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The Goat-stag and the Sphinx: The *Place* of the Virtues in Environmental Ethics

ROBERT L. CHAPMAN

Pace University
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
41 Park Row, Room 310
New York, NY 10038, USA
Email: rchapman@fsmail.pace.edu

ABSTRACT

Standard virtue ethics approach to environmental issues do not go far enough because they often lack significant attachment to local environments. Place provides the necessary link that enlarges the arena of moral action by joining human well-being to a place-based goal of wildness (Thoreau) or biotic harmony (Leopold). Place defines a niche for human activity as part of nature. Virtuous action, then, is understood as deliberation from a position of being *in* and *of* the natural world; respect and gratitude are examples of this type of deliberation.

KEY WORDS

Place, respect, gratitude, environmental virtue, Thoreau, Leopold, Aristotle

I. INTRODUCTION

'It is not down on my map, true places never are.'

Moby Dick, Herman Melville

What are some of the values (virtues) needed to establish harmony between nature and culture that is connected with a sense of place? A sense of place requires a view of the good that extends beyond individual ideals of excellence (Baillie 1989: 29–30). Traditional virtue ethics have not gone far enough. Aristotle's great-souled man (*megalopsuchus*) is firmly grafted onto the *polis* wherein happiness (*eudaimonia*) is defined – in the area of moral virtue – as a sort of civic integrity. Aristotelian happiness comes up short for it stops at the edge

of town, it ends where the pavement terminates and the swamp begins. Ironically traditional Natural Law theories too lack proper connection with the natural world since they are derived from transcendent/eternal law purporting to speak of matters beyond the natural. In this regard they are much like utilitarianism, contract theories and deontic approaches to the good (and the right) which sever the individual from a vital source of meaning and self-development. In these aforementioned approaches (especially Kantian and Rawlsian deontology) the moral agent is defined outside the relevant sphere of social *cum* environmental action. Isolated from the vicissitudes of the natural world the moral subject is ordained to a goal of domination over nature. It is not enough to say these positions are anthropocentric (strong or weak) since a human perspective is unavoidable. What is missing from these positions is deliberation influenced by sensitivity to place—one could accuse Kantianism et al. of committing the fallacy of *displaced* deliberation.

We need to enlarge the Aristotelian notion of happiness (integrity) to include virtues (identity confirming commitments) based on place considerations. Henry David Thoreau and Aldo Leopold will serve as sources and, in some cases, examples for creating an environmental virtue ethics well grounded in place.

II. HISTORICAL REMARKS

Aristotle in *Physics* 4.1–5 provides an early philosophical/scientific consideration of place. Taking up the question, ‘what is place?’ the Philosopher reasons that it has some kind of real existence because things must exist somewhere, since ‘the non-existent is nowhere – where is the goat-stag or the sphinx?’¹ and, undoubtedly, motion is change of place (*Physics* 4.1.208a30). Aristotle is confident that place is different from space (*pace* Plato)² and as such is not intrinsically related to things that are in it. Additionally, there is no place of places (*pace* Zeno),³ since that would make place a body and then two bodies would occupy the same place, a patent absurdity. Place is coextensive with what it contains (like a vessel) and it exerts a certain kind of influence ‘possessing distinct potencies’ (*Physics* 4.1.208a20–25), or as Thomas Aquinas remarked, ‘...it follows that place not only is but that it has a wondrous potency which is the first of all beings’ (*Commentary*, Book IV, Lecture 1, 414.). In summary, place is defined as ‘the innermost motionless boundary of what contains is place’⁴ (*Physics* 4.4.212a20), an immovable container, or terminus of that which contains ‘primarily’.⁵

The richness of the idea of place as container and separate from what is contained (the inner surface of an enclosing body) allows Aristotle to include an active element (*dunamis*) as an integral part of the description of place; the capacity (potentiality) of place to shape and influence what it contains. It is this vital aspect of place that complements recent discussions about place in environ-

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mental ethics, environmental history and environmental geography, and the topic developed in this essay, not to mention that place has a singular importance in the constitution and enactment of virtue.

Over the course of two millennia Aristotle's conception of place fell in and out of favour. Early commentators, following the Stagarite, stressed the constitutive/generative aspect of place.⁶ This notion underwent a substantial transformation in the seventeenth century to become the homogenous space of Cartesian *res extensa*.⁷ What followed under the direction of modern physics was the continuation of the identity of place with space terminating in 'the concept of an independent (absolute) space, unlimited in extent, in which all material objects are contained' (Einstein 1970: xiii). Unlikely as it may seem that after the complete success of modernism in eradicating all things ancient, Aristotle has regained some of his former prominence beyond the recovery of his ethical theory. Once again something like *topos* is seen as constitutive of identity and has found favour among certain philosophers who have incorporated it into environmental thought.⁸ This is how it should be, topography as generative. We (individuals *of* and *in* the natural world) inhabit places and are, so to say, sponsored by landmarks – the legacy of the locatory aspects of environment; identity is membership in place. It is in this sense that who we are is, to a great extent, constituted by where we are, a proposition strongly advanced by Aristotle's notion of 'proper' place.⁹

III: CONTOURS OF PLACE

In times such as ours as we move rapidly and incautiously toward globalisation – cultural homogenisation and universal commodification – where political systems are discounted as crudely and in the same fashion and with the same frequency as tube-socks sold by unlicensed New York City subway vendors, when, to follow Oscar Wilde, we know the price of everything and the value of nothing, attributions of non-instrumental value to nature are met with cynicism and overt distrust. In this hostile environment the category of place is a welcome resident, providing a framework for value assessment (recognition and attribution) that satisfies our prudential predilections without pauperising the natural world.

The features of place that separate it from other types of locality and mere spatial extension are mostly qualitative. For example the Greek *plateia* and the Latin *platea*, both connote a broad, loosely articulated area that admits a significant attachment to the natural world along with congruent civic activity – the Greek agora, Roman campus and English commons are other historical examples. As we will see shortly these 'places' are the spawning ground of activities expressive of human excellence (virtues). Often *place* exists where the natural landscape 'is eloquent of the interplay of forces that have caused it'

(Carson 1962: 64), where human heritage and natural history carefully and creatively interpenetrate (Chapman 1999: 82). This leaves wilderness and other unarticulated states of nature beyond the boundary of place.¹⁰ Straightforward articulated environments are not places either,¹¹ they are more akin to a network of planetary plumbing configured as an objective system warranting continuous maintenance (reversibility and rehabilitation are possible activities under this interpretation), a sort of global infrastructure (Sagoff 1992: 359).

The concept of place I have in mind offers an opportunity to define a niche for human (virtuous) activity as part of nature, an activity that understands and accepts limitations on human choice out of respect for our position as natural beings *in* nature. These limitations and restrictions help to inform an ethic of virtue. One of the benefits of a virtue ethic is that it avoids some of the difficulties of deciding between competing values, since it is not necessary to posit an independent value for nature; a unitary value attribution is more appropriate in this context. As for place, it answers some of the problems associated with attempts to apply virtue ethics to the environment, since the specificity of locality will become a factor in providing moral guidance.¹²

Throughout this essay we will be moving back and forth between two related notions of place. On the one hand we talk about place as some particular locale, on the other, as an evolutionary-biological continuum. These two aspects of place are represented in the works of Thoreau and Leopold. Thoreau focuses on the particular through his activity of microvision: 'I have stood under a tree in the wood half a day at a time, and yet employed myself happily and profitably there prying with microscopic eye into the crevices of the bark or the leaves or the fungi at my feet' (*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, 300).¹³ Leopold expresses the value of place as evolutionary through his idea of an ecological conscience and biotic pyramid: 'Each species, including ourselves, is a link in many chains... The pyramid is a tangle of chains so complex as to seem disorderly, yet the stability of the system proves it to be a highly organised structure' (Leopold 199: 215). Also, the distinction between *in* (local place) and *of* (evolutionary place) nature captures the dual aspect of place mentioned here. The ontological relationship between these aspects of place is one of aspectual asymmetry with the evolutionary as logically prior to the local, yet both are inextricably bound together.

The contours of a place exist in the minds of those who must become familiar with local circumstances for some particular purpose, often for the sake of survival. Henry David Thoreau would have us confront nature directly, internalise its qualities (tangible and intangible) and develop considered values that will lead to a local harmony between nature and civilisation. 'I am the wiser in respect to all knowledges, and the better qualified for all fortunes, for knowing that there is a minnow in the brook. Methinks I have a need even of his sympathy and to be his fellows in a degree' (*Natural History Essays*, 'Natural History of

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Massachusetts', 16). Likewise, Aldo Leopold requests that we develop characters that are willing to accept obligation and engage in sacrifice so that we promote a state of harmony and integrity between men and land and become citizens of a land community. '....[A] land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such' (Leopold 1949: 204). Radical environmentalists too seek a new moral space – an ethics of place – that reconstitutes the relationship between nature and culture. 'This heartfelt ethics cannot be learned by rote, for it depends crucially on the development of a "feel for the game" of life and our place within it ... on the development of what might become an ecological habitus' (Smith 1997: 352–3).

IV. THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

'How can we expect a harvest of thought who have not had a seed-time of character?'¹⁴

We get a glimpse of Thoreau's great-souled man from the following, 'What is any man's discourse to me, if I am not sensible of something in it as steady and cheery as the creak of crickets? In it the woods must be relieved against the sky. Men tire me when I am not constantly greeted and refreshed as by the flux of sparkling streams. Surely joy is the condition of life' (*Natural History Essays*, 'Natural History of Massachusetts', 3–4).¹⁵ Thoreau's *megalopsuchus* is stable, reliable, with equanimity and preserved in his own good spirits. He reflects continuity between the natural world and human society by embodying wildness, Thoreau's *replacement* for happiness. The good, then, the goal of human action is the joyous exemplification of wildness.¹⁶ Joy holds a prominent place in Thoreau's pantheon of moods. It provides the lens 'to appreciate the [our] distinctive existence ... and tolerate the complexity and ambiguity in what order Nature Does have'. Joy also provides an immediate epistemological advantage, 'Joy enables extraordinary perspective for Thoreau; it is one of the moods that is for him a way of knowing' (Bennett 2000: 55). What is this wildness which Thoreau embraces as the proper end of human action? For the most part it is just another name for human development as an ongoing co-operation with nature, a modified manifest destiny without the accompanying biblical domination and other prejudices. Thoreau's vision of westward expansion, although patriotic in the main, was expressive of a tense harmony between nature and civilisation, 'The West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild ... in Wildness is the preservation of the World' (*Natural History Essays*, 'Walking', 112). It is in anxious co-operation that wildness is preserved.¹⁷ Thoreau provides an example

of the type of co-operation wherein wildness endures, 'I think that the farmer displaces the Indian even because he redeems the meadow, and so makes himself stronger and in some respect more natural' (*Natural History Essays*, 'Walking', 118). The farmer cultivates wildness in himself and the meadow by transacting with nature in a way that doesn't inhibit the crops – although cultivated – from sending out their resourceful roots in search of the wild. Human wildness is advanced through the plough as farmers place themselves *in* nature as custodial inhabitants without eliminating sources of natural vibrancy and diversity.¹⁸

Thoreau's wildness withstands a certain refinement, in fact it calls for it. Human action can embellish nature¹⁹ by the overall production of wildness. 'When the first inroad has been made, a few acres levelled, and a few houses erected, *the forest looks wilder than ever*. Left to herself, nature is always more or less civilised, and delights in a certain refinement...' (*Natural History Essays*, 'A Walk to Wachusett': 38–9; italics added). Human attempts to fit into nature through an understanding of natural processes increase wildness, allowing for its expression within a human context: 'A healthy man, indeed, is the complement of the seasons, and in winter, summer is in his heart' (*Natural History Essays*, 'A Winter Walk': 56).²⁰ Health both moral and physical is acquired in co-operative contact with the capacities and possibilities of nature – the potentiality of place – and thus the good prompted is not only a human good but a good for natural processes too. It is in this way that Thoreau moves away from a strictly anthropocentric (and exclusively dualistic) approach. Thoreau derides a crude anthropocentrism when speaking about city dwellers who are unaccustomed to the tonic of nature. He remarks, 'They will perchance crack their dry joints at one another and call it a spiritual communication' (*Natural History Essays*, 'Autumnal Tints': 165). Much of our talk is internal and species referential – a kind of anthropic solipsism. In the absence of wildness there is a want of human excellence, evidenced in this telling comparison, 'Show me two villages, one embowered in trees and blazing with all the glories of October, the other a merely trivial and treeless waste, or with only a single tree or two for suicides, and I shall be sure that in the latter will be found the most starved and bigoted religionists and the most desperate drinkers' (*Natural History Essays*, 'Autumnal Tints': 165). The prospects of a balanced ('steady and cheery') development outside the reciprocal reach of the natural world are grim indeed.

We locate value in the wild – the preserver of civilisation – on the semi-permeable boundary at the edge of town, on the family farm, in an urban park (even a vest-pocket park), on the numerous children's trails and shortcuts through suburban green space, in short wherever there is a worn path.²¹ These are some of the places where we acquire a 'second nature' invested with traits of excellence leading to human flourishing.

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V. ACTIVITIES IN PLACE

‘When you find your place where you are, practice occurs.’

Dogen

Homo sapiens is capable of more than motion (*pace* Hobbes) (See Baillie 1989: 27–9). Thoreau echoes Aristotle’s distinction between motion and action, exclaiming, ‘I am alarmed when it happens that I have walked a mile into the woods bodily, without getting there in spirit ... What business have I in the woods, if I am thinking of something out of the woods?’ (*Natural History Essays*, ‘Walking’: 99). Just going through the motions won’t do – walking in the woods for exercise is not ‘walking in the woods’, it is exercise – the activity itself is the end (see *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a 5–15). Given the choice between a motion and an action, prudence (and Aristotelian practical wisdom) dictates we chose the activity over the motion and for its own sake.²²

Placing the good in the context of local natural environments broadens the precincts of human action while it increases our choices and responsibilities, especially to future generations. This requires either a new set of virtues or a reapplication of traditional ones. In replacing wildness for happiness as the appropriate human end, Thoreau changed the topography of deliberation to include a relational man-in-nature dynamic. Aldo Leopold provides a similar example by substituting harmony – within the biotic community – for happiness (see Shaw 1997: 55). Leopold remarks about this radical shift in ethical perspectives: ‘Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land ... a system of conservation based solely on economic self-interest is hopelessly lopsided ... An ethic to supplement and guide the economic relation to land presupposes the existence of some mental image of land as a biotic mechanism’ (Leopold 1949: 207–9). If harmony is the end of human moral action, then deliberations must be informed by a new ecological perspective – one that is sensitive to place.²³ I interpret place as more of an evolving attachment for Leopold.

Leopold roots human existence and the attainment of human excellence in an extended community. In an often-quoted passage he declares, ‘...a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it’. And further, ‘...man is, in fact, only a member of a biotic team...’ (Leopold 199: 204–5). The dangers of this type of approach are well known.²⁴ Often referred to as ‘ecocentric holism’ this approach can lead to a mutation of value, de-emphasising the importance of the individual while promoting the system, the community. The land as the locus of value presents a serious challenge to traditional ethical theories, but one that virtue ethics informed by sense-of-place values is capable of handling. Value assignments are not a fundamental concern for virtue ethics (*pace* Rolston).²⁵ Granted, by

identifying the good as wildness (Thoreauvian good) or harmony (Leopoldian good) we are saying that these should be valued for their own sake but this does not make them ontologically queer or establish some strict ontological priority wherein human value is severely diminished in relation to some common biotic good. Virtue ethics is more interested in character development, and while we can attribute intrinsic value to the 'integrity, stability and beauty' (harmony) of the biotic community, it remains a human activity that will be evaluated from a human-in-nature perspective. Thoreau explains how this is possible and how wildness unifies nature and culture, humans and their environments: 'The most alive is the wildest. Not yet subdued to man, its presence refreshes him' (*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, 114); and 'It is vain to dream of wilderness distant from ourselves. There is none such. It is the bog in our brain and bowels, the primitive vigour of Nature, that inspires that dream' (*Journal*, 9: 43).²⁶

More significantly, this variety of anthropocentrism allows for a Copernican revolution in value where there is a unitary sense of value; man and nature exhibit wildness/harmony together not in isolation from the other. This does not preclude attributing non-instrumental value to the natural world – remember harmony and wildness are valued for their own sake both as they appear in humans and nature.²⁷ We are not only valuing human excellence but also the *place* from which it arises. It is not as if we locate intrinsic value in the world of nature and human value is an adjunct to it (as Rolston does, see note 25). Human value is recorded within the incunabula of nature; you cannot properly value one without the other.

Living well and the activities that promote the good life result from environmental sensitivity (a complex concatenation of values). For example, respect for nature is respect for humans-in-nature. Here value assignments are fluid. To respect the community 'means' to show respect for our place within nature. For the ancient Greeks moral virtues like courage had their place on the battlefield, and temperance developed in the household (Baillie 1989: 26–7). So too with the intellectual virtues, for example practical wisdom (*phronesis*) has its place in the community. If we extend the concept of community in Leopoldian terms then we find that practical wisdom has its place in the larger biotic community. Leopold stresses the importance and ecological necessity of locating humans within the land community: 'All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his *place* in that community, but his ethics prompt him to co-operate (perhaps in order that there may be a *place* to compete for)' (Leopold 1949: 203–4, italics added). For Leopold, the place of virtue is infixed in the 'ecological *polis*' and cooperation exemplified by virtuous actions preserves a place for human participation and ultimately a place-based identity befitting human development.

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We have already mentioned respect, but more is worth saying. Respect – the virtue of choice for some philosophers of the environment – requires close observation accompanied by a history (*spectus* – to look back at).²⁸ This ‘backward glance o’er travel’d roads’ is best undertaken within the province of ecosystemic complexities where we have the opportunity to experience closely and deeply and thus understand better the subtleties of this complex affiliation between culture and nature. Leopold refers to this relationship as the biotic pyramid, wherein the land is transformed into a ‘fountain of energy’ with pathways of dependencies and interdependencies that support the conclusion, ‘the less violent the man-made changes, the greater the probability of successful readjustment in the pyramid’ (Leopold 1949: 219–20). In turn this leads to an ethical relation to land that includes respect. ‘It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, *respect*, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value’ (Leopold 1949: 223, italics added).

These ‘less violent’ activities call-up another aspect of respect that manages a refrain from careless inquiry or harmful interference. Once we come to respect something we have a deferential regard or esteem for it, such that attention and moral consideration are appropriate responses. The ‘background conditions’ for respect, in this case natural (evolutionary) history, call to mind Stanley Cavell’s paraphrase of Wittgenstein’s question, ‘Could someone have a feeling of ardent love or hope [or expectancy or joy or belief or profound pleasure or causation] for the space of one second – no *matter what* preceded the following second?’ We will add respect to the list and respond, ‘No, we could not have the feeling or attitude of respect without protracted temporal continuity.’ Environmental virtues not only have a material association but a temporal one. We have already considered respect; now let us look for a moment at gratitude.

To a considerable extent natural forces (both local and global) cast our identities; our genes have been coded in the matrix of an extremely complex evolutionary stew. Can we properly extend gratitude to these historical forces that have had such an important influence on us? It would seem unlikely, at least not without doing violence to a standard ethical meaning of gratitude. According to Fred Berger, one of the essential characteristics of gratitude involves a clear intention on the part of the agent, ‘the recipient shows he recognises the value of the donor’s act – that is, that it was an act benefiting him and done in order to benefit him’ (Berger 1985: 199). Since nature is neither benevolent nor intentional, to act out of gratitude toward it would be inappropriate, at least on Berger’s formulation.

Yet there is another aspect of gratitude that allows for application to the natural world. Expressions of value require a *mutual* valuing of each as ends in themselves (see Berger 1985: 202, italics added). If we define mutual in ecological terms – as terms of arrangement by placement – representing a joint, two-way relationship, then we need not concern ourselves with the intentionality

and benevolence of nature, since from the perspective of ecology no such attribution is necessary.²⁹ Also, there is a legitimate reading of Aristotle that can handle the criticism of approaching nature with certain virtues like gratitude and respect. Aristotle remarks that virtue must have the quality of aiming at the intermediate. So anger, fear, pity, pleasure and pain must be felt, ‘...at the right times, with reference to the right objects, toward the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way ... this is characteristic of virtue’ (*NE* 1106b 15–25). I want now to explore Aristotle’s notion of ‘with reference to the right objects’. Suppose I am walking in the forest and surprise a nest of pit vipers now rearing to attack. Propelled by fear I run and avoid imminent harm. I assume my fear was legitimate for it was directed at the right object – the vipers – and was an appropriate response since I wasn’t frozen by fear nor was I recklessly nonchalant. If this is correct, then a proper object for virtuous action need not be aimed exclusively at humans (or any other intentional and benevolent agents if such exist). It follows that aspects of the natural world are the proper recipients of respect and gratitude.³⁰

Gary Snyder recognised the importance of expressing gratitude toward nature for,

‘...how could we *be* were it not for this planet that provided our very shape? ... The trees we climb and the ground we walk on have given us five fingers and toes. The ‘place’ (from the root *plat*, broad, spreading, flat) gave us far-seeing eyes, the streams and breezes gave us versatile tongues and whorly ears. The land gave us a stride, and the lake a dive. The amazement gave us our kind of mind. We should be thankful for that, and take nature’s stricter lessons with some grace.’³¹

VI. CONCLUSION

‘ego vivo in civitate, ergo sum’³²

Aristotle located the place of moral virtue in the *polis*. For him a community of practitioners was necessary for the proper development of a sound character. By extending the location of influence beyond the human community *per se* to include the nonhuman – as both Thoreau and Leopold do – we create a new precinct for responsibility wherein human behaviour, if it is to be virtuous, must take into account the world of nature *as a world of places*. Gratitude and respect reflect values and attitudes attached to local environments along with promoting harmony and wildness as the desired end. As defined here, place embodies value through transactions that, if undertaken virtuously, produce wildness and harmony. Gratitude and respect are but two ways to reach this desired human good. Other virtues have a place here too; temperance as altered patterns of consump-

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tion will in all likelihood lead to sustainable living, and humility as an increased awareness of our relative importance within the overall system should mitigate against arrogant interference (see Hill, 1983 and Frasz, 1993). No matter which environmental virtue we chose it will have a strong connection to a place. Place is the nexus where humans and nature realise wildness and harmony. Both Leopold and Thoreau admonish against too narrow and exclusive a relation to nature, since such a relation isolates rather than unifies. Thoreau remarks, 'To enjoy a thing exclusively is commonly to exclude yourself from the true enjoyment of it. Let us improve our opportunities, then, before the evil days come' (*Natural History Essays*, 'Walking': 104). Thoreau gave good counsel.

NOTES

¹ This passage is an instance of the Archytian Axiom, 'to be is to be in place; conversely, to be without place is not to be', which was widely accepted during classical antiquity. See Casey 1997: 274. Simplicius of Cilicia remarks that this axiom although logically valid is not true since it assumes the nonexistence of immaterial being. *Simplicius On Aristotle's Physics 4.1–5, 10–14*, at 521, 35–522,1. (A Heideggerian formulation of the Archytian Axiom might read 'to be is to-be-in-the-world'.)

² Aristotle claims that Plato in the *Timeaus* (and in his oral teachings and more esoteric writings) equates space with place and matter. See for example *Timeaus* 49a – 52c.

³ *Physics* 209a25–30. See *Simplicius* at 522, 15–20.

⁴ An alternative translation of this passage is, 'the first unchangeable limit of that which surrounds', Casey 1997: 272.

⁵ According to Aquinas, Aristotle says 'primarily' to distinguish proper place from common place. (*Commentary*, Book IV, Lecture 6, 470.) A thing is in its proper place when there is a kinship between it and its limit. Simplicius remarks, '...the cause of a body reasonably moving locally to its proper place is the kinship of the body the limit of which is its place to that in the place', 598, 10–15.

⁶ Iamblichus' Platonic reinterpretation of Aristotle maintained that place *qua* boundary defines bodies and is probably a source of existence. See *Simplicius*, p. 14, n. 14. Casey (1997: 275–6) mentions Iamblichus' neo-Platonism.

⁷ 'There is no real distinction between space, or the internal place, and the corporeal substance in it...The terms "place" and "space" then, do not signify anything different from the body which is said to be in place...' *Principles of Philosophy* II: 10 and 14. See Malpas 1998 for a condensed history of place in western philosophy.

⁸ There is a growing literature on the concept of place in environmental thought. The following works have been influential: Mark Sagoff (1992) 'Settling America or The Concept of Place in Environmental Ethics'; Bryan Norton and Bruce Hannon (1997) 'Environmental Values: A Place-Based Theory'; Black, Kunze and Pickles (1989) *Commonplaces: Essays on the Nature of Place*; Andrew Light and Jonathan Smith (1998) *Philosophies of Place*; Edward S. Casey (1993) *Getting Back Into Place*. Interest in place outside academic philosophy is witnessed by the following: Tony Hiss (1991) *The Experience of Place*; W. Cronon (1996) *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human*

Place in Nature; Daniel Botkin (2001) *No Man's Garden: Thoreau and a New Vision for Civilization and Nature*; Leonard Lutwack (1984) *The Role of Place in Literature*.

⁹ Marjorie Grene (1963: 158) states, 'In the Aristotelian universe...everything has its proper place, in modern jargon, its ecological niche...'. The proper place of humans is the *polis*. We are social animals, *polis* (our place) is part of the definition of human. In the *Politics* Aristotle begins constructing what today we might call an 'ethics of place' (normativisation of space). The state, founded on a natural impulse, is the primary place of human association (*politeia*). The best 'politeum' is one that provides the resources for and is a source of human flourishing. 'Hence it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity' (*Politics*, 1253a35).
¹⁰ Upon descending Mt. Katahdin, Thoreau remarked of the terrifying savagery of the area, 'It was vast, Titanic, and such as man never inhabits...Here was no man's garden, but an unhandseled globe. It was not lawn, nor pasture, nor mead, nor woodland, nor lea, nor arable, nor waste land.' It was not a place at all, lacking the ingredients for such a construction (*Maine Woods*, 60–61). Also see Botkin 2001 for a refreshing interpretation of Thoreau's thought.

¹¹ Michel Certeau (1984) doubts that urban areas admit of places as defined here, 'The moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place – an experience that is, to be sure, broken up into countless tiny deportations'.

¹² For problems of application see Geoffrey B. Frasz (1993) 'Environmental Virtue Ethics: A New Direction for Environmental Ethics'. For problems of competing values see Bill Shaw, (1997) 'A Virtue Ethics Approach to Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic'. Thomas Hill acknowledges the many shortcomings in traditional ethics when dealing with environmental issues, especially with attributions of intrinsic value to nature and opts for a virtue ethics. See Hill 1983: 212–214. Thoreau too was uninterested in applying intrinsic value to nature. See Daniel Botkin, *No Man's Garden*, 'I found little if any discussion in his writings of an intrinsic value of nature independent of the ability of human beings to benefit from it. Thus, of the...reasons to conserve nature, Thoreau would seem to have supported all but what is today called the moral' (Botkin 2001: 54).

¹³ See Jane Bennett, *Thoreau's Nature: Ethics, Politics, and the Wild*, for an in-depth discussion of Thoreau's microvisioning. Bennett 2000: 26–9.

¹⁴ From Thoreau's unpublished manuscripts, cited in 'Thoreau' by Ralph Waldo Emerson. For those who think character is ancillary to Thoreau's concern for individuality consider the following, 'A man's peculiar character appears in every feature and in every action ... Character is plenipotentiary and despotic. It rules in all things' (*Writings/Journal*, 3:5), as cited in Bennett 2000.

¹⁵ It is interesting to contrast this with Socrates statement in *Phaedrus*, '...I'm a lover of learning, and trees and open country won't teach me anything, whereas men in the town do' (230b–c.). Like Thoreau, Emerson too was distracted by those who did not know how to live or what to live for: 'This man had ploughed and planted, and talked, and bought, and sold; he had read books and eaten and drunken...yet there was no surmise, a hint, in all the discourse, that he had ever lived at all.' *Address*, 1838.

¹⁶ Paraphrasing Ben Jonson, Thoreau exclaims, 'How near to good is what is *wild!*' (*Natural History Essays*, 'Walking': 114) Granted wildness, unlike happiness, is not unique to humans, but that is the point to broaden the end of human action by connecting it intimately to the world of nature.

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¹⁷ Although Thoreau doesn't mention it we should not rule out the type of cooperation that develops through the process of natural selection wherein group members with a developed sense of cooperation are the 'fittest',

¹⁸ I use 'custodial' in the archaic sense of a vessel (like Aristotelian place) for preserving sacred objects. (*Oxford English Dictionary*) Thus, when humans inhabit nature they are called on to preserve wildness within themselves and their immediate environment.

¹⁹ This need not be understood teleologically where *Homo sapiens* occupy the pinnacle of some designed preordained creation. For an excellent historical exposition of this position see Clarence J. Glacken (1967) *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*. Like Thoreau, John Muir offers a similar accommodating view of man-in-nature: 'Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation? And what creature of all that the Lord has taken the pains to make is not essential to the completeness of that unit – the cosmos? The universe would be incomplete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge' (*A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*, 139).

²⁰ From the last two quotes one might want to interpret Thoreau as introducing what E.O. Wilson calls 'biophilia' and others, most notably Rene Dubos, refers to as an innate connection to landscape, in this case the savanna (see Dubos 1981). Wilson remarks of those who construct savanna-like environments that they, '...are responding to a deep genetic memory of mankind's optimal environment' (Wilson 1984: 111–12). We needn't travel the road of sociobiology and it is unlikely Thoreau did, but his idea of 'cultivated wildness' shares similarities to a bonding between nature and human culture. See also Gary Snyder's idea of 'civilisation of wildness', in *The Practice of the Wild* (1990).

²¹ Speaking of urban place, if such locations actually exist, David Macauley (2000: 27) states, '...walking tracks, outlines or traces a place through the continuous trail left by the moving body and memory of its motions'. This captures an aspect of the notion of place I have in mind.

²² '...happiness is an *activity* of the soul in accordance with perfect virtue' *Nicomachean Ethics* (1102a 5–10, hereafter *NE*); 'This is why the *activities* we exhibit must be of a certain kind; it is because the state of character correspond to the differences between these' *NE* (1103b 20–25); '...virtue is concerned with pleasures and pains, and that by the *acts* from which it arises...' *NE* (1105a 10–15); 'the activity, it seems, has a greater claim to be the function of man' (*NE* 1098a 5). For the various types of practical wisdom see *NE* (1141b 23–32).

²³ Agreeing with Leopold, Bill Shaw comments on the evolutionary interdependence of ecosystems, 'This accumulated wisdom, and the good sense of being guided by it, urges the expansion of our ethical universe beyond the bounds of the human community. After all, our existence and our culture are intricately bound to the land, and our continued well-being clearly depends upon recognition and strengthening of our ties to it' (Shaw 1997: 58).

²⁴ See Andrew Brennan (1988) *Thinking About Nature: An Investigation of Nature, Value and Ecology*, especially chapter 10, 'Puzzles About Value'; Bryan Norton (1987) *Why Preserve Natural Variety*, especially chapter 9, 'Nonanthropocentrism II: Species and Ecosystems'; Peter Wenz (1988) *Environmental Justice*, especially chapter 9, 'Biocentric Individualism and Ecocentric Holism'. These works are mostly responding to Paul Taylor's influential book *Respect for Nature* (1986). For an overview of this issue see

Joseph Des Jardins (2000) *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy*, chapter 7, 'Biocentric Ethics'.

²⁵ See *Conserving Natural Value* (1994). His comments on a virtue ethics approach to environmental ethics can be summed up as follows, 'If the virtue of human character really comes from appreciating another, nonhuman form of life, then why not attach intrinsic value to this alien life? Let the human virtue be a corollary to that. Why praise only the virtue in the human beholder?' (Rolston 1994: 164).

²⁶ These quotations are cited in Bennett 2000, on p. 19.

²⁷ If called upon I would characterise the value in nature as inherent. Inherent valuation recognises that something has value beyond the merely instrumental but stops short of intrinsic valuation. An object has inherent value when it is valued for its own sake but does not have value in itself – valuers are required. Heirlooms provide an interesting example of inherent value. They have special value, prized for their own sake, yet they need someone to do the prizing in this case a family member (See Chapman, *International Journal of Water*, Vol.1, No. 2, 2001, 167–177). Also see J. Baird Callicott, who argues for an 'anthropogenic' theory of value, wherein human consciousness is the source of all value yet it is similar to inherent value as defined here. See 'On the Intrinsic Value of Nonhuman Species' (Callicott 1993: 66–70).

²⁸ See especially Taylor 1986. Taylor's position is, 'The central tenet of the theory of environmental ethics that I am defending is that actions are right and character traits are morally good in virtue of their expressing or embodying a certain ultimate moral attitude, which I call respect for nature' (Taylor 1986: 80).

²⁹ I have in mind mutualism, a type of symbiosis wherein two (or more) species interact in ways that benefit both.

³⁰ Unfortunately, Aristotle doesn't discuss gratitude. He does speak of kindness, which possesses many of the characteristics of gratitude. See *Rhetoric* 1385a 15.

³¹ 'The Place, the Region, and the Commons' (in Zimmerman 2001: 473–4). Thomas Hill (1983) speaks of gratitude toward nature, but his Kantian approach leaves connection with the natural world an indirect relation.

³² 'I live in community, therefore I am'. I borrowed this from Tom Regan's wonderful book *The Thee Generation: Reflections on the Coming Revolution* (1991), p. 3.

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