value in the world. He has published this argument in various places, each time emphasizing different features and applications.²⁵ Here I will use Bilgrami's agency

²⁵ See Bilgrami, 2006 chapter 5; 2010 p. 153ff; 2014 pp.156ff, 193ff.

argument to look more closely at how we share the things we value with others, and how this sharing requires more diverse and creative forms of discourse about our environments.

Before continuing I should mention that I am not entirely convinced by Bilgrami's argument from agency, but I review it here for two reasons. Most simple of all, the argument is a central part of Bilgrami's work on value. And even if the argument is not entirely convincing as a transcendental proof of value in the world, it does highlight important intuitions about human agency and the experience of value that should be included in the way we structure our environmental discourse.

Bilgrami opens with a bold claim: if we do not admit that the world contains value, then our practical agency makes no sense. In his words,

The idea that our practical agency is merely a matter of satisfying our desires and moral sentiments without seeing our desires and moral sentiments as themselves prompted by such responsiveness to value properties in the world, including nature, is a shallow conception of agency, one which cannot survive a deeper philosophical scrutiny.²⁶

Bilgrami begins his deeper scrutiny by asking us to consider two distinctions, each of which builds upon the difference between a first-person and a third-person perspective on oneself mentioned above. The first distinction is between *intending* to do something and *predicting* that you will do something. The act of intending takes place from a first-person perspective, e.g. intending to stick to one's diet. The act of predicting, on the other hand, occurs when we take a third-person view of ourselves, that is, when we become the object of our thought, e.g. predicting if we actually will fulfill our intention to diet.

The second distinction is very similar. Consider the difference between finding something desirable and observing *that* you find something desirable. Again, we find things desirable from a first-person perspective, looking out onto the world. We also take note that we

²⁶ Ibid. p. 159

have these desires, looking in at ourselves from a third-person perspective. The point of both these distinctions is to show that only the first-person perspective includes aspects of being *motivated* to act. Only when we intend, desire, etc. are we actually moved to act. Bilgrami's point is that action, as we understand ourselves as agents acting, is only possible from the first-person perspective. A purely third-person person, one who never experienced desire but only took note of the existence of desires within herself, could never act as an agent.

Bilgrami uses these distinctions to build support for two claims. First, we can only properly be considered practical agents in regard to our first-person perspective. It is from within the state of intending and desiring, as opposed to predicting and taking note of desires, that we act as agents. Second, while we are in this first-person perspective, we are moved to act by the recognition that things are desirable. Thus, our *experience* of agency is always the first-person experience of finding things desirable, valuable, etc. We can always transition into a reflexive third-person perspective and simply take note of our desires, but it is precisely in this transition that we step away from the experience of agency, away from the features of our experience that actually move us to act. What it is to be an agent, then, is to engage with a world full of value, a world of desirable and undesirable things. Thus, if we are to affirm our agency, we must also affirm that agents inhabit value-laden worlds.

There is a quick and damning critique of this argument as I have presented it so far. To make it plain I can summarize the argument as follows: (1) *Experiencing* value in the world is an essential feature of practical agency. (2) Practical agency exists. Thus, there must be value in the world.²⁷ This is a cruder version of Bilgrami's point and, I think obviously enough, an invalid argument. As an attempted transcendental proof, it only shows that the *experience* of value

²⁷ This version of the argument – which makes a fair and worthwhile point but is ultimately an uncharitable reading – comes from: Smith, Matthew N., “Disenchantment and the mind dependence of the moral” <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2011/01/07/disenchantment-and-the-mind-dependence-of-the-moral/>

exists, not value itself. The experience of value may indeed be a necessary condition for the existence of agency, but that simply begs the question about what the first-person experience of value really is. Is it an instance of actually discovering value in the world or is it simply a projection of our internal sentiments and preferences out onto the world? This was the starting question. For the argument to work, Bilgrami must move away from the *experience* of value and defend the stronger premise: “The *existence* of value in the world is a necessary condition for agency.” So, what does Bilgrami say to defend this stronger premise?

At its best, Bilgrami’s argument is not the knock-down proof that human agency shows that there is value in the world. Instead, I think it is better to read Bilgrami’s point as an argument that the most common and coherent conceptions of human agency involve the idea that we can respond to value in the world. This is a weaker claim and still not without its problems. However, when we approach Bilgrami’s argument in this way it becomes far more appealing and, I think, fruitful for highlighting important intuitions about how we experience value and why these intuitions matter for our discourse about the environment.

Intuitions about Agency

At this point I will depart a bit from Bilgrami’s presentation and give something of my own interpretation of his argument. The basic idea is that there are better and worse conceptions of human agency. The better ones makes sense of more of our intuitions about our experience of agency, of desiring and deciding. Conceptions of human agency that include the possibility of recognizing and responding to value in the world, I argue, make sense of some of the most common and important intuitions about our agency.

To make this point I want to distinguish between two very rough conceptions of human agency, what I will call *random* and *grounded*. These are obviously prejudicial terms, but I only

use them to differentiate two rough ideas. Random agency is the idea that our desires and valuations simply arise within us, from where no one quite knows. Agency is the ability to act on the desires we find ourselves having. In many matters of preference something like this seems correct. Sometimes we like the taste of pickles, sometimes we don't. Some of us enjoy loud music, some of us do not. When pressed to explain the differences we might cite a number of influencing factors, but we're often content to admit some level of seeming randomness.

Grounded agency is the idea that our desires and valuation can at least sometimes be rooted in – prompted by and appropriate responses to – the desirability and value of the world. Sometimes when we find value somewhere we are not content to imagine that it just happened. We were moved by the thing, we discovered something about the world, and our valuing is an appropriate response to what we've found.

Appreciating music provides a good example of the difference between the two. Imagine hating a type of music. Perhaps you simply can't abide Appalachian folk singing. If one didn't hear this wonderful music in childhood its freedom and force might be forbidding. Some might call it an "acquired taste." But how does one acquire a taste? Sometimes it is rather inexplicable. Sometimes we just find ourselves enjoying a new thing and admit, "I don't know why, but I just really started loving pickles." But surely, this is not how we come to love new music. It isn't random. We find something. We become attuned. The music doesn't slowly start to fulfill a newly present desire within us. Rather, the beauty of the music itself opens us to a new appreciation, a new experience of reality. Grounded agency is the idea that these discoveries are real. Random agency, on the other hand, must admit some level of randomness into the acquisition of taste. It merely happens or it doesn't. The *ungrounded* agent must admit that the

experience of discovery is something of an illusion and doesn't tell one anything about the value of the music itself. Can anyone who loves music admit this? It is possible, but I wouldn't.

This is a very simplistic moral psychology, but it highlights what is at stake in the way we talk about our environments being valuable. Isn't learning to love the forest, isn't seeing the value in non-human life more like a discovery of something real than it is a random acquisition of taste? I think that Bilgrami's argument from agency captures two intuitions relevant to our discourse about the environment. First, we do experience value from a first-person perspective as a recognition or discovery of the value of reality. Even a random conception of agency admits that we do have these experiences, but it must then explain why these experiences are not what they seem. Second, the value we discover in our first-person perspective is best communicated to others by asking them to adopt a similar first-person perspective. Instead of explaining why a song is good, we ask an audience to listen. We do this all the time. We say, "Try it, you'll see." To explain why we value something, we point away from ourselves and ask people to look to the world, to consider it and engage it in a particular way. The explanation of the beauty of a song, or perhaps even the value of a forest, is most vivid, and perhaps sometimes only present, in this first-person experience. Both of these intuitions involve the idea that the world has value to discover and appropriately appreciate.

Bilgrami's argument does not succeed as a transcendental proof of value in the world. At the end of the argument we can still object that only the *experience* of value in the world is a necessary part of agency, not its actual existence. Moreover, I don't find Bilgrami's claim that we are *only* agents in regard to our first-person perspective convincing. Bilgrami's argument seems a bit stronger if one is convinced that agency really is only our first-person experience of navigating the value we find in the world. I agree that when we desire and intend it really does

seem more like we must be responding to the world rather than projecting things from within us onto it. So, if desiring and intending are the whole story of agency, then Bilgrami's case is stronger. But I am inclined to think that third-person reflexivity, one's ability to note one's own desires and intentions and deliberate about them, is so inextricably linked to our experience of agency that it must be more adequately included in our conception of agency. I can, whenever I deliberately try, separate my first-person and third-person perspectives, but in normal experience the division is not so clear. I see and see myself seeing (as well as see others seeing me *and* imagine what I do not see) all at once. I think this is normal and all part of what it is to be an agent.

The strength of Bilgrami's argument is to focus what is at stake for the concept of agency by denying the possibility of value being in the world. If value is not in the world we must give up two basic intuitions about discovering and sharing value. Our own experience of discovering value, as well as the implicit logic of imploring others to "try it, you'll see," lose their meaning if there is no value to discover or share. Valuing becomes only preferring, and our preferences are marked by a certain randomness, a detachment from any meaningful connection to the way the world is. The question might be put this way: what is *more real*, our first-person experience of discovering value or our third-person ability to note that we do value something? Bilgrami's concept of *alienation* is the position that the real story of our agency lies in the third-person perspective that desires and valuations are things within us and not meaningfully connected to the world. To be an *unalienated* agent is to hold that our first-person experiences of discovery, of appropriately responding to value in the world, are at least far closer to the real story of what it is to be an agent.

Sharing Value

If the value of things is understood from within our first-person perspectives, then we need a discourse that encourages the kind rich testimony and sympathetic listening that allows one to discover new value. Music is again appropriate. How awful is it when we share a song, only to have a friend reject it without fully listening. Of course the friend is entitled to her opinion, but without the experience of a sympathetic listen she hasn't allowed herself to appropriately form an opinion. The analogy holds for our discourse. We have designed and enforced a kind of discussion that discourages sharing and listening. Instead of bringing our listeners into the texture and significance of our experience, we denude our discourse down to those bare forms of argument deemed politically acceptable. What is far worse, we justify not listening. We delegitimize the testimony of those willing to share richer reasons. If someone is an unskilled speaker, but speaks with emotion, we write him off as unintelligent and disruptive. If someone is skilled and emotional, we say she is resorting to manipulation and power. Equality in discourse necessitates that we make these easy dismissals much harder. We must guard against dominance in our discourse, but testimonies to value and expressions of the significance of things are not the acts of domination that some humanists suppose them to be. These kinds of testimonies are one of our best ways of questioning and unifying ourselves against dominating conceptions of nature and the practices that stem from them.

At this point I want to put some of these ideas to work by examining how they might apply in an environmental discussion. Below I provide an example of a fairly common first-person testimony that does appeal to normative conceptions of nature. My hope is that these examples will seem familiar and fairly acceptable for a dialogue about our environments. My reason for expanding upon them at some length is to respond to the humanist argument,

presented with some ferocity by Vogel (and even more ferociously by Luc Ferry before him), that these kinds of testimonies are inherently dominating and amount only to unwarranted appeals to authority. My main point is that the kinds of reasons I give below, while they do include facts about the world, are best understood as invitations to consider these facts from a first-person perspective. We are invited to try out a point of view and see if it makes sense.

Consider a speech someone might make against a proposed mountain top removal mine. I'll present it in outline and then expand on each point. First, the speaker might argue against a proposed mine on the basis that we have moral duties not to harm the integrity of biotic communities. Next, she might say that the rarity of the biodiversity in the proposed mining site has intrinsic value greater than any benefit we can derive from its destruction. Lastly, she might appeal to the value of the kind of life and activities that are available for her community only when the forest is appreciated for what it is on its own, rather than for what we can extract from it. A community life marked by an appreciation of the land's seasonal transitions – a life marked by spring ephemerals and the first community meals of foraged foods, of summer swimming, of fall colors and harvests – is too good of a life to trade for a mine.

I must interject into my own example that there are far less contestable arguments against mountaintop removal, poisoned water and perpetual poverty prominent among them. The damage of this kind of mining on the people closest to it is undeniable and unacceptable. My imagined speaker, however, has chosen to also include ethical considerations about the land, not just the effect of mining on people. Each point in her speech involves some kind of normative conception of nature.

In the first case, we are asked to imagine that nature is a community of which we are a part. We are members not altogether different from the other members of our larger biological

communities. An awareness of these community relations can lead us to think that the non-human members of our community deserve a certain amount of respect. As such, it makes sense to question if we are good or bad neighbors. Whatever being a good neighbor might mean, eradicating such a large part of the community so completely is surely out of the question.

In the second case, we may be asked to consider more closely the amazingness of the particular kinds of life that inhabit the proposed mine site. The present forest, cut and regrown as it is, remains a jubilant testament to eons of evolutionary history. Some species are only found here, some salamanders live only on one mountain. Our speaker may go into detail about how such a forest came to be. The point of this story is simply to ask, aren't these things, just in being what they are, worth letting be, worth appreciating rather than destroying?

The third reason comes close to Bilgrami's distinction quoted in the last section between seeking "mastery and control" of a landscape versus "the ideal of merely 'living in' and morally engaging with the world."²⁸ We might say this is the difference between *using* and *appreciating* the land. An appreciation of the land in the kinds of seasonal activities mentioned above might be called "uses" of the land, but certainly not the same kind of "use" involved in extractive industry. The difference involves fungibility. For industrial use, any land capable of producing the same resources is equally valuable and any more efficient means of obtaining these resources is preferred. Indeed, the whole mining economy as a means for energy production is slowly proving its replaceability. On the other hand, the kind of life described by the speaker above is marked by goods that are only enjoyed through particular kinds of engagement with the land. It is foraging that makes spring meals so valuable. This cannot be replaced by the ability to purchase and eat the same foods. The value of the land comes to speak for itself in the ways she engages it.

²⁸ Bilgrami, 2014 p. 160

In all three cases, the speaker has appealed to nature as a normative reality, something that we ought to engage with in some ways rather than others, that we ought to value in some ways rather than others. The speaker may say that she prefers looking at spring flowers more than looking at a mine site, but she invites the audience to consider that this preference is not simply random; it is grounded in something real about the world. The speaker does not look within herself, notice that she prefers flowers, and then decide to voice that preference at a community meeting. Instead, she has looked out on the world, noticed the flowers themselves, and thought they really are much more valuable than this particular mine. She came to the meeting to invite us to experience this same way of seeing.

Vogel may welcome such testimony, but still politely insist that the claim that such a preference is grounded in reality, that it is a proper response to the world, is close to being domineering. It involves an appeal to an “extradiscursive” authority. Vogel says that we can present our preferences and provide many kinds of reasons for why others ought to share our preference, but we cross a line into domination when we claim that our preferences are grounded in reality. Our first-person experience of value in the world must be translated into a third-person expression of a preference in ourselves in order to be acceptable in Vogel’s discourse.

I think that the imagined speaker’s arguments are better understood as invitations to consider our environments in new ways. We aren’t being told to obey nature, we are being asked to try out new ways of thinking to see if they make sense. The idea of “trying out” is important. These arguments are not deductive. We may never be logically compelled to accept them. But when we try them out, when we see what sense they bring – or don’t bring – to our lives, we may come to appreciate them. Again, this is something like learning to appreciate music. It is not dominating to insist that some music really is worth appreciating and to insist that such

appreciation can only be gained by “trying it out.” I suggest much of what is important about our lives, and many of the things that most strongly challenge the forces that have led us to build bad environments, are much like this. They are values that are best communicated through detailed sharing and sympathetic listening.

In closing this section I want to mention two ways our environmental discourse suffers when we do not allow a reasonable space for first-person testimony like those above. First, we don’t become the kind of listeners we need to be. If there are important kinds of value that are only understood by “trying them out” – in some case simply involves imaginatively and sympathetically considering them, but in many cases it means actually participating in the activities that reveal them – then we must become the kinds of listeners open to finding such value. We must organize our conversations to encourage these kinds of testimonies and reward this kind of listening. One small movement in this direction has been the use of field trips as part of collaborative forest planning processes. The idea is to take a group of stakeholders out to the locations they are discussing to show each other their concerns about the place. The testimony “isn’t this beautiful!” comes across much different when the beauty is there in front of everyone. Even the act of walking into the place together provides the opportunity to discuss the value of walking here, to compare experiences of these places, and to better understand others who have far different experiences of the place.

Second, without these kinds of testimonies our discourse does not become as deep or radical as it needs to be. The question of what kind of environment we should shape involves asking where we are and how best to inhabit this place as a community. But a debate about preferences presupposes much of the answer. Where we are is a value-neutral world and how we ought to inhabit it is in such a way as to balance individual human preferences. The task of

politics is not to question and discover how best to live together, it is only to implement and watch over procedures that will ensure a balance of individual preferences. In the name of saving politics from the domination of normative views of nature we end up with a politics that demands a fundamental presupposition about the world and the role of politics.

The question of how we wish to be envired must be at the center of our conversation, but it must be discussed in greater depth and with greater freedom than some on the humanist side allow. The preference view of democracy presupposes that the environmental question is already answered, at least in outline. The good environment simply is that environment that results from properly democratic decision-making procedures. What this leaves out, in the name of fair procedures, is the expression and consideration of any experiences that have convinced us that there is something more important than shaping the landscape to fit our desires. We are discouraged from discussing the intrinsic value of non-humans, testimonies to the superiority of some kinds of engagement with our environments over others, and the goodness of communal ways of living that require a shared appreciation of what makes for a good life. These topics can form the center of an inclusive and transparent democracy, even though they are all prefaced on the idea that the world has value to discover, respect, and celebrate in our life together. This kind of inclusive and transparent democracy, moreover, has a better chance of resisting the forces that have led to the continual degradation of the land and the production of uninspiring and unhealthy human environments.

Our democracy suffers when we fail to realize that very narrow definitions of what counts as rational discourse are exclusionary. We are able to justify ignorance and dismissiveness of others whenever their reasoning deviates from ours, instead of insisting that democratic discourse demands doing the work to fairly understand other's positions. One of the

great goals of democratic discourse is to preserve an institution in which we come to a greater understanding of the members of our community. This involves a willingness to share and consider more first-person experiences.

Not only does it damage our discourse, it also alienates us from the true depth of our own experience. We are moved by the world. We do discover value through new ways of thinking about and engaging our environments. So much of our understanding of what constitutes a good life and a good environment is shaped by the ways the world has moved us, the way the world has proved its value in our first-person engagement with it. These features often form what matter most to us in life. But we lose purpose and motivation to investigate and share what matters most to us when what seems to matter most is ruled out by some presupposition of our discourse. If our discourse presupposes that normative ideas of nature are sentimental or manipulative or just plain unjustifiable, then how do we share our experiences of being so dramatically moved by the value of the world? How do we share what we really do experience? Or worse, how do we admit to ourselves that we experienced something real and not just an illusion? Often we don't admit it and we don't share it and our discourse is impoverished as a result. In so many of our forums it is understood that beauty can only be preference and that the sacred can only be fetish. A staunchly humanist environmental politics is the hopeless idea that by doubling down on these presuppositions we might somehow cure ugly and meaningless environments.

Chapter 3: Antipolitics and Openness

So far I have argued that Vogel's humanist conception of discursive democracy – while very important in its focus on inclusivity, transparency, and self-consciousness – still insists upon an unacceptable exclusion. This exclusion is both public and private. It is public by rejecting other's appeals to normative conceptions of nature as both performative contradictions and inherently dominating. It is private in the way it encourages us to self-censor our speech about all we personally value to fit only those forms of argument acceptable as appropriately discursive political speech.

Next I reviewed Bilgrami's argument from agency and provided some reasons for encouraging first-person testimony and sympathetic listening in our discourse. Sharing value, whether showing someone a song or the beauty of a wilderness area, simply doesn't work without sympathetic listening. Value, love, and concern may be fortified by argument, but they are most often discovered and communicated by sharing, by providing testimony and listening with an openness to experience the value.

In this section I turn to a new writer, Jedediah Purdy, to evaluate how he navigates the humanist / post-humanist divide. As presented in the introduction, the humanist / post-humanist debate centers on the possibility of including non-human value in our political discourse. The post-humanists argue that we must include the value of nature in our politics in order to correct the destruction caused by our anthropocentric politics. The humanists argue that the value of nature only enters our politics as form of domination that prevents us from have the inclusive and equal democracy needed to deliberate fairly about environmental matters.

Purdy presents a middle ground between the two sides, letting the insights of each inform different aspects of the kind of democracy we need to confront our environmental crises. Looking closely at a few passages, I present how Purdy's middle way captures much of what is important on each side. Although he does not use the term, in many ways Purdy hopes to address both forms of alienation I discussed in the first section. On the one hand, powerlessness is addressed by responsibility. This responsibility is marked by the recognition that nature, both the meaning we find in it and the ways we have shaped it, is something we have made and can remake together.²⁹ On the other hand, distance is addressed by openness. Remaining open and attentive to the unexpected influences of the world around us is a vital part of enriching and challenging what we find valuable in our environments. Some balance of responsibility and openness is surely what we need. They do not have to be in tension in our environmental politics. And yet, I argue that even as Purdy so eloquently opens doors for the non-human world to influence and challenge us, he also fortifies the framework of exclusion that so easily silences any post-humanist challenge.

A Middle Way

So far I have managed to leave out the term *Anthropocene*. This is only because the word is not prominent in Vogel or Bilgrami, nor was it available in similar debates about environmental politics in the past. Purdy uses the term to describe two things, the first is a recognition and the second an intuition. The *Anthropocene condition* names the fact that human activity has now impacted every part of our planet. By measuring this impact we can significantly define our present era as one in which our climate, soil, oceans, and biodiversity all

²⁹ Writers from all sides of the debate use the word "responsibility." Some use the word to stress "taking responsibility for one's actions," which is how I'm using it here, and others stress "being responsive to the world." The second use is fine, but I think less common. I use "openness" to capture the second use.

bear the marks of human activity. Although we can also reasonably identify widely varying types and degrees of human impact, it is nevertheless true that human activity now influences all parts of globe. What Purdy calls the *Anthropocene insight* is something different than the fact of our impact on the planet. Similar to Vogel's idea of our "built" environment, the Anthropocene insight is the idea that the *meaning* of nature has always been a human creation. In his own words, "claims about the meaning and value of the natural world have always been, in good part, ways of arguing with and about people. Here, too, but in a different way, nature depends upon human activity, in this case the activity of meaning-making."³⁰

Like Vogel and Luc Ferry before him, Purdy uses the Anthropocene insight to call out normative conceptions of nature, or indeed any position that claims to know the "nature" of nature, as historically and still potentially damaging. But unlike others on the humanist side, Purdy advocates for a much broader idea of what conceiving of nature's meaning entails. As I mentioned in section one, Vogel defends an idea of discourse that stresses the uniqueness of language and the importance of discursive reasoning. The major conclusion of Vogel's concentration on discursive discourse is that when we speak of things we value, we must take full ownership of these values as our own (perhaps random) preferences and not claim any higher authority for them. "Extradiscursive" authority, whether an appeal to nature or the will of God, is not a way of providing a reason, it is a tool for dominating discourse. Purdy affirms much of this, but argues that we do come to imagine and value our environments in many more ways than can be adequately captured in discursive argument. Purdy writes,

To say that the considerations that guide human decisions must be intelligible to humans, and that public expressions of them must be in language, does not at all mean that their sources must be restricted to our uniquely rational and linguistic qualities. Much of environmental imagination and public language have developed through accounts of intimate, strange, sensual, and aesthetic encounters with the natural world.³¹

³⁰ Purdy, 2016

³¹ Purdy, 2015 p. 281

Purdy's middle way, then, affirms that the meaning of nature is a human creation while holding on to the idea that the sources of this creation are the diverse and sometimes mysterious ways we engage with the world. Nature cannot *instruct* us in Purdy's picture, but it certainly has the power to *influence* us. Importantly, the influence of "intimate, strange, sensual, and aesthetic" encounters with the world often form the greatest challenges to our tradition of mastery and control. It is our openness to these influences that produce the kind of valuations – which Purdy doesn't hold back from naming "love" – that challenge and restrain an imagination that sees the world as only resource. He concludes *After Nature* with this suggestion: "A democracy open to post-humanist encounters with the living world would be more likely to find ways to restrain its demands and stop short of exhausting the planet."³²

Purdy's middle way, then, can be read as an attempt to capture the concerns of both Vogel and Bilgrami. The Anthropocene insight addresses Vogel's concern over forgetting that we shape nature and our conceptions of it. Purdy seconds Vogel's words quoted above, that when nature is understood as self-evidently normative this "treats humans as impotent objects of an external force whose structures they must acknowledge but can never question or change."³³ The Anthropocene insight is the empowering intuition that we can question and change what we take nature to be. But Purdy also recognizes that in the Anthropocene we must find new ways of valuing nature and new ways of representing and responding to how nature moves us in order to restrain our exploitation of it. We must come together and share our experiences and intuitions that reveal nature as something to love, rather than something merely to use. In this sense he gets somewhat close to Bilgrami's point, also quoted in the first section, that no satisfactory relation with nature can be gained "simply by invoking elements entirely from within our own interests."

³² Purdy, 2015 p. 288

³³ Vogel, p. 91

We require something more to challenge “the framework that landed us with the alienation in which the urge for ‘mastery and control’ has undermined the ideal of merely ‘living in’ and morally engaging with the world.”³⁴ Purdy’s claim of the importance of remaining open to being moved by nature in the Anthropocene, along with his recognition that this love arises through diverse forms of engagement, present an idea that nature remains more than just our ideas about it. We can discover, if not always so definitively, things new and things morally important about our world. These things must be freely expressed and taken seriously in a democracy fit for the Anthropocene.

This blend of, what I have called, responsibility and openness is very appealing. Purdy’s specific position, however, comes across as aspirationally rich, but theoretically poor. He has reached out with each hand for the best of current environmental discourse, but the weight and opposition of each side remains too much to hold together. In what follows I hope to join Purdy, adding only a few insights to buttress a middle position.

What is Antipolitics?

My first suggestion addresses a danger that I can’t imagine Purdy really intends. I argued in section one that Vogel’s rejection of all extradiscursive authority left the germ of public exclusion alive in our discourse. I think that Purdy’s use of the Anthropocene insight does much the same, however much more gently. The Anthropocene insight is the intuition that our ideas of nature have always been political, both used for political purpose and a product of our collective meaning-making. This does not have to be an exclusionary intuition, but it can become so with Purdy’s accompanying idea of “antipolitics.” Antipolitics captures the destructive way that ideas

³⁴ Bilgrami, 2014 p. 160

of nature are used as unchallengeable authorities to dominate discourse and oppress others.

Purdy explains,

To invoke nature's self-evident meaning for human projects is to engage in a kind of politics that tries, like certain openly religious arguments, to lift itself above politics, to deny its political character while using that denial as a form of persuasion. ... Such arguments succeed by enabling their advocates to make the impossible claim that only their opponents' positions are political, while their own reflect a profound comprehension of the world either as it is or was intended to be.³⁵

Purdy's worry is very close to Vogel's concern of dominating discourse. Appealing to a normative conception of nature is a power play. Nature holds ultimate authority and those people able to speak for nature wield that authority over everyone else.

There is no doubt that we must stand against this kind blatant domination. But is every normative conception of nature an antipolitics? If so, then the germ of public exclusion is alive and well. Every time someone expresses a normative conception of nature we can respond that she is being antipolitical. Instead of disagreeing directly, we can use the meta-critique that her opinions are undemocratic and thus not fit for our discourse. Antipolitics gives us a way of delegitimizing fundamental dissent. On the one hand, Purdy shows that love and strange intuitions gained through engagement with nature are our best means of challenging the march of mastery and control over the landscape. While on the other hand Purdy sees no problem calling appeals to normative conceptions of nature antipolitical. This might not be inconsistent, but we need a much sharper idea of antipolitics to keep the charge from excluding fundamental dissent about the nature of nature.

But what about private exclusion? Purdy is among the most eloquent and forceful advocates for including new, strange, and subversive arguments and testimonies into our political discourse. His charge of antipolitics may be too broadly applied, but no one can accuse him of trying to denude political speech. He writes,

³⁵ Purdy, 2016

When interpretations of our natural, emotional, and bodily experience enter politics, they add depth and texture, and even accrete to build new principles that anchor future reasoning.³⁶

And again,

Reflection and argument take effort and practice, and when people are embarrassed to express commitments that seem “subjective” or “culturally relative,” they lose practice and slacken effort. A part of what we need to do – it’s not enough, but necessary – is just to be bold in voicing the visions of the natural world that we carry and the ways they matter to us.³⁷

This is certainly the kind of openness we need. In combination with the idea of antipolitics, however, it raises questions. What happens when we imagine that a particular landscape is sacred? Must we demand that the idea of sacredness also be deconstructed as only political (which, no doubt, it has been) and insist that speakers in our discourse only use “sacredness” in terms more akin to personal preference? That is, must we translate sacredness into something it isn’t in order to make it acceptable for democracy? What happens when our engagement with non-human animals reveals that they are valuable in their own right, beyond any meaning we happen to give them, and thus even if we collectively and fairly decide to abuse them, we are still wrong? Are animal rights antipolitical? More broadly, what happens when our visions of the natural world seem more like deep discoveries than accidental inventions?

The point of these questions is to say that we need an openness to reality that can have at least some teeth to it, some real moral force. We need a way of admitting that our ideas about nature are politically formed while also affirming that our experience of nature shows that some things really do matter and some lines really should not be crossed. Otherwise, openness to being moved by nature will never be more than reverie.

For all Purdy’s eloquent appeals to the importance of boldly voicing how nature matters to us, everything stands too ready to collapse under the charge of antipolitics. As quoted above, we are wrong to “invoke nature’s self-evident meaning.” But how are we to speak of love

³⁶ Purdy, 2015 p. 281

³⁷ Purdy, 2015 p. 265

without such appeals? How does one provide testimony to value in nature, to something worth loving, without the idea that this value is self-evident, at least in the right conditions? The whole logic of testimony is to ask others to see for themselves. Testimony is not argument in its more formal sense. It cannot force anyone's assent. Testimony functions on the conviction that values can become self-evident, in the right conditions, for those with eyes to see, as it were. The testimonies we need are precisely those that ask us to notice, to touch, to engage with nature in order to discover and respect the value present. It is precisely because we have found that nature is worth loving in particular ways that we are motivated to resist its domination and to oppose its reduction to mere instrumental value. In some passages this seems to be exactly Purdy's direction, while his notion of antipolitics seems at times to threaten the project. I think it is clear that Purdy will approve of testimonies of how nature moves us, but it is less clear if the kind of first-person testimonies in the last section can stand the test of antipolitics.

I have two suggestions for easing this tension. First, we should clarify that the Anthropocene insight is an important *subject* of our discourse and not a *prerequisite* for it. In the Anthropocene we still disagree about what nature is. Our discourse should strongly encourage the consideration of how ideas about nature are constructed and used to various ends, good and bad. But this discussion should also strive to sustain the broadest possible disagreements. In Purdy's formulation it can appear that there are two families of environmental thought, ideas that have accepted the Anthropocene insight on the one hand, and only antipolitics on the other. The question of what it means to make nature together, and whether this excludes convictions about the reality of normative conceptions of nature, is something to discuss together in the Anthropocene.

As Purdy presents it, however, the Anthropocene insight is less a topic of debate and more a gatekeeper for ensuring a fair debate. At times it seems that Purdy wants the Anthropocene insight to be a prerequisite for our politics. As good Anthropocene citizens we must be willing to abandon the idea that what we claim about nature is how nature actually is. There is wisdom in this kind of humility, and it is a necessary defense against many oppressive views of nature. But it goes too far if we insist that everyone, in all cases, who seems unwilling to give up some firmer normative ideas about nature is practicing antipolitics. The danger of taking a hard line on antipolitics is that fundamental dissent is no longer a topic of our discourse.

People may enthusiastically agree that our political structure, our economic structure, and most of our ideas about nature are in many ways matters of our own making. But when certain features do not seem like mere constructions (artificial) – for instance, when the value of animals seems real, when letting land be wild feels more like a matter of justice than personal preference – how are we to boldly voice these opinions within a discourse systematically constructed to exclude them? Recognizing the Anthropocene is an invitation to discuss what the Anthropocene means; it is not a marker for when previous views of nature became unacceptable.

Second, we may benefit from defining *antipolitics* more clearly as a kind of act rather than a kind of belief. I think we can be open to the idea that the same beliefs about nature can be expressed in both good and horrible ways. One might believe, for instance, that the value of animals is not something that can be politically determined. This person might believe that no matter how we decide animals are valuable or not in our society, we can be wrong. This seems like an antipolitical position about nature, as Purdy describes antipolitics. But it seems acceptable to think that this same animal advocate may still act in “pro-political,” pro-democratic ways concerning how she shares this belief with others. She may hope to win people over through

testimony, but never be domineering. Antipolitics is then more a matter of how we bring our beliefs into political discourse, rather than *only* about what our beliefs are.

I must admit some hesitancy about making this distinction between belief and action. A very important part of addressing injustice is to unmask how our belief systems really are inherently oppressive. We must continue this work. Also, we must reject the idea that oppressive beliefs are acceptable so long as we express them kindly, or non-violently, or what have you. For instance, there is no acceptable way of holding white supremacist or sexist beliefs. And terrible ideas about nature stand behind white supremacy, sexism, and so many other oppressive systems. So too, there are going to be beliefs that really are antipolitical (destructive to our politics and to the goal of working together to shape better environments) no matter how nicely they are expressed. Nevertheless, testifying to natural value, or even appealing to very broad normative conceptions of nature, is not inherently antipolitical.

Believing that animals deserve respect, even believing that others are wrong not to see this, is not inherently antipolitical. Expressing this belief, pleading with others to see what you see, also need not be antipolitical. Even the conviction that the value of animals can never be entirely determined by politics is also not antipolitical. It is a conviction we bring to political forums in the hope that together we can re-shape the way we value animals as a society. Yet, without a much sharper definition of what kind of acts constitute antipolitics, the broad charge stands ready to expel all such conviction from political forums.

Real Fear and Real Love

I want to conclude this paper with an endorsement of Purdy's own conclusion. Purdy's middle way is most eloquently expressed in the closing of *After Nature*. He writes that a politics

for the Anthropocene must be guided by both fear and love. Humanist approaches are enough to define and hopefully avoid what we should fear, like making our own environments

uninhabitable, but something more is needed to inspire love. He writes,

The history of environmental lawmaking suggests that people are best able to change their ways when they find two things at once in nature: something to fear, a threat they must avoid, and also something to love, a quality they can admire or respect, and which they can do their best to honor. The first impulse, of fear, can be rendered in purely human-centered terms, as a matter of avoiding environmental crisis. The second impulse, of love, engages animist intuitions and carries us toward post-humanism, which is perhaps just another name for an enriched humanism. Either impulse can stay the human hand, but the first stops it just short of being burnt or broken. The second keeps the hand poised, extended in greeting or in an offer of peace. This gesture is the beginning of collaboration, among people but also beyond us, in building our next home.³⁸

Much of the point of this essay is simply to say that this kind of love cannot be reduced, in our value theories and in our political forums, to preference. This kind of love, or what we might think of more broadly as responses to the way nature moves us, involve statements about how the world really is. Just what kind of authority such love has is an open question. One of our political tasks will be to ask what ought we to love and how should our love guide the world we shape. These questions are antithetical to the kind of Anthropocene politics encouraged by Vogel. Nature simply doesn't have a character that ought to be appreciated in any particular way. Nature is only what we make it. From Purdy, we are encouraged to ask about proper responses, but we are left without a solid theory of what it means to do so. Moreover, Purdy affirms that nature is what we make it, the same insight that from so many other authors is precisely what takes the wind out of the question of love. Having it both ways, in at least some of our discussions, will demand a more robust theory of what it means to be open to encountering reality, being moved by it, and appropriately responding. Bilgrami's project is to argue that both fear and love matter because they can be appropriate responses to reality, not simply preferences. Love of nature isn't simply something that happens, it ought to happen because nature is worth

³⁸ Purdy, 2015 p. 288

loving. Without some justification of how this can be the case, the call for love is too weak to withstand its Vogellian opponents.

But what kind of criticism is this? It is only to say that Purdy is right, that his suggestions should and probably will be welcomed by many audiences, but that his appeal to love is theoretically weak. We can strengthen it a bit with something like Bilgrami's argument from agency. But this may only matter in very specific contexts. A strong theory that can give Purdy's love ethical force may only be needed to defend against rival theories. In many political settings the best argument for the importance of the kind of responses to nature Purdy champions is simply a sincere testimony. We best justify the importance of bold testimonies by giving them. It is not centrally important to insist upon any particular metaphysics or value theory that fully explains how a landscape, a species, or an individual non-human can have value. No doubt, some theories fair far better than others. But I would be as guilty as the strictest humanist defenders if I insisted on a particular metaphysics of value as a prerequisite for political discourse. The point is to encourage a broader discourse. Theory is needed most to defend this broader discourse against those determined to delegitimize it. Many of the Anthropocene writers (and Purdy's idea of antipolitics is ambiguously in this camp) insist that normative conceptions of nature are politically dubious, distracting at best and tyrannical at worst. If Purdy's middle way is to be successful, it must be supported by an explanation of how the love he talks about can be defended as the right response to reality.

Purdy's aspiration is needed in the anthropocene. We must find a way of encouraging inclusivity, richness, and fundamental challenges to the domination of nature into our political discourse (and policies) while also maintaining firm standards against dominating discourse and views of nature used to oppress others and impoverish democracy. While this may be an

empirical matter, I hazard the opinion that the most dominating and exclusionary ideas of nature in our age are not particular normative conceptions of nature, but rather those that claim nature has no value for us to discover and respect. What Vogel accomplishes by casting out normative conceptions of nature (more specifically, casting out “nature” altogether) is only an absolutizing of the reigning rationality that currently dominates both politics and nature. Whatever legitimate theoretical concern there may be, Vogel (and Ferry before him) is simply wrong that current normative conceptions of nature constitute a practical threat to our democracy, at least in our environmental discourse. If and when an appeal to the intrinsic value of a forest is influential enough to halt even one mountain top removal mine, then perhaps Vogel’s worry might gain some purchase in reality. That time is not now.

Purdy, most notably in his disapproval of Peter Kareiva³⁹, warns that appeals to the self-evident moral neutrality of nature is also a form of dominating discourse and a failure to properly interpret the Anthropocene Insight. In this sense, Purdy is willing to point the humanist finger back at itself. Purdy is consistent in seeking a way to reject dominating ideas of nature without creating, at least not intentionally, a more dominating regulation of our discourse. Moreover, he affirms that important insights about nature are found when we remain open to discovering meaning and value in our engagement with the non-human world. This is the right direction.

In closing, I want to stress that the goal of a more inclusive, transparent, and self-conscious democracy is shared by nearly everyone in these debates, certainly everyone in this essay. This agreement is far more fundamental and practically important than disagreements about if and how nature is valuable. Thus, to say that Vogel is wrong about normative conceptions of nature being inherently dominating is only to say that our mutual goal of a better democracy for the anthropocene is better achieved through less policing and meta-critique of

³⁹ Purdy, 2015 p. 5; Purdy, 2016

what constitutes acceptable discourse. Also, to say that Purdy is theoretically poor about defending his middle position is only to say that we share the task of defending the importance of the diverse and sometimes strange ways that nature challenges us, awakens our appreciation, and stays our hand.

Purdy's final appeal to love brings to mind a much older political text. In one of Aristotle's softer moments he warns that familial love requires particularity.

Whereas in a state having women and children common, love will be watery; and the father will certainly not say 'my son,' or the son 'my father.' As a little sweet wine mingled with a great deal of water is imperceptible in the mixture, so, in this sort of community, the idea of relationship which is based upon these names will be lost; there is no reason why the so-called father should care about the son, or the son about the father, or brothers about one another.⁴⁰

I wonder what kind of love for nature will prove more than “a little sweet wine mingled with a great deal of water.” In our case the water is an ocean of theory set to undermine the idea that moral claims really can arise from our engagement with nature. Is Purdy asking us to love nature while remaining agnostic about the reality that grounds this love? Will such love stick? If openness is to matter, if being moved by nature is to move our politics, we need a stronger defense against the charge that these experiences are only projection and illusion. We need to know how the ways we are related to nature justify our love for it. Without this, openness is too easily washed away.

⁴⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1262b (Benjamin Jowett translation)

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