

Field philosophy: dualism to complexity through the borderland

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Abstract For 5 years, we have taught an interdisciplinary experiential environmental philosophy—field philosophy—course in Isle Royale National Park. We crafted this class with a pedagogy and curriculum guided by the ethic of care (Goralnik et al. in *J Experiential Education* 35(3):412–428, 2012) and a Leopold-derived community-focused environmental ethic (Goralnik and Nelson in *J Environ Educ* 42(3):181–192, 2011) to understand whether and how wilderness experience might impact the widening of students' moral communities. But we found that student pre-course writing already revealed a preference for nonanthropocentric and nonutilitarian ethics, albeit with a naïve understanding that enabled contradictions and confusion about how these perspectives might align with action. By the end of the course, though, we recognized a recurrent pattern of learning and moral development that provides insight into the development of morally inclusive environmental ethics. Rather than shift from a utilitarian or anthropocentric ethic to a more biocentric or ecocentric ethic, students instead demonstrated a metaphysical shift from a worldview dominated by dualistic thinking to a more complex awareness of motivations, actions, issues, and natural systems. The consistent occurrence of this preethical growth, observed in student writing and resulting from environmental humanities field learning, demonstrates a possible path to ecologically informed holistic environmental ethics.

Field philosophy: pedagogy and curriculum

With emphasis on ecosystem services, trade-offs, and economic valuation of nonmarket biodiversity and conservation strategies, natural resource management

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and education can tend to prioritize utilitarian or anthropocentric perspectives (Freese and Trauger 2000; Loomis 2000). Additionally, overreliance on empirical scientific evidence in conservation learning hinders students' ability to understand the importance of epistemology or practice the integration of diverse values in environmental discourse (Jones et al. 1999; Grace and Ratcliffe 2002; Vucetich and Nelson 2013). Alternatively, environmental ethics courses are often taught in fluorescently lit classrooms where obligations to the natural world are considered theoretically, with case studies (real or imagined), or perhaps with recollections of past outdoor experiences. This approach limits students' ability to connect personally with real landscapes, issues, and other human and nonhuman beings; it provides no way to explore right action concretely or correct for unanticipated consequences of enacted ideas.

We developed our field philosophy pedagogy (Goralnik et al. 2012) and curriculum to address these disciplinary hurdles and to provide students the opportunity to cultivate relationships with peers and the natural world while also learning ethics, place-based ecology, nature writing, natural and human history, and traditional ecological knowledge—whatever was appropriate to understand a specific place, Isle Royale National Park. Field philosophy is fieldwork in the environmental humanities.¹ Our goal is to combine the intellectual content of environmental ethics and literature with physical experiences in the natural world to develop personal, emotional, critical, and concrete relationships with the natural world. Responding to ideas about community development, field experience, and emotion in environmental ethics (Moore 2004; Preston 2003; Brady et al. 2004; Plumwood 1991; Leopold 1949) and driven by research on learning, retention, and attitudes in environmental (Hungerford and Volk 1990; Russell and Bell 1996; Smith-Sebasto 1995) and experiential (Elder 1998; Knapp 2005; Mortari 2004; Proudman 1992; Sobel 2004) education, our version of field philosophy aims not just to educate about theoretical environmental ethics and issues, but also to explicitly cultivate a sense of care for and responsibility to the natural world. Learning objectives, therefore, entail both cognitive and affective variables, including the development of a place-based awareness of ecology, environmental issues, and community membership, as well as empathetic shifts that might signify the development of a personal environmental ethic or a deepened relationship with the natural world.

Isle Royale Outdoor Philosophy is a 4-credit upper-level course. The course includes: a pre-course meeting 6 weeks before the trip; a 31-article interdisciplinary coursepack (environmental ethics, traditional ecological knowledge, nature writing, place-based environmental history, and local ecology), and a collection of nonfiction nature ethics essays (Moore 2004) the students read and write summary-response essays about prior to our field component; one-week base

¹ This is a somewhat new phenomenon practiced by a few philosophers (Brady et al. 2004; Moore 2004) and on several humanistic field courses (Algonia and Simon 2010; Johnson and Frederickson 2000, "Outdoor Philosophy"). The terms experiential environmental philosophy and field philosophy are not used in this literature, though other programs do refer to their work as field philosophy, including University of North Texas's Sub-Antarctic Biocultural Conservation Program (UNT); the way we use these terms here is specific to the model described in our research.

camping in a wilderness group campsite; experiences on trail and in dialogue with Isle Royale Wolf-Moose Project ecologists; interpreted human and natural history hikes with National Park rangers; hiking, canoeing, cooking, exploring, and discussion; and individual, partner, and group exercises, which are documented in a course journal. Students write unguided reflections daily, teach one 10–20 min class on an island-related subject and present a 5-min literary and natural history mini-lesson along a trail the group collectively interprets. Finally, students complete a post-course project 2 weeks after our return, a researched and creative expression of what they learned from reading and through experience. With this project, students also submit a 3-page final course reflection about their learning.

Students have ranged in age from 17 to 27; most are between 19 and 22 years old. They are primarily science majors in fisheries and wildlife, zoology, and human biology. Other majors vary, from psychology to microbiology to English. We have never had a philosophy major participate.² The course size has shifted across the years.

Course size shifts between 2008 and 2012

Year	# Students	# Instructors	# Teaching assistants (Undergrad. or grad. student)	Reason for shift
2008	8	2	0	
2009	11	2	0	University requirement for larger class sizes
2010	6	1	1	Weakened learning outcomes of larger group
2011				
2012				

Most students do not have a strong environmental learning background or formal ethics training; all students have outdoor experience from summer camp, scouts, family camping, or school activities.

Methodology and analysis

We used a grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Knapp and Poff 2001) framework for this research, which describes an inductive analysis of a large quantity of narrative data to generate theory about a phenomena about which no explanatory theory already exists. Because of our small sample sizes

² Students apply for the course with a one-page letter about their experience and interest. Interviews follow, and students are invited to participate after the interview process. Some years, there is so much interest we have interviewed half the applicants and then brought half the interviewed students on the course. Other years, no interviews were necessary. A waitlist is created for students not chosen (because they are underclassmen, do not seem enthusiastic about the content or collaborative environment, or are not in good standing on campus).

and the nature of teaching and learning scholarship, which is deeply tied to individual participants, group dynamics, and course context, we are less interested in developing theory than we are in creating a “thick description” (Geertz 1973) of the phenomenon that might be meaningful for other educators interested in similar objectives. We do not believe the truth of the field philosophy experience lies out there for us to discover. Instead, we believe the meaning of the phenomena is constructed by the participants as they share the learning experience. As both researchers and instructors, we are cocreators and participants in this process; we impact, observe, experience, and interpret the phenomena as it is rooted in time, place, and context. This constructivist theory of learning and qualitative research led us to adopt Charmaz (2006) constructivist revision of grounded theory.

Our data included pre-course reading responses (15–30 typewritten, single-spaced pages per student), on-course handwritten journals (notes, course activity assignments, and daily reflections), and 3-page (typed, double-spaced) post-course reflections about what and how the students learned. In 2011 and 2012, we also added a blog assignment, on which the students were required to post 9 times (at least one paragraph each) before we met for the field course (6 reading-related responses and 3 instructor prompts—pre-reading, mid-reading, post-reading—about the value of wilderness) and 1 time after the course (post-course instructor prompt). Employing the constant comparison method (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Maykut and Morehouse 1994), we read and re-read the data numerous times, margin-marking observations about learning, ethics, relationships, nature, wilderness, and other themes related to our inquiry, as well as observations about student language, process, and reflection. After inductively coding 25 % of the data, we condensed overlapping categories and developed a codebook to apply to the remaining data, adjusting the codes as necessary until they were saturated and distinct. We then used the refined codebook to deductively analyze the entire data set to identify emergent themes, relationships across codes, and trends within individual students, across students, and across years.

During the analysis, we co-coded for intracoder reliability, peer debriefed, and validated our codebook with each other and another colleague. During the analysis, we returned to the field site to conduct a “field check” (Wolcott 1994) to make sure our account accurately captured the place and context we were describing. The validity of our work is rooted in the trustworthiness (Guba and Lincoln 1994, 114) of our process—it is transparent, reflexive, and well documented. We include primary data in our analysis to represent the voices of the participants and the tone of the data (Wolcott 1994).

Through this analysis, we found students’ pre-course and on-course writing to be effective indicators of their ethical and knowledge baselines, as well as a standard against which post-course growth can be understood. Pre-course reading responses, when observed alongside daily on-course and post-course reflections, can help identify shifts in individual student thinking, make comparisons across students, and identify recurrent themes in the processes of ethical development, learning, and self-awareness. Across 5 years of data (2008–2012), the pre-course reading demonstrates a reliance on dualistic thinking, including true/false and selfish/generous characterizations applied to people, the land, and motivations for action. Students

employ these dualisms in ways that both describe and impose evaluations of good and bad, right and wrong, and thus, the dualisms also project a moral judgment. From this language trend—which suggests the students' conceptualization of the world—and the way it changes, disappears, or is challenged during the field philosophy experience, we can draw some conclusions about the students' ethical inclinations, shifts, and responsibility for environmental problem-solving.

Dualisms play an important role in student thinking and writing both because their shift can indicate growth to more nuanced intellectual stance, and also because there is a rich history in environmental ethics scholarship about the problematic nature of dualisms in the Western worldview (Callicott 1986; Mathews 1991; Plumwood 1991; Warren 2000), which situates the students' metaphysical development. At the heart of utilitarian or human-centered ethics, Callicott (1990) suggests, is an “atomized, mechanical, and dualistic view of nature and human nature,” while at the center of the land ethic, and supposedly other ecologically informed or ecocentric ethics, is an “organic, internally related, holistic view of nature and human nature” (115). Thus, the worldview transition our students experienced, from a dualistic to a more holistic view of the natural world and one's place in it, demonstrates the kind of metaphysical transformation integral to the development of ecocentric ethics, lending empirical grounding for these theoretical arguments about necessary preconditions for widened moral communities and inclusive environmental ethics.

Often the observed shift from dualism to complexity is accompanied by a professed care for or moral consideration of a broader collection of beings or systems applied to the students' home lives or lifestyle and explained as concrete plans for changed behavior, altered worldviews, or different approaches to problem-solving. These metaphysical shifts often happen in, or as a result of, contact with what we call borderlands: physical or conceptual middle-grounds where the needs of the individual and the community are in conflict or questioned, where one's previously held values require confrontation and re-visioning, and where one experiences a new awareness of complexity, responsibility, or morality. These borderlands are rarely the direct result of a planned course activity; rather, they arise in response to informal learning or interactions filtered through course concepts, discussions, and reading.

In on-course or post-course reflections, several students describe a precise moment or experience that caused them to reevaluate their previous thinking and arrive at a more nuanced or complex understanding of relationships and ideas. These experiences serve as the bridge between two distinct ways of thinking and approaching the world. Field philosophy provides the space and opportunity for reflection on these moments. Field philosophy, therefore, enables learning and ethical outcomes perhaps not possible in the classroom alone.³

Below, we discuss the different dualisms students commonly invoke to demonstrate how they can provide insight into student value stances, perspectives

³ More work is needed to further explore the distinctions between classroom and field learning. It is not clear whether these kinds of learning and personal shifts can be facilitated as effectively in the classroom environment or whether they are more easily or permanently fostered in the field.

on environmental problem-solving, and beliefs about personal and collective responsibility for environmental change. From this grounding, we discuss of the role of borderlands, as well as explore examples of specific borderlands, which illuminate the metaphysical shifts and simultaneous content learning fostered by the field philosophy experience. The ethical awareness and empowerment students develop provide evidence for the broader value of experiential learning in the environmental humanities.

Dualisms and moral extremism: selfish

A consistently recurring dualism in the student writing identifies—and likely rightly so—selfish behavior as bad and (implied) altruism as morally good. But the way students understand these concepts suggests they mean more than the simple selfish behaviors one might enact in daily life, such as taking the last cookie, cutting in line, or even voting for politicians who singularly protect personal wealth, which some might argue derives from a form of selfishness. The students' language instead often equates selfishness with what we might understand as an anthropocentric ethical position, one in which nature (or elements of the natural world) is valuable only in its benefit for or relationship to humans, rather than in and of itself. Additionally, student overreliance on the word “selfish” to communicate valuations can lead to inconsistent argumentation within a single student's unreflected-upon position.

Sarah, a student in 2008, captures both of these trends in a pre-course journal response to a Jack Kulpa (2002) essay, musing: “Basically, wilderness is either confined and restricted to humans or it is the subject of human recreation. Both situations sound selfish to me.” Sarah is struggling with the definition of and motivation for wilderness, a course theme. In her mind, either we create wilderness and keep humans out to protect it from degradation by humans (and preserve it for human appreciation) or we let humans in to play. Sarah finds both definitions selfish because they serve human enjoyment or desire. We can understand this characterization of selfishness as an expression of anthropocentrism, even if other beings and systems might also benefit from the human action, because Sarah does not recognize these benefits as drivers of wilderness protection. While Sarah clearly values wilderness in her other writing, here she suggests she is troubled by anthropocentric argumentation on its behalf, and therefore, it becomes a flawed concept for her and other students as they interrogate it, even while they are drawn to wilderness both in theory and in place.

Later in her pre-course journal, when responding to Rolf Peterson (2008) essay about the Isle Royale National Park wolf population, Sarah explains: “Peterson ended with his vote to keep and support wolf populations on Isle Royale. I agree and I think this is important although still it is selfish.” Sarah finds saving the wolf population selfish because, in her reading of the article (which misinterprets the author's central argument about predation and land health), it satisfies human interest for scientific learning, rather than recognizes the action as good first for the wolves or the system, second for humans. As well, she agrees with Peterson's argument, but she is also—indicated with “although”—disappointed for thinking

selfishly. Thus, her beliefs are in conflict with her ethical understanding. Sarah believes that wilderness recreation is selfish because it “uses” nature for our enjoyment, while preservation is also selfish because it “saves” wilderness from (and for) us, therefore, still serves humans. Because conservation “tinkers” with a system to satisfy human motives, it also strikes her as selfish. In all three relationships, Sarah conveys the word selfish negatively, even while she agrees with some “selfish” environmental decision-making, e.g., her support for Peterson’s proposal.

With the limited nature of Sarah’s responses, we cannot know what she values and why, or whether she intentionally uses the word “selfish” in multiple ways. But we might infer from her reactions to the texts that she does not mean the same thing when she uses the word “selfish” in different contexts and that, without having the vocabulary to articulate it clearly, she finds human-centered or anthropocentric decision-making problematic, while she finds system- or nonhuman nature-focused decision-making (bio- or ecocentric in nature) that also appeals to human interests less problematic. It seems fair to infer that she finds consumptive intentions—use, recreation—bad, while she finds less consumptive relationships—science, wildlife conservation—better. Her use of the word “selfish” to characterize different actions and intentions conflates perhaps similar but different entities. Unaware of the nuance in the different human/nature relationships, Sarah reacts as if all human intervention, interest, and impact are anthropocentric, or bad. But while action on behalf of the wolves might pertain to the human good by preserving beings we value, it might also benefit population health, reduce suffering, or contribute to ecosystem health. These intentions are not anthropocentric, or selfish, for action to serve these ends would be driven by the moral consideration of nonhuman others. Perhaps these are elements of the management strategies Sarah supports, but she cannot disentangle the multiple values in a single conservation issue; she can only respond with the dualistic language she knows: good and bad, true and false, generous and selfish.

Sarah’s, and the students’, language demonstrates a couple of things. First, students have limited vocabulary to discuss natural resource and ethical issues, and through the association of their language to moral perspectives, a limited moral awareness, as well. We do not expect them to have this language or awareness yet. While many have grounding in popular environmental issues from personal reading and coursework, the field philosophy course is often their first (perhaps only) focused ethics learning. Still it is instructive to observe their knowledge baselines, so we can best teach this content in ways they will engage and remember (Wolfe 2006). It is also useful to recognize common expressions of conceptual limitations and value delineations, such as the conflation of multiple meanings of the same word or consistent use of dualisms like the ones we saw frequently: true/false, selfish/generous, and pure/tainted. Identifying these limitations during the learning experience allows us to address them when they arise.

Second, Sarah’s language provides insight into the general tone with which students discuss utilitarian and anthropocentric environmental thinking. For Sarah and others, actions generated from these perspectives are unsettling, even if the students cannot identify exactly why. Often when students invoke the word selfish

to describe discomfort with an idea or an action, what they are saying, it seems, is that human- and consumption-centered approaches are driven by unacceptable motivations, even if the consequences are deemed acceptable. Therefore, one role for educators is to help the students develop more effective language and envision alternative motivations for right action in the world.

Dualisms and moral extremism: generous

Sarah's dualisms work in two directions. She not only aligns selfishness with bad behavior, but she also suggests altruism, the opposite of selfishness, indicates good moral behavior and intention. In an on-course journal response to a future generations argument on behalf of wilderness,⁴ she writes: "I do agree that this [future generations argument] is valid—it is an expression of selflessness and care toward people other than ourselves." To Sarah, the virtues of selflessness (or altruism, which seems to be what she means here) and care for others are acceptable motivations for wilderness preservation. Though this moral extension is to other humans, not nonhuman nature, these humans do not yet exist, so are rarely included in utilitarian accounting and hence extend consideration beyond straightforward anthropocentric argumentation. Contrarily, in response to the argument that wilderness areas promote social bonding, thus are valuable and necessary, Sarah explains: "Although I know this is true and I experience social bonding more when I'm with others in nature, I think it's too selfish of an argument to stand alone. It's all about the well being of people." She suggests that arguments on behalf of wilderness ought to serve the good of nature itself, rather than the good of the humans who benefit from a relationship with it. Sarah's responses to these wilderness arguments at the end of the course (we do this exercise both on the first and the last days of the course to observe shifts) mirror her pre-course reading responses, revealing only limited growth in her thinking. She still uses selfish/selfless language, still intimates a preference for more inclusive ethics, while also displaying a limited perception of argument nuance. Still, Sarah indicates an appreciation for the intrinsic value of nature, suggesting wilderness landscapes have a good of their own and it is our responsibility to honor it, and her second response demonstrates self-reflection about her own experience applied to more abstract arguments, which implies transference.

Other students make parallel claims. In the same exercise, John responds to the argument that wilderness possesses similar value to an art gallery: "This argument is [t]oo egotistical of [a] way to look at nature. Its not the wilderness that matters, it is what I can get from it that matters." "Egotistical" here echoes the previous use of selfishness; it seems also to suggest a problem with anthropocentrism as a moral stance and utility or consumption as a motivation for action, which he conflates. According to John, considering only humans or personal needs in decision-making is wrong because it ignores nature's own good. In this way, concepts of community, interconnectedness, generosity, and selflessness, which we also observed in the

⁴ For the full list and descriptions of the wilderness arguments discussed in this paper, see Nelson (1998).

student writing, exist as contrary, perhaps more morally acceptable, concepts. John fortifies this position in a response to the argument that wilderness is intrinsically valuable. “Wilderness without use is still important,” he explains, because it is the “Least selfish reason to have wilderness.” Selfishness is directly associated with use; intrinsic value is associated with unselfish, perhaps altruistic, action. For John and a number of students, use-value is bad, while intrinsic value, or nature for nature’s sake, is good.

Interestingly, though, students often identify “selfish” arguments as culturally persuasive, even while they personally prefer—or feel they ought to be persuaded by—more altruistic alternatives. Thus, the students reveal their ideas about human nature while removing themselves from the norm. In making this leap, they either short-sell society’s moral imagination, demonstrate their own self-centeredness, or recognize a personal tension between values and action. They value one thing but are not sure how it manifests in action. Nina’s response to Richard Louv’s (2009) “A Walk in the Woods” illuminates this trend:

It is our obligation to be the stewards of nature, ... to protect it and keep it healthy. I believe this should be done ... because it is what is ethically right ... because nature provides us with so much in return. ... But if others need a more selfish reason to agree to this obligation, we can use the arguments that Louv presented: that interaction with nature (a healthy nature) positively affects humans’ “ability to learn ... [and our] physical and emotional health.”

While first aligning herself with what sounds like a virtuous and relational approach to ethics—caring for nature is the right thing to do and an act of reciprocity—Nina then offers what she considers a less meaningful, more selfish, anthropocentric argument to use publicly.

Interesting, too, is how students believe we ought to help people transcend these selfish motivations. Eric responds to Aldo Leopold’s (1949) “Land Ethic”: “I agree that people need to become more unselfish when dealing with nature. More education will yield better land protection.” Education is the key to becoming un-selfish, or to cultivating a more morally inclusive ethic, he suggests. It seems fair to assume Eric means ecocentric when he says un-selfish here, for this is Leopold’s position in the essay, which argues for an evolution of ethics beyond humans and nonhuman individuals to include the land. The question, then, is if education really can provide this kind of shift? And if education means the accumulation of more information or facts about nature, will more facts lead us to greater ethical awareness, or to a more inclusive moral community? In fact, we developed our field philosophy course because we do not believe they will (Ramsey and Rickson 1977; Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002).

Many scholars discuss this indirect relationship between knowing and caring, or the process of arriving at pro-environmental behavior, which includes attitudinal, not just informational, growth (Kellstedt et al. 2008; Marcinkowski 1998; Moore and Nelson 2010). Our students, if prodded, would probably agree, based on how they explain their own expanding moral communities and changing relationship with the natural world. Simplified proposals like Eric’s—we just need more education, just need to respect nature, etc.—are important places for us to prod

students to explore what really might be needed to affect a shift in attitude and behavior, especially if we hope to help them cultivate an empowered responsibility for this change. One easy place to start is to ask them what—in this field philosophy context especially—has impacted them most in their relationship with the natural world. Based on our data, they are likely to say things like awe, inspiration, observation of other beings and beauty, and spending time in a specific place. These things are certainly part of the experiential learning process, but they are seldom articulated as learning objectives, especially in environmental ethics. By including them as such, we can help students not only deepen their thinking beyond dualisms, but perhaps also understand how they might encourage others do the same.

All of these examples about selfishness versus altruism, or anthropocentric versus ecocentric positions, align fairly consistently with other dichotomous language the students employ. Throughout the journals students associate the words “fake,” “unnatural,” and “false,” as well as “selfish,” to refer to humans, anthropogenic impacts on the natural world, and problematic motivations for action. Contrarily, the words “true,” “natural,” and “real” describe nonhuman nature and systems; often students condone these characteristics in similar ways as they do implied altruism.

Navigating the middle ground

Many students think attending to community needs—and living a life driven by relationship and community responsibilities—is good and respectable. They demonstrate this thinking with consistent critical evaluation of selfish motivations and in reflections like Jessica's: “Our existence depends so entirely on our environment and community of organisms. [Because of this] I can no longer consider my actions trivial.” It is community membership in and with the natural world, Jessica explains that drives her desire to act morally. Contrarily, students consistently express frustration with individualistic motivations. Often they feel conflicted about potentially meaningful conservation actions, which may align with their values, because the actions also benefit human needs or desires. Always prioritizing the “natural” or anti-selfish position, especially without fully interrogating it, may lead students to inhabit a fascist ecocentric stance (Nelson 1996), as if by shunning anthropocentrism one must run to the other pole, radical holism.

In many ways, the altruism the students are drawn to is as much a representation of dualistic thinking as is selfishness. When all actions taken on behalf of oneself are selfish and thus bad, and when all actions taken on behalf of the community are good, then the idea of community is undeveloped, lacking the challenge and depth true community demands. Healthy communities cannot exist without healthy individuals. Therefore, the middle space where utility meets respect—perhaps in the honorable harvest (Kimmerer 2013), where one interacts with the natural world with both gratitude and reciprocity, valuing utility, individual wellbeing, and system health all at one time—is an important relationship to explore. As Jessica, whose growth on the course was especially transformative and who returned twice as a teaching assistant, articulates in her on-course journal, “we need to explore the ‘middle ground’ between the natural and the unnatural, and we should explore

discussions of both use and non use of the land.” This might be why borderland places (including the field philosophy experience itself, see below) are so interesting. These places represent the moments where the needs of both the individual and the community overlap, perhaps even conflict. By demanding some kind of values prioritization, borderlands challenge students to confront romantic notions of community and the natural world and push them to adopt a more complex, reflective awareness, which often occurs in tandem with critical and attentive respect for more entities, or a wider moral community.

Borderlands: nuance, value conflicts, and transference

A common trend in the student writing is a heavy reliance on romantic notions of community, nature, and human responsibility during pre-course thinking, which then shifts to a more complex and reflective awareness about the challenges of true community, ecology, and the complicated nature of right action by the end of the course, after we have worked to develop both human and natural community during our learning experience. With the exception of several students from 2009, when the course size was likely too large to enable the kind of community building and responsibility necessary for meaningful ethical shifts, most students realized some form of this transition from romantic dualism to complexity. The process looks different for different students, but a series of interconnected steps emerged as common elements across effective learning experiences: personal growth and self-awareness, social learning and the development of a safe learning community, emotional and curriculum engagement (enhanced by awe, inspiration, and place relationships), the development of agency and an empowered sense of responsibility for action, and a deeper connection with the natural world expressed as specific caring about the landscape and animals of Isle Royale. These things collectively—not necessarily linearly—lead to reflective awareness and intended or manifest transference of course learning to the students’ home environments.

The most dramatic instances of this shift from dualism to complexity, though, arose in response to what we call borderlands, the physical and conceptual landscapes where students have an opportunity to confront their previously held values, re-configure them based on new learning or exposure, and recognize a re-prioritization or a depth of complexity they had not before acknowledged. For Sarah (who relied on dualisms both in pre-course and on-course writing), this borderland was literally between here and there, between Isle Royale and home. Sarah’s moral borderland occurred when she watched a wolf run in front of her car across Highway 61—from forest to lake—as she drove away from the island toward Duluth, MN only three hours after disembarking from the ferry. In an unprompted and un-assigned journal response following this event, Sarah reflects:

So then we ask again, what is wilderness? We saw a wolf out of our expected context and it was equally exciting. I do feel badly though, because the wolf was confused about the highway and was definitely scared of the cars. In this way, I am grateful for “Leave No Trace” on Isle Royale. It gives wolves

respect to have their own habitat. Seeing the wolf was awesome and I will continue to debate the ethics of ecology, wilderness, etc. in order to find compatible solutions.

This is especially remarkable because Sarah criticized Leave No Trace (LNT) principles in her pre-course journal when she felt they created an unacceptable human/nature separation:

I do not like the idea that “leave no trace” encourages back-packers to stay on the already-used sites, so that the wild areas would be left wild. In some ways that’s a compromise. We allow packers on the trails who leave minimal impact and then the wilderness is still protected. But I still am not okay with this feeling of disconnect. The wilderness is then not “ours” to take care of—it’s separate and people don’t care for that which isn’t theirs.

She believed LNT principles precluded the opportunity to experience nature unscripted by human intervention, and this exclusion distanced humans from real connection with the landscape. But Sarah’s early position did not consider the intentions of LNT for the natural world more widely; rather she only thought about its impacts on her or other humans’ experience. Hers was a selfish motivation, despite her objections to what she earlier referred to as selfish motivations for conservation and wilderness. But the Highway 61 borderland catalyzed a more complex understanding of Leave No Trace.

Sarah’s post-course borderland reflection demonstrates a shift in empathy from the start of the course—where she romanticized the human/nature relationship—to the end of the course—where she steps outside herself to instead imagine the wolf’s needs from its perspective. This is exciting, especially as it occurred in the transition between her faraway experience in a “special” landscape, the wilderness, and her return to the “near” environment of her home landscape. While the awareness did not arise on the course, the learning and experience of the course prepared her to reflect on her relationship with the natural world more deeply. Her reflection demonstrates transference of course thinking to her beyond-course life.

One of the themes of the course is understanding how to “take our wildland values down from the mountain” (Moore 2004, 101), or how to understand our obligations to the natural world in all places by transferring the value and meaning we bestow upon our special places to our daily lives. This entails overcoming what Moore (2004) refers to as the near/far and the sacred/mundane paradoxes, which mislead us to think there are profound differences rather than blurred boundaries between both sides of these potentially damaging dualisms. Loving only the sacred because of the perhaps arbitrary elevated value we attribute to it allows us to desecrate the mundane, though both are similar and inherently connected in an interdependent and fluid world. We can, Moore argues, revere the mundane with the same respect we bestow upon the sacred by attending to it closely, forming a relationship with it, and caring about it; we have an obligation to love our near places in similar ways as we do our far places, for they are connected and related, a continuum of places neither good nor bad except in the labels we assign. Such awareness requires the realization that one’s environmental ethic must inform all

actions, not just ostensibly environmental actions. For not only are all places connected, all actions are too. An ethic is neither a hobby nor a set of rules. It is a way of being in the world, an expression of one's values and a powerful guide to action.

Sarah's learning reflects a better understanding of the near/far dynamic and the actual needs of the natural world, in this case the wolves and their habitat. Ownership was a problematic construct for Sarah in her pre-course journal because of the possessiveness she felt it implied, but when she understands the wolves need their "own" habitat, she adopts a more nuanced position: ownership is not wholly good or bad or right or wrong. Instead, it has gained for her meaning and value in place and through experience. The shifting context of wild animals becomes important in her understanding of nature, wilderness, and our obligations to the natural world. Thus, in crossing the literal borderland between wilderness and home, Sarah encountered a moral borderland, as well, a juncture that asked her to question and re-prioritize her previous valuations; when she experienced an actual values conflict between her desire for access to wild experience and her valuation of the wolves' lives as beings in the world, she experienced an ethical dilemma. This dilemma and the resultant reflection enabled her to articulate a shift in her environmental ethic, or her understanding of an appropriate relationship with the natural world.

Other students experienced similar transformations. In a mid-course reflection in 2010 Kelley wrote: "Today I had quite a few moments that make me want to hit the reset on my brain and begin to build my philosophy from the ground up again. I realize a lot of what I believe may clash as I have tried to make some things black and white." Not only does he begin to inhabit the gray zone, he recognizes his previous tendency to create false dichotomies. "I think though that the most important thing I learned is that we have to be conscious of the multitude of opinions out there and understand they may have valid points. I also feel it is important to help inform those who have false notions of facts that they use to back up their ideas," he continues. "This is why I think it is important that I came to Isle Royale to learn philosophy. I learned in the environment I want to protect. The place, not some book, is teaching me how I feel as I study about how I feel and what I ought to do." These experiences matter. They are not just neat learning experiences, but consequential opportunities for students to develop ethical awareness and a sense of responsibility for their knowledge as it manifests in the world.

Without our time on the island, our curriculum consists of fairly conventional environmental literature and ethics exposure. Students read a bunch, write a bunch, reflect some, and are guided by probing questions. These things are valuable teaching and learning activities. But giving students opportunities to re-evaluate their values when prioritization matters, when something is at stake, matters too.

And there is a lot at stake in our relationships with the natural world and our communities, which the students may or may not recognize until they are in the borderland and understand the relevance of their learning in the world. Kelly straddled this line one evening, when we had a conversation with a fisherman at the dock. As the fisherman fed students' fresh-caught fish he had pan-fried on his boat

while we held our evening discussion on the dock, he explained he had been fishing on and around Isle Royale for 50 years, since he was a kid and his relatives had a cabin on the island. He had a special relationship with the place, but he understood it differently than we did, especially in his expressed hatred for the wolves, which he described as pests. He hoped they would be eradicated from the island to protect the moose. The instructor shared some of the important roles she understood wolves to play in island ecology, scientific learning, and as beings just living their lives as they know how. The fisherman and the instructor disagreed but in a friendly way, and the tone of the dialogue was respectful, even as the subject was charged. The students observed the interaction. Kelly reflected on this exchange in a journal entry at the end of the course:

Maybe my actions and attempts at kindness and patience will give inspiration to others to find out for themselves how they want to live with Nature. I think that is a problem for both myself and many other people, We don't know exactly how we want to live with Nature. Do you want to be primitive? Or is air conditioning and sports cars your primary concerns? This has a lot to do with how you approach a conversation with somebody. I learned this as I watched [my instructor] and [the fisherman] talk about the moose and wolves. Both people loved the outdoors, the animals, and Isle Royale, but they had different values and reasons. Their differences defined the conversation from the beginning, and with the amount of time they had they could only talk so deeply about it. I have to be open-minded, but solidly in place to defend my own virtues as well.

In observing the conversation between his instructor and the fisherman, Kelley learned first-hand what is at stake in our environmental values and ecological understanding, as well as gained a concrete understanding of the fragile human dynamics required to engage value-laden conservation dialogue. He listened to the fisherman with compassion and in reflection displays empathy for a position with which he strongly disagrees. Kelly's ethical learning occurred as he started to cultivate and reflect upon the virtues necessary to navigate values conflicts gracefully while standing up for the things he cares about, qualities such as patience, steadfastness, open-mindedness, commitment, and kindness. Kelley stood on the border between two paradigms and learned better how to live his values in action. He is thinking about the lifestyle implications of our island learning, committing to work on its behalf, and setting goals to transfer his learning effectively. Kelly is not asking what facts he needs to know to nurture an appropriate relationship with the natural world. Rather he is wondering how he might best communicate empathetically, think critically, and defend his ideas in a kind and consistent way. This is remarkable learning enabled by an experience in the borderland.

For other students, we might say that the Isle Royale field philosophy experience is itself a borderland. Isle Royale is an island, a place with fluid boundaries between land and water, so close to Canada that in the past, an ice bridge could eclipse the once watery boundary and tie island to land. While the island is a designated wilderness, our Windigo campsite lies in the 2 % of nonwilderness land in the park; it is remote and in the woods, but also a quarter-mile from the ranger station, flush

toilets, and a small store we sometimes patronize that sells candy and souvenirs. The island and our camp are themselves places between here and there, the slashes in the human/nature, wilderness/civilization relationships.

Our field philosophy course is a rigorous academic experience complete with reading and writing, challenging discussions, and high expectations for participation, but it also encourages esthetic appreciation of place, emotional responses to ideas, relationship building, and reflection as academic content. These are new additions to the academic experience for most students; these skills more likely associated with everyday life (if anywhere), not school life. In addition, we hike and cook and take photos alongside our research, writing, and dialogue. Classwork is woven into daily life, and daily life becomes class.

The field philosophy course is a borderland between learning and life, experience and ethics, a place where how one acts in class bangs heads with how one acts in the world. This contact zone can cause a re-valuation and re-prioritization of ideas and actions similar to what Sarah experienced on the highway. It can also encourage a similar embrace of complexity. As Jake wrote in his final reflection: "From this adventure I have learned to question the question. My response to a question has always been to find the answer as quick as possible. Now I will take a moment, or a lifetime, to explore the question before responding." When Jake took the course, he was an advanced doctoral candidate in the natural sciences, a mature scholar and student. But it took a week in the field philosophy borderland for him to develop the intellectual sophistication to patiently inhabit the gray zone between knowing and not knowing, as if he has learned altogether a different way of inhabiting knowledge, learning, and approaching our relationship with the natural world.

Conclusion

Student reliance on dualistic characterizations of people, problems, and environmental action betray a problematic understanding of issues, responsibility, and the work necessary for environmental change. The specific dualisms students invoke, as well as the different ways these dualisms are used, demonstrate student knowledge and ethical baselines that can help us understand how best to focus curriculum and identify growth in subsequent student writing and thinking. Experience in the natural world can provide environmental humanities students opportunities to transcend these dualisms and engage borderlands, places that are both learning and life, special and familiar, practical and theoretical. It is in these borderlands that the crystalline distinctions between students' previously invoked dualisms lose power and relevance. Boundaries are blurred, positions challenged. Encountering these places helps students recognize and articulate value conflicts, prioritize commitments, and appreciate the un-straightforward nature of moral decision-making and action. Field philosophy experiences catalyze a metaphysical shift that is necessary for the development of ecologically informed and inclusive environmental ethics.

These are important learning and ethical outcomes, especially for the role they play in helping students develop participatory skills and virtues. Attending to multiple voices, caring about the consequences of one's actions on his or her

community, committing to the challenging work of environmental and community action on behalf of one's love for wilderness, nonhuman others, natural systems—these are meaningful and powerful things to take away from a learning experience. Most of our students will not become ethicists or environmental activists, writers or scholars. But they will all be members of communities, all actors in relationship with the natural world. They can choose to inhabit these roles as moral agents, and it is our goal to provide them the skills, intellectual seeds, and emotional motivation to do so. Field philosophy, in its capacity as a borderland, does just this.

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