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BETWEEN NATURE AND CULTURE

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## Between Nature and Culture:

### The place of the garden in narrative approaches to environmental value.

*The garden must always work in a changeable space somewhere between wildness and humanity, between Nature and Culture.<sup>1</sup>*

#### Preamble.

What has gardening to do with environmentalism? The aim of this paper is to begin to defend one kind of response to that question. I want to defend the claim that we might usefully learn to see contemporary environmentalism as, amongst other things, a moment in the history of gardening.<sup>2</sup> No doubt that claim could do with considerable clarification; surrounding it with many caveats might have been advisable. However, I trust that the meaning of my claim will become clearer in the course of this paper and so shall only discuss one further caveat at this stage.

It has sometimes been rather dismissively suggested that conservation is nothing more than 'glorified gardening'. One of the things that I aim to show is that any such dismissal would be unwarranted. The value of conservation does not stand or fall with whether it may be seen as a form of gardening or not.

The rhetorical force of this ('glorified gardening') accusation seems to lie with the combination of three separate factors. It lies partly with the fact that conservation does indeed have a gardening aspect, it can be seen as a form of gardening. If someone says that conservation is a form of gardening, we can see what they are 'getting at'. Second, the 'force' of the charge lies partly in its presentation of conservation as gardening 'in denial'. Third, it lies also in the assumption that being 'in denial' is constitutive of conservation's capacity to take itself seriously, and to present itself as meaningful. This combination threatens to 'wrong foot' conservation, because it implicitly embodies the idea that conservation must deny that it has a gardening aspect, or concede to dismissal. Yet neither conservation, nor other forms of environmentalism - with the possible exception of 'wilderness fundamentalism' - need deny (or otherwise suppress) any resemblance that they may have to, or any serious connections that they may have with, gardening and gardens in order to present themselves as meaningful, or to take themselves seriously. Of course, even if we accept that conservation and other forms

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<sup>1</sup> Sacred Gardens. p14. Jeremy Robinson.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper I shall repeatedly refer either to gardens or gardening; often when I do so I shall tend to have both in mind, although in different ways. It should also be borne in mind that although it is primarily the histories of gardens and gardening that I am referring to these are not histories that are in the habit of maintaining distinct boundaries from, for example, the histories of farms and farming or forests and forestry. Further, the history of gardens is deeply bound up with the history of other cultural expressions and arts, and especially with the histories of painting and poetry. Nonetheless I believe that placing particular emphasis on the history of gardens and gardening can be justified in the attempt to understand aspects of contemporary environmentalism.

of environmentalism can look like, may be seen as, forms of gardening, the question remains: *do* they have any such connections with it? In this paper I shall begin to develop my argument that they do. Further I shall be claiming that recognising, accepting, and understanding those connections may help, rather than hinder, the fuller development of an informed and mature environmental values debate.

I propose to proceed by elaborating and defending the following three claims.<sup>3</sup>

- 1) Environmental ethics will remain inadequate to its proper task until such a time as it develops the resources to address in a positive way problems pertaining to the ‘environmental value’ of artefacts.
- 2) Environments and environmental values are both in significant senses historical phenomena, and so each needs to be addressed with sensitivity to their respective diachronic dimensions.
- 3) The deployment of insights and resources from the ‘Aristotelian’ tradition of virtue ethics is capable of shedding much needed light upon certain problems of, and in, environmental values debates.<sup>4</sup>

This will allow me to cultivate a sense of a certain set of problems and questions, which will in turn help allow me to cultivate a sense of the place that I see for gardens and gardening in narrative approaches to environmental value. For the positive claim I am making here is that situating contemporary environmentalism as, amongst other things, a moment in the history of gardening opens the way to a wealth of materials and resources which whilst neither ‘disposing’ of the problems, nor ‘answering’ all of our questions, will enhance the intelligibility of our situation with regard to these, and so help us as we attempt to fathom how best to go on.

### *The exclusion of artefacts from the environment.*

With regard to the first of the above claims a number of different kinds of arguments could be given. Here I confine myself to some reflections on the central place that has been given to ‘nature’ in the environmental ethics literature, and to some implications of this, given the way that the operative conception of ‘nature’ has been developed there.

In *The Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic* Tom Regan, for example, begins by

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<sup>3</sup> Although each claim may be accepted or rejected independently, this paper looks to the implications of their combination.

<sup>4</sup> There is a minor difficulty with terminology here. The term “Aristotelian” implies a kind and degree of adherence to Aristotle’s own philosophical framework which, frankly, is not a ‘live option’ for (sane) persons living in the ‘modern world’. The term “neo-Aristotelian” has come to be associated with a body of commitments which I do not share, hence I retain here the unmodified term but place it in scare quotes.

asking,

Is an environmental ethic possible? Answers to this kind of question presuppose that we have an agreed upon understanding of the nature of an environmental ethic.<sup>5</sup>

In closing the same paper he tells us;

If I am right, the development of what can properly be called an environmental ethic requires that we postulate inherent value in nature.<sup>6</sup>

The same kind of general stance is evident in the following statement from J. Baird Callicott,

the central and most recalcitrant problem for environmental ethics is the problem of constructing an adequate theory of intrinsic value for non-human natural entities and for nature as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

Rather than continue multiplying examples - the literature contains them in abundance - I wish to turn now to the kind of way in which the concept of nature has (all too often) been developed and deployed.

There has been a tendency to provide a formula for nature by means of setting up an opposition with art; thus art and its product 'the artefact' are excluded. This move is, perhaps, innocent enough. As an attempt to 'get at' nature it has something correct about it; and it draws something from the cares and concerns we have for the phenomena in question. As an account of the 'nature' that we encounter and care for, however, it is under-determined, and may be more than a little misleading. Thus it may also direct our thinking, and so our theories and analyses, away from the phenomena. When environmental ethics is constituted on the basis of this concept various problems may arise, one of which I shall address now. This is the problem of the exclusion of the artefact, not only from nature, but also from environmental ethics as such. I shall now briefly examine one example of the way in which this comes about.

My example is taken from an essay by Eric Katz.<sup>8</sup> The reason for this choice is that within this piece the issues and problems are particularly accessible; but the patterns of thought that make for these problems are endemic, and typically culminate in advanced cases of a condition which might be called 'environment/nature reductionism'.

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<sup>5</sup> Regan, 'The Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic.' *Environmental Ethics* 3 (1982) p19.

<sup>6</sup> Regan op cit. p34.

<sup>7</sup> J. Baird Callicott.. Opening lines of abstract to "Intrinsic Value, Quantum Theory and Environmental Ethics. *EE* vol. 7 (1985) p257.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Katz, *Artefacts and Functions: A note on the Value of Nature*. *Environmental Values* (1993):223-32.

It is ..... important to understand how and why human creations or artefacts are different from natural entities. Without a proper understanding of the distinction we shall lack a basis for a moral environmental policy.<sup>9</sup>

Moving from the claim that a human intention is a necessary condition for the existence of an artefact Katz all too swiftly arrives at the following conclusions:<sup>10</sup>

Artefacts are instruments or tools for the betterment of human life. They can only be understood as anthropocentric instruments.<sup>11</sup>

Natural entities on the other hand are seen as intrinsically functionless,<sup>12</sup> and are the spontaneous productions of nature. Nature is construed by Katz as an autonomous subject, and the infringement of this subject's autonomy may thus be seen as domination:<sup>13</sup>

Intervention in nature creates environments based on models of human desire. This is the human project of the domination of nature: the reconstruction of nature in our own image, to suit human goals and purposes.<sup>14</sup>

As Katz goes on to develop the implications of his analysis we are confronted with his discovery that “sustainable forestry is not an appropriate improvement over short-term development, for both policies treat the forest as an artefact”<sup>15</sup>. That this is not an accidental effect is made particularly clear when Katz tells us of his plan:

[T]he Leopoldian environmental ethic that I seek to elaborate will exclude so-called “living artifacts”, such as domesticated animals, biologically engineered

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<sup>9</sup> Katz, op cit., p225.

<sup>10</sup> Katz, op cit., p223. It might also be thought that Katz's specification of a *human* intention is a bit too swift, for this move *automatically* excludes the productions of all other species. Whatever judgements we finally make about that matter it really ought not to be settled by the very definition of the artefact.

<sup>11</sup> Katz, op cit., p.224. It does not appear to have crossed Katz's mind that when he includes ideas as artefacts (p.225) he by implication condemns his own 'non-anthropocentric' ethic to the status of an essentially anthropocentric device. Something that, had he noticed it, might have served to alert him to problems within his analysis.

<sup>12</sup> Katz, op cit., p224-225.

<sup>13</sup> Katz, op cit., p230-231. This construal of nature as an autonomous subject seems to have been required by Katz's attempt to develop his account of our duties to 'natural value' in terms of Kant's moral philosophy. That this attempt is misconceived becomes plain when Katz claims that “Kant teaches us that the possibility of moral consideration lies in an entity's independence from rational control and design ....”. (p230) What Kant in fact taught was that both autonomy *and* moral considerability lie in an entity's capacity *for rational control* of itself; only thus does the injunction against control by others arise in his work. (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*) Katz's appeal that we should be “willing to look beyond the boundaries of the human rational subject” (p229) is of no avail here. Whilst Kant's account does apply to non-human rational subjects it, in principle, could not have application to non-rational subjects.

<sup>14</sup> Katz, op cit., p223.

<sup>15</sup> Katz, op cit., p.226.

species, and forest plantations. These human created entities have no place in an environmental ethic since they are not natural entities.<sup>16</sup>

Consider, for example, the fate of an area such as the New Forest (of southern England) in such a scheme. Cooper describes the New Forest as “a unique area of historical, ecological and agricultural significance,” but allows that although “a beautiful area” it is “not ‘natural’ in the sense of untouched by man.” Firstly, the New Forest was planted; a long time ago admittedly, but planted it was. Secondly, throughout its long history it has been the site of sustained and considerable human intervention. From monastic farms and boat-building in the past, to pasture for ponies and tourists in the present, it has constantly been caught up in the plans, productions and actions of human beings.<sup>17</sup>

Such a site is clearly an artefact in Katz’s sense of the term. If it is an artefact then it is not a natural entity. If it is not a natural entity then it has no place in environmental ethics. So it’s good-bye to the applicability of environmental ethics to the New Forest. It is, apparently, as simple as that.<sup>18</sup>

Now, of course, we could try to alleviate this problem in a number of ways. We could, for example, subject the notion of nature to a little therapy, we could ‘re-configure its parameters’ and ‘re-run the programme’. We could diversify our classificatory scheme by introducing new and more subtle categories. This might yield some benefits; done properly I am confident that it would. Although I have my doubts as to whether it could, for example, succeed in making the New Forest natural. Thus, I would argue that no matter which way we ‘carve the pie’ there are always going to be some artefacts that we need to be able to think about within the terms and scope of environmental ethics (not all of which need be ‘living artefacts’).

We may easily find ourselves pondering the options with regard to a range of possibilities all of which are artificial, yet where the question of what we ought to do next remains relevant from the standpoint of environmental concern. (The structural inability of Katz’s position to address the differences between sustainable forestry and short-term development as differences that matter *within* environmental ethics is surely telling in this regard.) We need to be able to think about the possibility, at least, of non-natural entities which have ‘environmental value’ to a greater or lesser extent. We may even need to contemplate the possibility of artefacts that are positive embodiments of environmental virtue, and just what that might be with regard to artefacts.<sup>19</sup> As such, we need an environmental ethics which can embrace artefacts, and not one which simply excludes them.

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<sup>16</sup> Katz, op cit., p229.

<sup>17</sup>The New Forest was created in 1079 on the orders of William I (‘the Conqueror/the Bastard’) to provide hunting grounds. The current legal boundaries of the forest include an area of 145 square mile, almost half of which is open forest. Details of the current state of the forest (including numerous photographs), and of its history may be found on Graham Cooper’s extensive web-pages, which are sponsored by Hampshire County Council, and may be found at <http://www.hants.org.uk/newforest/>, (1999).

<sup>18</sup> It might be thought that my choice of example is the real source of the problem here. In which case I would urge the reader to compile a list of sites within the European context that *would* satisfy Katzian criteria for inclusion in environmental ethics. The list, if one could be produced at all, would be very short indeed.

<sup>19</sup> I say ‘contemplate’ rather than ‘make’ because it is not clear that we could ever quite produce an artefact that was itself the fullest realisation of these possibilities. Yet thinking about such artifacts could be of considerable importance, the idea of such an artifact might, for example, serve as a ‘regulative ideal’.

Here a start might be made by briefly challenging some of the claims that Katz has made about artefacts. Torture-racks are artefacts, yet the claim that they are tools for the betterment of human life is surely questionable. The claim that artefacts can *only* be understood as anthropocentric instruments looks to involve an arbitrary restriction, one which may have been imposed for the sake of a certain conclusion. Nesting-boxes provide one counter-example to it; they are made *by* humans, but *for* birds. Such artefacts may well contribute to the betterment of human life; yet ‘understanding’ them solely in terms of anthropocentrism and instrumentality represents a failure to understand them, and the kind of possibilities that receive limited but concrete realisation in them, at all well. Further, the values that may properly be attributed to an artefact are not always circumscribed by the values and purposes of those who produce them, as the habits of those birds that press other kinds of artefacts into service as ‘nesting-boxes’ will serve to testify. Reflection upon such counter-examples may suggest a number of avenues for exploration in re-thinking the place of artefacts in environmental values.

I now turn to my second claim, and the subject of ‘diachronic integrity’ in relation to environmental matters.

*Time, Nature and Integrity: some more problems.*<sup>20</sup>

Katz’s treatment proceeded via an account of naturalness, and relied on the ‘recognition’ that everything that meets the criteria for it thereby has something he called ‘natural value’. That method, as we saw, is problematic: it excludes too much. Many kinds of environment that we do in fact value, and which should be included in environmental ethics, do not pass the ‘naturalness test’. This difficulty is not confined to ‘problem cases’ such as the New Forest. The application of such theories to the very ‘wilderness’ sites that they were designed to explain the value of, often requires the suppression of the facts of history. One culture’s ‘wilderness,’ it transpires, is very often the product of another culture’s interactions with, and impact upon, the land. On a different level such a treatment threatens to include too much. This is so because it seems to require that we ‘recognise’ that any and all states of affairs, actual and possible, that might arise independently of human intention have this ‘natural value’.

In response to these and other difficulties an alternative strategy for addressing nature in environmental ethics has been proposed, ‘the narrative approach’. This approach aims at beginning with the actualities of nature and its value as encountered ‘in the midst of history,’ with an eye not only to the non-human origins of nature, but also to the importance of developments within ‘the story so far’:

Thus, the problem is, or ought to be construed as, the problem of how best to continue the narrative; and the question we should ask is: what would make the most appropriate trajectory from what has gone before?<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> This section of the paper draws, quite substantially, on work done by Holland and O’Neill in their paper, ‘The Integrity of Nature Over Time: some problems’. (Thingmount Working Papers 96-08).

<sup>21</sup> Holland and O’Neill, op cit p.3.

The adoption of this stance lends itself to the endorsement of a distinctive characterisation of the conservationist's project:

conservation is .... about preserving the future *as a realisation of the potential of the past* ..... [it] is about negotiating the transition from past to future in such a way as to secure the maximum transfer of significance.<sup>22</sup>

In their modest development of the practical implications of adopting a narrative approach to conservation Holland and O'Neill eschew the provision of an elaborate theoretical framework of guidelines. Moving instead in a broadly 'Aristotelian' direction, they indicate the importance of understanding particular situations, introduce an analogue of 'the doctrine of the mean,' and emphasise that each decision here "is a matter, in short, of deliberative judgement, not a matter of algorithmic calculation according to some formula".<sup>23</sup> Support for this broadly 'Aristotelian' line of thought is drawn from "the UK's old Nature Conservancy Council",

The standards of nature conservation value thus became established through practice and precedents based on collective wisdom.<sup>24</sup>

That this kind of strategy is better placed for dealing with the kind of problems encountered in environments saturated with the effects of long term, and perhaps intensive, human habitation and activity should be clear enough.<sup>25</sup> That it is, in part, aimed at enabling thought about the relations between nature and artefacts is apparent in the choice of the particular problems discussed by Holland and O'Neill in the opening stages of their paper. (A washing line on a damaged thingmount and its ongoing place in a farmyard; rare butterflies flourishing under artificially induced conditions; and the fate of workmen's huts and their contents, abandoned in a disused slate quarry). Even so, because of the centrality (quite rightly) given to a diachronic account of nature in that discussion the issues with regard to artefacts are not developed thematically. Precisely because the artefact has a central place in the constitution of the problem, but remains largely at the margins of even a narrative account of *nature*, it is also an aspect of the problem that largely remains over.

Whilst respecting the need for situated judgement in these things, I believe that this aspect of the problem may usefully be developed at the theoretical level. In attempting to make some headway with it I shall now intensify the 'Aristotelian' element already present in this narrative approach. In doing so I move in the direction of my third claim, whilst staying, for the moment, with the topic of narratives. After which I shall clarify a few points by presenting a very brief outline of some of Aristotle's ideas about ethics and 'physics' (the study of natural beings) and their implications for our topic. At which point I shall (finally) be in a position to explain the place that I see for gardens in narrative approaches to environmental value.

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<sup>22</sup> Holland and O'Neill, *ibid.*, (citing Holland and Rawles *The Ethics of Conservation*. Thingmount Series, No 1.)

<sup>23</sup> Holland and O'Neill, *op cit* p4.

<sup>24</sup> cited by Holland and O'Neill, *op cit* footnote 5, p.4.

<sup>25</sup> This should, in the first instance, be clear enough simply because such a strategy (unlike that favoured by Katz) is able to include and address such problems as problems for environmental ethics.

*The Story according to Alasdair MacIntyre.*

In *After Virtue*, a classic of contemporary ethics, MacIntyre attempts, with some success, to bring about a fusion of Aristotelian virtue ethics and ‘the narrative approach’ to things.<sup>26</sup> Arguing that the intelligibility of our encounters with world, and the intelligibility of our actions within it, depend upon the stories that we tell ourselves about what-it-is that we are doing, MacIntyre draws attention to the diachronic structure of these stories:

There is no present which is not informed by some image of some future and an image of the future which always presents itself in the form of a *telos* - or of a variety of ends or goals - to which we are either moving or failing to move in the present. Unpredictability and teleology therefore coexist as part of our lives; like characters in a fictional narrative we do not know what will happen next, but nonetheless our lives have a certain form which projects itself towards our future. If the narrative of our individual and social lives is to continue intelligibly ..... it is always both the case that there are constraints upon how the story can continue *and* that within those constraints there are indefinitely many ways in which it can continue.<sup>27</sup>

This view of the present as informed by future possibilities is then linked to the past, and the importance of ‘diachronic integrity’ is stressed:

[T]he story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past ..... is to deform my present relationships. .... What I am, therefore, is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present.<sup>28</sup>

Thus what we are is “in key part” something that ‘comes down to us’ from the past, it is upon the basis of our past that we project our future possibilities and in doing so make the present intelligible. (A down-to-earth example may help to clarify the point here. ‘Tea-drinking’ has a past which has come down to me, and it is the projected possibility of my ‘having a nice cuppa’ that makes sense of my going to ‘put the kettle on’ now; and that little episode or ‘mini-narrative’ takes place within the context of other, longer, narratives, and so on. Just how much sense attaches to my going to ‘put the kettle’ on now will depend upon the way in which my project of ‘having a nice cuppa’ in about ten minutes time gels, or fails to gel, with the wider and longer running narratives that I am involved in.)

Moving through a consideration of shared practices, and the virtues that sustain them, as

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<sup>26</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Duckworth (2nd edition 1985). See especially chapter 15. “The Virtues, the Unity of a Human life and the Concept of a Tradition”.

<sup>27</sup> MacIntyre op cit. p.215-216.

<sup>28</sup> MacIntyre op cit. p.221.

historically embedded in a similar way to the persons who move within them MacIntyre arrives at the conception of “an additional virtue”, that “of having an adequate sense of the traditions to which one belongs or which confront one.”<sup>29</sup> Reflect here upon the way that *something of this kind* is an implicit pre-condition of standards becoming “established through practice and precedents based on collective wisdom”. Also reflect upon how it may have a role in helping “to secure the maximum transfer of significance” when negotiating the “infinitely many ways” in which the story can continue within the bounds of intelligibility.

What MacIntyre intends by ‘tradition’ stands in need of clarification. He wishes to distance himself from those who have contrasted “tradition with reason and the stability of tradition with conflict”:

For all reasoning takes place within the context of some traditional mode of thought, transcending through criticism and invention the limitations of what had previously been reasoned in that tradition; this is as true of modern physics as of medieval logic. Moreover when a tradition is in good order it is always partially constituted by an argument about the goods the pursuit of which gives to that tradition its point or purpose.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, to re-cap, the person faced with choices and decisions is situated in ongoing narratives grounded in practices which are themselves embedded in traditions, traditions which are partially constituted by debate about the proper goals of the tradition. Notice though that whilst MacIntyre’s account shares with conservatism the element of “preserving the future as a realisation of the potential of the past” it also brings out in a thematic way something else that deserves our attention here. It brings out the fact that the present is illuminated by some envisaged future, which takes the form of a *telos*, a goal or set of goals. Whilst the goal of continuing the narrative as best we can is laudable, our being able to continue the narrative at all, and the bestowal of intelligibility of actions and choices made in the present, requires that we also have other goals, and some kind of grasp of them.

Whilst it is not my intention to attempt to set forth here a determinate and substantive account of the goals we should be pursuing, I do think that something quite general or formal can usefully be wrung from a consideration of the phenomena that are already involved. We are dealing with diachronic integrity, and we have seen that it has application both to nature and to our own lives. We are seeking to continue the narrative as best we can, and it is a narrative

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<sup>29</sup> MacIntyre op cit. p.223.

<sup>30</sup> MacIntyre op cit. p.221. It should, perhaps, be noted that MacIntyre’s overall position still tends toward a degree and kind of ‘communitarian traditionalism’ that many, myself included, perceive as too restrictive. Heavy emphasis upon this passage thus seems advisable when dealing with his work. The work of another writer heavily influenced by Aristotle and also given to a ‘story-telling’ approach, namely Hannah Arendt, may usefully be invoked to offset some of the difficulties associated with the details of MacIntyre’s narrative ‘Aristotelianism’. I mention this in passing, rather than dealing with it in detail, or drawing on Arendt in the first place because Arendt’s work is rather less accessible than MacIntyre’s, is more centrally concerned with politics than ethics, and would anyway require comment and comparison to offset some difficulties with her approach.. Briefly stated, whereas MacIntyre tends to view the main work of narrative as the maintenance of tradition, Arendtian ‘story-telling’ is a way of illuminating the present which retrieves and confronts us with ‘pearls’ of wisdom and ‘treasures’ of insight from a tradition which has, to significant degree, failed. Thus without ever leaving the circuit of the idea of the present as ‘between past and future’ Arendt emphasises our ongoing ‘natality’, our capacity to (in a narratively nuanced sense) ‘begin again’.

that involves both nature and human existence. This much was already explicit in Holland and O'Neill's account and can, for example, be seen in their consideration of the historical arrival of 'exotic' species at Respossaari - species "which were able to flourish in the coastal climate of Finland":

The history of human activity is part of the narrative of the natural history of the area. The idea that the proper way to continue the narrative is to cleanse the area of any seed of human origin in the name of biological or ecological integrity strikes us as quite wrong, and would be properly resisted by local biologists and inhabitants of the area.<sup>31</sup>

This kind of point surfaces a number of times and is, at one level, a core idea of their paper. The "empty hills of highland Scotland" we are reminded have their emptiness because those who lived there "were driven from their homes in the clearances", the memory of these people should be respected, their "now delapidated cottages .... should perhaps remain", perhaps the massive statue of the Duke of Sutherland should be removed, not only on aesthetic grounds but also because of what it represents to the local descendants of those driven out.<sup>32</sup> This theme receives a more abstract and principled formulation when possible objections from 'nature restorationists' are pre-empted:

If ... we simply imagine humans removed, then we have an incoherent situation: there would be a hole (because humans were in fact there), and it is well known that there cannot be a hole in nature because nature abhors a vacuum.<sup>33</sup>

The tone of these comments is explicitly directed to the past and the need to take that past into account, and that is a quite proper concern for a narrative approach. However, we should note that there is an implicit reference to the future in these examples, a reference which is explicit in their context. (How best to *continue* .... ) It is a future which also features humans, as does the present. Thus to do justice to the story, to continue it well, we need to keep in mind that persons and artefacts are already a part of it, and will continue to be so. Whilst postulating a future that for a given area does not include the presence of humans and artefacts does not have quite the same kind of incoherence as imagining a past without them, it would in many cases have incoherences of its own. In some cases it may be either unrealistic or unjust, it could quite easily be both. Thus if we are not to have some fairly abhorrent gaps in our understanding of these issues we need to be envisaging (at least some) futures which include and relate nature and humans, and so also include the relation of artefacts to nature, because to imagine that one can really include humans and exclude artefacts would be just one more incoherence.<sup>34</sup>

With the above points in mind, a second characterisation of conservation may now be added; one which might reasonably be taken to indicate a good that its author would bid us include

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<sup>31</sup> Holland and O'Neill, op cit. p.11.

<sup>32</sup> Holland and O'Neill, op cit. p.5.

<sup>33</sup> Holland and O'Neill, op cit. p.6.

<sup>34</sup> I do not intend to imply that Holland and O'Neill were suggesting anything so incoherent; far from it. As indicated above I seek to draw attention to a facet of the narrative approach to environmental issues which was not explicated and made thematic in their presentation.

when envisaging futures:

Conservation is a state of harmony between men and the land.<sup>35</sup>

What else may be said? Well, in a purely formal way, we may say that if the aim is to continue such narratives as best as we can then the factors involved should be related in a way which is good. We can re-state this and give it just a little more content by saying that the ‘envisaged futures’ must be such that they can be seen as embodying goods or goals that we may properly commend as worth moving towards, worth realising. Which is, in turn, to say that we must be prepared to provide reasons for the view that this is *a set* of goods that we should be pursuing, and that the goodness of the goods involved is partially constituted by their having the right kind of relation to each other.

The ‘realisation’ here is to be the realisation of the potential of the past, and it has to integrate within that realisation the realisation of the potentials of humans *and* the realisation of the potentials of nature. That way of presenting the matter may yet be too ‘itemised’ and too abstract. Perhaps we could say ‘the realisation of the historically actualisable potentials of humans-and-nature’, where it is acknowledged and taken to heart that each of these ‘moments’ (ie. humans, nature,) of the relation to be realised is, to a significant extent, what it actually is, what it historically is, because of the way it is, and has been, related to the other. We might on such a view say that best realisation of human potentials involved, and involved caring for, the realisation of nature’s potentials.

### A problem.

We can, anyway, without going quite that far, say that we are looking to integrate in a harmonious way the realisation of the potentials of nature *and* the potentials of human beings, to preserve their *shared* future as the realisation of the potentials of the past. Let us turn then to the matter of ‘the potentials of the past’,

Once again the narrative phenomenon of embedding is crucial: the history of a practice in our time is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer history of the tradition through which the practice in its present form was conveyed to us; the history of each of our lives is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible

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<sup>35</sup> Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* p.207. (OUP 1968) It is abundantly clear from the context, as well as the tone, of this characterisation that Leopold did not intend as a report of the facts about conservation at the time of writing. I would suggest, and believe the immediate context supports, reading it in terms of a the goal, or end, of conservation, as Leopold understood it. Leopold’s repeated references to “the good life,” (See, for example, p.154.), his (metaphorical?) claim that “ontogeny repeats phylogeny in society as well as the individual,” (p.177-178) and emphasis upon the role of history and culture, (ibid) indicate other possible points of convergence with the narrative approach. His construal of ‘sportsmanship’ as a virtue (in a robust sense of the term) concerned in part with the appropriate choice of weaponry for hunting trips indicates a concern for the relationship of artefacts to nature, albeit in a limited sphere. (p.177-178) (Although Leopold decried the use of ‘gadgets’ in hunting it should be kept in mind that even the home-made bow that he favoured in later years was an artefact.)

in terms of the large and longer histories of a number of traditions.<sup>36</sup>

There is surely a problem here about the deeper intelligibility of environmentalism in the narrative mode. Where is that intelligibility that comes from being embedded in, and drawing upon larger and longer traditions of collective wisdom in this case? We saw above that reasoning may lead to a transcendence of a tradition's previous achievements; is environmentalism then a moment of pure transcendence? Well, perhaps the answer to that question is "Yes". According to some, environmental values sprang into existence sometime around 1962 with, or soon after, the publication of Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring".<sup>37</sup> If this is so, though, we must face up to certain difficulties for the narrative approach as I have sketched it. Firstly, this 'new movement' is frequently self-characterised by its rejection of the past and 'Western traditions'; it seeks to be a realisation of the potentials of *rejecting* our past.<sup>38</sup> Secondly, it very frequently characterises its goals in terms that require the radical separation of the potentials of nature, and the potentials (construed as 'interests') of humans. To state the point somewhat starkly; if we accept this 'environmentalism as pure transcendence' type of view *and* opt for a narrative approach we shall either be (*ex hypothesi*) continuing narratives which have no meaningful environmental thread to them, or we shall be trying to continue a narrative that has little or no past, and which also has a marked tendency to the hyper-separation of humans and nature. Most likely we would be left trying to do both at once whilst attempting to keep the two at arms length from each-other. That is, implicitly 'keeping faith' with a view that sees the development of 'human interests' as (necessarily?) involving the domination of nature, whilst also aiming at an end to 'the domination of nature'. Which in turn sponsors the creation of a radical, and perhaps insurmountable, separation between ethics in general on the one hand, and environmental ethics on the other.<sup>39</sup>

### *A common or garden remedy.*

Now it certainly would not do to pretend that recent developments in environmental values have been anything less than profoundly significant. On the other hand it will not be helpful to pretend that earlier history has nothing to offer in terms of understanding these relatively recent developments. Indeed, according to the general stance on 'the intelligibility of the present' that tends to underpin narrative approaches, a failure to appreciate the history of the values that we bear today, and the importance of understanding that history, would tend to culminate in a kind of self-inflicted counter-intelligence.<sup>40</sup> It could be the case then, that at least some of the difficulties we encounter with our environmental values arise from a failure to appreciate their past. It could be that we - in MacIntyre's terms - are lacking that additional virtue of having an adequate sense of the traditions to which we belong, even if we have an overwhelming sense of certain of the traditions which confront us. Perhaps there is too little on one side of the balance, too much on the other; if so this would be more like having an

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<sup>36</sup> MacIntyre, op cit., p222.

<sup>37</sup> See eg. Warwick Fox "Toward a Transpersonal Ecology" (Shambala, 1990), p4. (Although it is not quite clear to what extent Fox himself holds this view, he does report it as a typical dating).

<sup>38</sup> Or at least a very great deal of it. See eg. Fox, who indicates that the 'Western tradition' between the time of the pre-Socratics (pre-fifth century b.c.) and the arrival of Heidegger's late period (mid twentieth century a.d.) has somewhere between little and nothing to offer, op cit., p.7-9.

<sup>39</sup> See eg. Sylvan and Bennett, who explicitly endorse the idea of a "narrow," specifically environmental, ethic, which exists in radical separation from the consideration of other ethical issues. *The Greening of Ethics*, (The White Horse Press 1994) p.90.

<sup>40</sup> See, for one example, MacIntyre op cit., ch 1 "A Disquieting Suggestion". In which 'post-enlightenment' morality is diagnosed as thoroughly confused as a result of its misunderstanding of its 'own' origins.

additional vice, than an additional virtue.

Now, perhaps, the reader can see why someone ‘in the grip of a theory’ such as this, and in mounting desperation, might just be driven to postulate the idea that the intelligibility of contemporary environmentalism is enhanced by situating it within the larger and longer tradition of gardening. ‘Any old port in a storm’!

However, things are either not as bad as all that, or else they are much worse. For what I am claiming is that the historical traditions of gardens and gardening really are important in understanding the development of contemporary environmental values, and hence, from a narrative standpoint, are important in the understanding of those values themselves and their forms of expression. It is not that these histories will serve as a surrogate in the absence of any genuine contenders; they genuinely do have a role to play in helping us to think through ‘how best to continue the narrative’. This, again, is not an attempt to move against Holland and O’Neill’s advocacy of situated judgement over algorithm and pre-constructed system. It is rather an attempt to indicate one of the ways in which such judgements might become situated within a broader tradition, and so enable us to draw upon any insights or collective wisdom that may be found there. (Once more I would stress MacIntyre’s observation that when a tradition is in good order it is partially constituted by argument about the goods that it pursues.)

Just as the intelligibility of nature is enhanced by bearing in mind the diachronic dimension of nature, the intelligibility of environmental values may also be enhanced by bearing in mind the diachronic dimension and their development within it. Within the histories and traditions of gardens and gardening we may find the basis of one kind of narrative account within which the relationships between humans and nature, and nature and art, are worked out and played out - in theory and practice, and with constant reference to those very relationships, on and with regard to the land, in and beyond the garden. Certainly there are many factors at work in the changes in this history, and in the processes that lead to them, which have their origins outside of the garden. Yet the garden remains a kind of focal point for understanding these things in relation to the land and attitudes towards it, even in such cases. Further, as one builds an acquaintance with these histories one continually encounters evidence that the meaning and significance of land and nature beyond the garden is conditioned and modified in direct relation to, and sometimes as a consequence of, the emergence of new trends and developments in garden design, practice and experience.

Before coming back to these histories, it seems advisable to clarify certain points by means of a quick summary of some themes in Aristotle’s own work. I shall be addressing these in terms of their implications for our topic, especially with reference to MacIntyre’s emphasis upon the importance of ‘envisaged futures,’ and the kind of future that might be envisaged by those pursuing a narrative approach to conservation. (This will complete my treatment here of my third claim.)

### *A Passion for Nature?*

Firstly, Aristotle's ethics is very largely concerned with the virtuous, or 'excellent', character.<sup>41</sup> Virtue of character is understood in terms of certain traits the possession of which tends to promote flourishing. This flourishing is *eudaimonia*, "living and faring well", or 'happiness', and is understood to be the proper goal of human existence. It is also understood to be a richly complex affair; it includes a wide range of goods such as friendship, active citizenship, understanding and contemplation, as well as requiring the acquisition of a certain limited but necessary range of material goods and resources that make such a life possible.<sup>42</sup> With Aristotle then ethics is, broadly speaking, about leading a worthwhile life; having the virtues helps that to happen, and virtuous activity itself is inherently worthwhile. Thus MacIntyre's 'arguments about goods' are, ultimately, arguments about constitutive components of our well-being and the means necessary to them; and the "envisaged futures" which illuminate the present by functioning as a *telos* or collection of goals take the form of what Aristotle called 'an idea of the life to be lived'.

The implication here would be that the serious conservationist or environmentalist sees the realisation of certain relations with nature, or movement towards these, as goods to be achieved, goals to be accomplished, and that these things have a place in their conception of what it is for them to live a worthwhile life. To move this beyond the sphere of 'existential choice' one need not claim that any human life which is not the active life of a conservationist or environmentalist is thereby not worthwhile. Rather, the claim would be that ways of human living which actively frustrate the realisation of such goods fail to be as good, as worthwhile, as they might otherwise have been. Sometimes there are very good reasons why a particular good or goal has to be forgone under particular circumstances, where this is so there is still loss, but accepting that loss, and even choosing it, makes sense in light of the wider context. At other times, and under other situations, where there are no particularly good reasons for forgoing a particular good which is partly constitutive of the goodness of a well-lived human life, choosing to forsake that good in the pursuit of, say, additional but unnecessary finance and resources, or hedonistic titillation, does not make the same kind of sense.

Virtue of character is, at another level of explanation, also understood by Aristotle to be an interacting complex of settled dispositions towards the passions. The passions are what move us, and are hence importantly related both to feeling and action. In any given context various aspects of the situation we find ourselves in may act upon our passions, and - in turn - our passions upon us. Our disposition toward a given passion operates both in terms of how we respond to the activity of that passion' and - over time - in terms of the degree of activity of that passion triggered by the relevant aspects of any given situation. This interwoven complex of 'feelings' and responses to them is partly constitutive of our practical and situated perceptions of the situations that we find ourselves in. If we have the virtues we shall tend to feel appropriately, to see aright, respond well, judge and act as we should.<sup>43</sup> Thus for Aristotle it is good character, and not a system of rules, that we need to develop if we are to live as we should.

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<sup>41</sup> The ethico-political work of Aristotle's that is most widely read, and most often cited in contemporary treatments is the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

<sup>42</sup> One of the great strengths of Aristotle's work in this area is his insistence upon a robust distinction between quality of life, or well-being, and quantity of finance and resources, whilst accepting that, up to a certain point and within limits, the two are importantly related. This breach between the pursuit of one's 'interests' and the endless acquisition of resources provides a basis for challenging the usual portrayal of 'human interests' found in so much of the environmental literature.

<sup>43</sup> For an accessible account of these matters see Nancy Sherman's *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle's theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), especially the section entitled "Learning to see aright".

What this suggests is that in approaching environmental values from an ‘Aristotelian’ standpoint we are seeking to understand our topic partly in terms of the passions. Our ‘feelings’ in relation to Nature and natural entities are here, for heuristic purposes *at least*, understood in terms of passions which, if underactive or overactive, distort our perception of our situation, and hence of what our situation requires of us. The proper perception of the situation, on such a model, will be facilitated by the interplay of all the passions appropriate to the situation at hand, mediated and cultivated by the appropriate dispositions towards them.<sup>44</sup> Thus the history of environmental values seen from an ‘Aristotelian’ perspective will, in part, be the history of the passions and their cultivation. In particular, a narrative approach to environmental values which is also an ‘Aristotelian’ approach to environmental values will be interested in developments in the story of a passion for nature. (This indicates then one of the roles that I believe a narrative account of the history of gardens and gardening can fulfill.)

### *Caring for environments.*

Aristotle makes a distinction between natural entities and artefacts, one which may be more helpful to us.<sup>45</sup> Artefacts, as products of art, have their ‘form’ imposed upon them from without, and come into being as a result of this imposition; the operative principles of change and rest lie outside of the entity in question. Natural entities bring themselves into being, and have their own inner principles of change and rest; the realisation of their ‘form’ by dint of their own processes and proper activities is the realisation of their nature.

Indeed, Aristotle’s ethics operates on these terms with regard to humans, and their ‘form’ or nature, to provide an account of the generalities of human flourishing. Further, according to Aristotle an important aspect of the fullest realisation of our flourishing is an understanding of the world we live in. An important step in the development of that understanding is, for Aristotle, an understanding of the forms, and hence the flourishing and proper activities, of other living entities.<sup>46</sup> Now, it should be pretty clear that artefacts do not automatically dominate and frustrate our flourishing. There are no *a priori* grounds, as far as I can see, for supposing that they *must* dominate and frustrate the flourishing of other species either. Further, as indicated above, where an artefact is produced with an eye to the well-being of non-humans it need not be construed as an essentially anthropocentric instrument. If we are prepared to adopt, operate, and develop, an artefact/natural-entity distinction of approximately this kind, then the way is open to find a place for the treatment and consideration of artefacts within environmental ethics. Ethical implications could be considered in terms of the role of an artefact and its deployment in relation to the environments of living entities:

It may seem obvious, but is often forgotten, that an environment can only be

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<sup>44</sup> One further implication of this is that from an ‘Aristotelian’ perspective the attempt to create a separate system of environmental morality will be as misguided as the attempt to make ethical decisions a matter of algorithm, and for similar reasons. What needs to be cultivated is the responsiveness of the agent to their situation and all the relevant features of it, and that is (intrinsically) a complex, non-codifiable, affair.

<sup>45</sup> *Physics*, II.1. It ought to be noted here that the metaphysical basis of Aristotle’s account of this distinction is deeply problematic from a contemporary standpoint. Nonetheless the way in which he draws the distinction is more helpful for our purposes, and something suitably like it may anyway be defended on alternative grounds.

<sup>46</sup> For the sake of clarity it is best to admit straight away that for Aristotle this understanding culminates in a kind of compound of ontology and theology. We need not, of course, go that far in order to agree that such an understanding of the world is important to us.

defined relative to a being or beings whose environment it is, whether a single individual, a local or regional population, or an entire species. “No animal” as Gibson puts it, “could exist without an environment surrounding it. Equally an environment implies the existence of an animal (or at least an organism) to be surrounded”. For an individual organism, the environment normally comprises three components: the non-living or abiotic world, the world of other species, and the world of conspecifics. These worlds do not, in themselves make up a system; what they offer is rather a set of affordances .... The same objects will afford quite different things to different individuals ... a tree affords movement to a squirrel, but places of rest to a bird. The organisation of environmental possibilities into a coherent system has its source within the individual, being a projection of its own internal organisation onto the world outside of its body.<sup>47</sup>

Thus we are reminded that what is so-often referred to as ‘The Environment’ is in fact an indefinitely large plurality of interpenetrating environments. The reductions implicit in treating ‘the environments’ as ‘The Environment’, and ‘The Environment’ as ‘nature’ culminate in an overly simplified and hopelessly impoverished starting point for environmental ethics. Environments regularly include artefacts, some artefacts (Katz’s “so-called ‘living artefacts’ ”) have environments, and environmental ethics needs to begin from a standpoint that recognises these facts.

Further, if following Holland and O’Neill<sup>48</sup> we treat ‘Nature’ as the proper name of a particular historically identifiable individual we can reject Katz’s attempt to portray that individual as a Kantian autonomous subject, but still retain the applicability of a notion of the domination of Nature. This is because whilst Nature is not itself a subject in the relevant sense, it is (so to speak) shot through with subjects; the subjects of environments. The domination of Nature thus arises when Nature is construed only, or predominantly, from the standpoint of the what it affords to humans. Very few, if any, environmental subjects (subjects of environments) are going to qualify as Kantian autonomous subjects, but that need not concern us. For we can nonetheless take into consideration the effects upon the well-being of environmental subjects of interventions in their environments. Moreover, one striking aspect of the wonder of Nature may be located in the astounding array of interpenetrating and interlocking systems of natural entities, environments and affordances, that Nature contains and sustains. Nature is good, worthy of awe and respect, *and* natural entities deserve our consideration. Thus we ought not to intervene in Nature without good reason, and if we do intervene we still ought to consider, and still *can* consider, the effects of our interventions upon natural entities, and upon their environments. With all that behind us, we can now move towards the subject matter proper:

### *The place of the garden in narrative approaches to environmental value.*

Let us begin with the present. There is a relatively modest, but not altogether insignificant, sense in which environmentalism today clearly is, amongst other things, a moment in the

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<sup>47</sup> Tim Ingold, *The Appropriation of Nature*. (Manchester University Press 1986). The Gibson referred to here is J.J.Gibson, a professional psychologist, and leading proponent of ‘the ecological theory of perception’. Ingold’s discussion of ‘affordances’ is indebted to Gibson’s theory as, via Ingold, is my own. Gibson’s account of perception, it is worth noting, provides much of interest to the contemporary ‘Aristotelian’ as it places a deal of (realist) emphasis upon some of the factors that Aristotle addressed under the headings of ‘form’ and ‘function’.

<sup>48</sup> Holland and O’Neill, op cit., p.14-15.

history of gardening. This sense can be discerned easily enough by anyone who cares to tune into almost any of the radio or television shows concerned with gardening, or who picks up a current gardening magazine or any of many recent books on gardening. Not inconsiderable amounts of space and time are given over to the discussion of organic gardening techniques, the use of re-cycled materials, the ‘biological control’ of ‘pests’ and other related issues.<sup>49</sup> Although such factors form a part of what I have in mind, and serve as a reminder that situating environmentalism as a moment in the history of gardening has narrative implications for the future of gardening, this is *not* the primary focus of my argument.

Let us note though, before moving on, that what emerged above as an important notion, the plurality of interpenetrating environments, touches upon something that is *and has to be* an issue for the gardener (although not necessarily under that description). Their garden simply will not afford to them what they seek from it unless it also tolerably affords to at least some of its other environmental subjects sufficient conditions for their continued existence and their, perhaps all too frequently misperceived, flourishing. (eg. “I see the lilies are doing well” or “I’m a bit worried about the plum tree, it’s not thriving as it should”) The gardener’s peculiar kind of interest in their own environment requires that they learn something of the ‘affordance structure’ of gardens at an inter-environmental level. The success of their project depends upon the cultivation of a certain degree of understanding of these matters. This is so in a number of ways, most obviously, perhaps, in terms of the gardener’s relation to a given plant - that is, in terms of what the plant affords to the gardener and what the gardener, via the garden and their care of it, aims to afford to that plant. Things are, however, much more complex than that. To take but one example, gardeners need also to know which kinds of plants ‘go together’. In one way this might be an aesthetic issue for the gardener, in another it is an ecological issue for the plants. It is again the interpenetration of such factors that I wish to highlight; and the possibilities for evaluative transformations that might be made in light of this. By which I refer, for example, to the way in which consideration of the ecological aspects of this situation can lead to, and inform, a transformation of aesthetic judgements. Or to put the point in a more ‘old fashioned’ but, perhaps, more apt manner, ‘ecological’ considerations can have implications for our understanding of beauty, as well as for our conceptions of goodness.

When one considers the full range of life-forms, invited and uninvited, welcome and unwelcome, to be found in gardens, the full complexity of the situation is striking. When one considers the full range of values (which includes economic, political, scientific, ethical, spiritual and literary values, as well as ‘ecological’ values) that have influenced, and have been influenced by, gardens in the course of this history the interest of the story grows considerably. As these humans planned, organised and labored to create a certain kind of special environment for themselves, they had to learn in the process something about the other life forms that they were interacting and, let us admit it, often grossly interfering with. The histories of gardens and gardening are amongst other things, we might say, the histories of human experiments and negotiations in inter-environmental relations. It may well be true that this has only become an issue for gardeners in the environmentalist’s sense in very recent times, and under the influence of developments in ecology. Yet we might do well here to reflect for a moment upon the debt of Darwin’s own founding work in this ‘science of nature’ to the

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<sup>49</sup> In examples such as this there is an understandable tendency to see these kinds of environmentalising developments in terms of an external influence upon gardening. Here we see a moment in the history of gardening in which environmentalism enters from without. What I wish to emphasise in this paper is the potential for enriching our appreciation of environmental values that lies in learning to see things the other way around. I hold that if we attend carefully to the histories of gardens and gardening we shall find there plenty of evidence that the history (or pre-history, if you prefer) of significant aspects of environmentalism may be uncovered there.

artful practices of gardeners, amongst others.<sup>50</sup> We might find, upon reflection, that a tributary to ‘ecology’ flows out of the garden, long before ecology as such flows into it.

In moving from the present state of gardening to the gardens of the past a few words from historian Keith Thomas may ease the transition:

Nowadays one cannot open a newspaper without encountering some impassioned debate about culling grey seals or cutting down trees in Hampton Court or saving an endangered species of wild animal. *But to understand these present day attitudes we must go back* to the early modern period. For it was between 1500 and 1800 that there occurred a whole cluster of changes in the way in which men and women, at all social levels, perceived and classified the natural world around them. In the process some long established dogmas about man’s place in nature were discarded. New sensibilities arose towards animals, plants and landscape. The relationship of man to other species was redefined; and his right to exploit those species for his own advantage was sharply challenged. It was these centuries which generated both an intense interest in the natural world and those doubts and anxieties about man’s relationship to it that we have inherited in a magnified form.<sup>51</sup>

It is in relation to such changes of perception, thought, and attitude, to the wider environment that I wish to consider the histories of gardens and gardening. Part of my claim is that the histories of gardens and gardening are particularly important sources in the effort to understand the development of “these present day attitudes”.

This is so partly because, as mentioned above, the gardens of the past are places in which we can see various of the key developments of the relevant periods being played out in relation to, and upon, the land. There is, however, rather more to it than that. First, I am persuaded that if we consider a longer historical period than the one to which Thomas directs us, we shall see, for example, that the resurgence and expansion of interest in gardens that came with the renaissance has considerable bearing on these matters. If we look, we shall see that the interest in gardens and gardening helped to foster, and helped to shape, new attitudes and sensitivities, and that it helped to re-new some older attitudes and sensitivities too. Second, and relatedly, the process is not a ‘one-way street’. Just as the gardener works upon the land, the land and working upon it works upon the gardener. The gardener is one of the things that grows in the garden. The garden also works upon those who do not work upon it, but rather visit and spend some time there. The garden can act, and historically has acted, as a site of transformation. It opens the way for interchange between culture and nature, and does so because it is between nature and culture.

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<sup>50</sup> This debt plays out at a number of levels. Historically speaking, the founding metaphor of ‘*oecologie*’ (a term coined by Haeckel with Darwin’s work in mind) is between artificial and natural selection. The natural selection process was thus first rendered intelligible by transposing the idea of such arts into a natural key. In addition to this, the detailed development of Darwin’s theory owes much to the knowledges of gardeners, nurserymen, husbandmen, stockbreeders, pigeon-fanciers and so on. Darwin’s fascinating two volume work *The Variation of Plants and Animals under Domestication* (Murray, 1905) amply testifies to the truth of this. (Thanks to Jamie Walford for drawing my attention to a role for this material in my story about gardens and environmentalism.)

<sup>51</sup> Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, (OUP 1983) p.15 (emphasis added).

Further, the intensified interest in gardens and gardening which arose with the renaissance has in some form or another been with us ever since. An understanding of that interest, and its historical developments, has an important role to play in the story of how the great distance that separates medieval attitudes to nature from those that we have today came to be traversed one small step at a time. In learning of the movements of such a history we may come to better understand the values that we bear, and that we try so hard to express today.

It can, for example, help us to understand the historical changes of attitude towards our European 'landscape' between the middle ages and the present, and help us trace the processes through which there came to be a European *landscape* at all. One of the themes that I believe a narrative account of the histories of gardens and gardening would help to bring into focus is the cultural sediment embodied in our ideas and views of nature. It is a well rehearsed point that when we speak of 'the scenery', or of 'the landscape' and so on, we do so by drawing upon the language of the arts, of painting, of poetry, and of the theatre. The history of gardens is most instructive about the processes through which these terms and others came to have application to the land, and about the ways in which the wider 'landscape' came to be seen as bearing the kinds of significance we find in it today. The 'cultural charge' that is operative in the idealisation of wilderness, especially in the 'new world', has also come in for considerable attention. Here again gardens are not easily kept out of the picture.<sup>52</sup>

An awareness of such cultural factors at work in our appreciation of the natural world, can serve to alert us to the dangers of overly 'naturalising' our conceptions of nature, and of overly 'naturalising' the value that we find in nature. It may prompt us ask 'awkward questions' about such terms as 'natural value', making us more reflective about the expression of our 'values'. Yet, at the same time, the overemphasis of such considerations can have the effect of knocking our evaluations of a situation flat. If cultural mediation enters in at every point, is not the reality of nature, and the reality of our values, undercut by a paralysing kind of vertigo in the face of the contingency of our experience, and of our accounts? An unhelpful form of relativism and historicism can kick in at this point and threaten to collapse all of the 'vital distinctions' we seek to make into a heap of historically and culturally parochial sweepings. Our values may threaten to become facts about us - in particular, facts about peculiar outgrowths that occur in the course of living in a certain place, time and way.

To accept the 'historicity of it all' without falling prey to indifference in the face of this historical play of differences is a challenge that the narrative 'Aristotelian' approach can help us to meet. By accepting the vital role in our lives of envisaged futures which draw upon the insights of the past, and take the form of goals or ends to be realised, we can begin to make better sense of the situation. When it is borne in mind that the realisation of such goals, or even the striving for and towards them, is the historical actualisation of the possibility of meaningful human existence, of the constitution of a worthwhile life, things begin to look a little different. With such factors in mind it becomes possible to see patterns, story-lines, traditions, which (sometimes at least) take the form of creative, responsive and rational reactions to what has previously been done in the development and pursuit of certain goals and goods. In the course of the pursuit of a set of goods and goals someone may develop a degree of what Aristotle called 'practical wisdom' (*phronesis*); this includes insight into the goals that will make life worthwhile, and the capacity to make situated judgements in light of this 'view of the life to be lived'. New truths may be disclosed, deeper understanding gained and communicated, and

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<sup>52</sup> See, for example, 'Wild West imagery: landscape perception in nineteenth-century America,' Gerhard Strohmeier in *Nature and Society in Historical Context*, edited by Teich, Porter and Gustafsson. (CUP 1997). See also *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx (Oxford 1964).

ongoing argument about the goods to be pursued may help to prevent a tradition from falling into the kind of ill-health and poor condition that gives 'tradition' a bad name, and a reputation for arbitrary authoritarianism. If a tradition does indeed fall into such a state, then a life lived in blind adherence to its dictates would be exposed to all the dangers of meaninglessness and alienation that threaten to engulf us when confronted by extreme and unhelpful forms of relativism and historicism. As such, a reasonably lively debate about the goods to be pursued is quite literally *vital*.

To be clear, I am not claiming that the history of gardens is a story of relentless progress with gardeners featuring as some kind of heroic driving force of history. What I am claiming, though, is that as a matter of fact the historical events and processes that occurred in gardens and gardening in the period indicated, and in the European context, really do have a great deal to do with the development and spread of a wider interest in, deeper understanding of, and greater passion for, living nature. Further I am claiming that observing and understanding the role of the garden (an artefact), and the role of the gardener's art, in all of this will help us to re-think the relations of Nature and Art, and of natural entities and artefacts.

Art has what Heidegger called 'world disclosive powers';<sup>53</sup> this is true in a number of ways. Like Darwin we might understand natural processes on the basis of a metaphoric disclosure in which we grasp something by seeing nature as 'doing for itself' something that we do in, and through, an art or a craft. We ought not to let the role of metaphor here detract from the fact that insight is gained in these ways. The general kind of point at stake here is characterised well by Max Black:

A memorable metaphor has the power to bring separate domains into cognitive and emotional relation by using language directly appropriate to the one as a lens for seeing the other; the implications, suggestions, and supporting values entwined with the literal use of metaphoric expression enable us to see a new subject matter in a new way. The extended meanings that result, the relations between initially disparate realms created, can neither be antecedently predicted nor subsequently paraphrased in prose. We can comment *upon* the metaphor, but the metaphor itself neither needs nor invites explanation and paraphrase. Metaphorical thought is a distinctive mode of achieving insight, not to be construed as an ornamental substitute for plain thought.<sup>54</sup>

Ramsay, who also found that passage from Black to be worth quoting, follows it up by emphasising that for him "it is not merely a matter of insight or imagination" and indicating that he would "stress what insight or imagination reveals, the ontological reference of model and metaphor alike". When at a later stage Ramsay in summary returns to this topic he develops the point still further:

Models, like metaphors, enable us, I have said, to be articulate, and both are born in insight. But it is an insight which, viewed as disclosure, reminds is that in such

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<sup>53</sup> See, for example, 'The Origin of the Work of Art,' in *Basic Writings* (ed. Krell) (Routledge 1978)

<sup>54</sup> Cited in *Models and Mystery* by Ian T. Ramsay, p.54. (OUP 1964).

insight the universe is revealing itself to us.<sup>55</sup>

Combining this with some points from above we might note that all disclosure is historical disclosure, occurring in a situated context, made possible by a drawing upon the past and a projection of envisaged futures, but that it is not any the less disclosure for that.

Another sense in which Art and artefacts may reveal something of the world, and one “somewhat in vogue with landscape architects at present” is embodied in Wallace Steven’s poem, *The Anecdote of the Jar*.

*I placed a jar in Tennessee,  
And round it was, upon a hill.  
It made the slovenly wilderness  
Surround that hill.*

*The wilderness rose up to it,  
And sprawled around, no longer wild.  
The jar was round upon the ground  
And tall and of a port in air.*

*It took dominion everywhere.  
The jar was gray and bare.  
It did not give of bird or bush  
Like nothing else in Tennessee.*<sup>56</sup>

Now, of course, I realise that some of the overtones of such a piece are not altogether ‘deep green’, and that the way in which the jar ‘tames’ and takes “dominion”, making the wilderness “no longer wild” may make the comparison of the garden with the jar seem to ‘backfire’ on my overall case. Again I would emphasise that I am not trying to present a ‘Whiggish’ view of these things, nor claiming that gardens and gardening are and have always been unconditionally good. What I am saying, though, is that when we try to understand the enormous transition between medieval portrayals of the wilds in which they appear, for example, as the abode of the insane, or as earthly hell filled with “manifold horrors and fears”, places where heroes of Beowulf’s stature may have to venture to slaughter great and terrible monsters, and the kind of attitudes to be found today, we might do well to think of the

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<sup>55</sup> Ramsay, op cit., p.54-55, & 71. Ramsay, not entirely unlike Aristotle, sees something divine in all of this, again I see no need to go quite that far in order to agree with something of the general point.

<sup>56</sup> Norton Anthology of American Literature p. 1149 (Norton.3rd edition Vol.2. 1989.)

transformations that ‘garden-jars’ effect even upon the areas that they do not *physically* alter.<sup>57</sup>

As garden historian John Dixon Hunt explains,

Gardens, too, may be thought of as jars, set down in otherwise artless landscapes: part of their appeal is that they reorganise our thinking, especially about the natural material from which they are crafted. Unlike Stephen’s jar, though, a garden is itself a consequence of fresh perceptions of second and first nature.<sup>58</sup>

With new gardens, there may come fresh perceptions again, new ideas, new gardens, and so a dynamic interplay arises. Such factors provide additional levels to the consideration of artefacts in the environment: in what ways have the artefacts of the past served to disclose nature; and how might we think about how best to continue that narrative?

The vocabulary of ‘first nature’, ‘second nature’ and (not mentioned in the above extract) ‘third nature’ is itself drawn from garden history, in particular from the work of Jacopo Bonfadio, who wrote of gardens as “nature incorporated with art ... [and made] the creator and conatural of art, and from both is made a third nature”.<sup>59</sup> Bonfadio, and others, in writing of a third nature in this way were drawing, and building, upon Cicero who had referred to a ‘second nature’ (*alteram naturam*), the landscape produced by human beings in their attempts to make the physical world more habitable, and to make it serve their purposes, a landscape of bridges, fields, roads and so on.<sup>60</sup> It is, in some ways, a useful vocabulary, for it purports to distinguish between the effects of a merely utilitarian intervention in the landscape, and interventions in which there is an attempt to collaborate with nature. And it appears time and time again in these histories that there are people who set much store by this kind of ‘third nature’ integration of nature and art, whether or not they use that particular vocabulary. People for whom the harmonious integration of nature and art was a significant part of their ‘idea of the life to be lived’. Yet, when we look closer to see what ‘nature’ meant, and ‘art’ meant to these people, and in their day, we may be surprised, we shall certainly have further cause for thought, and further materials to think about and with. This example also affords a bridge to another point that I wish to make, as it is a minimal presentation of one fairly persistent theme in the history of gardens and gardening, and is the last that I shall mention here.

One of the strengths of the gardens narrative is that the movement and development of the history of gardens itself often explicitly takes the form of an attempt to project certain possibilities, drawn from the potentials of the past, as goals for envisaged futures. Which is to say that the histories of gardens and gardening, as histories of art and nature, garden and landscape, in large part *already* embody a narrative understanding of themselves. This seems to me to be a distinct advantage, for it means that we may listen to the stories or narratives as they were told by those involved. We can attend to their accounts, and to the futures that they

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<sup>57</sup> For interesting discussions of medieval attitudes to nature see, for example, ‘The ‘chaotic spaces’ of medieval madness: thoughts on the English and Welsh experience,’ by Chris Philo in Teich, Porter and Gustaffson, op cit., and *Nature: Western Attitudes since Ancient Times* Peter Coates (Polity Press 1998).

<sup>58</sup> John Dixon Hunt, *Gardens and the Picturesque*, p.5. (MIT 1992).

<sup>59</sup> Hunt op cit., p.3. (the parenthesised text is in Hunt)

<sup>60</sup> Hunt, op cit., p3.

were envisaging, and their accounts of their past that they were finding potentials in. We may hearken to the debates that they were already having about the goods to be pursued in their traditions, and so be better placed to consider whether there is any potential in these traditions of the past worth preserving as our future, and thus in our 'envisaged futures'. And if we do, as I think we shall, find some promise and potential in this past, we shall - on the basis of a careful attending to it - be able to situate ourselves partly within these traditions, develop an adequate sense of them, and take up the debate about the goods that should be pursued. 'Glorified gardening'? I think not. *Glorious* gardening? Perhaps.