Michael P. Nelson and **J. Baird Callicott**, eds.
The Wilderness Debate Rages On: Continuing the New Great Wilderness Debate.
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Environmental studies is a highly interdisciplinary field of inquiry, involving philosophers, ecologists, biologists, sociologists, activists, historians and professionals in public and private environmental organizations. It comes with no surprise, then, that the follow-up to Nelson and Callicott's original anthology *The Great Wilderness Debate* (1998) features essays from authors in a broad array of disciplines. While there is considerable overlap between the two volumes, this new version offers forty-one essays, five of which are new additions, organized into four sections.

What constitutes wilderness? Is wilderness real or social constructed? What kinds of values are served—recreational, aesthetic, scientific, or others—by protecting wild areas? While many commentators trace these questions back to an exchange in the 1990s between two environmental ethicists, J. Baird Callicott and Holmes Rolston III, the debate over the wilderness idea actually has older roots. At least in the U.S. context, it travels back in time to the earliest part of the twentieth-century, when the American public, politicians and ecologists were pressed to justify why wilderness areas should be set aside in a new National Park system. Since then, the fundamental question fueling the 'Great Wilderness Debate' is whether what is being preserved is actually wilderness. Is there such a thing or place as wilderness, that is, a quintessentially non-human or wild setting untainted by human influence? If so, why do we believe such areas deserve protection?

The first part of the anthology brings together ten historical and three contemporary pieces on the early statements and gradual alterations to the 'received' view of wilderness. The received view is that wilderness should be an area of pristine forest preserved for human aesthetic and recreational purposes: sight-seeing, scenic painting, hiking, camping, etc. What is referred to as the 'unreceived' view states that wilderness ought to be set aside for scientific purposes, including the study of ecosystems and biomes (or overlapping ecosystems) and the preservation of biodiversity (or the range of native species, both flora and fauna, that an ecosystem or biome can support). In 'The Importance of Preserving Wilderness Conditions', Charles C. Adams adopts a strongly anthropocentric view of environmental value ('wilderness must be judged ultimately by its contributions to social welfare') in cataloguing the several purposes of wilderness: artistic, scientific, educational, recreational and economic (59-62). Although the essay was originally published in 1929, it anticipates what is nowadays called 'non-equilibrium ecology', or the study of dynamic environmental conditions in the

absence of an unchanging natural balance. One of the essays Nelson and Callicott include in the anthology is Aldo Leopold's 'Wilderness as a Land Laboratory' (1941), also found in *The River of the Mother of God and Other Essays by Aldo Leopold* (1991). In this classic work, Leopold claims that '(t)he art of land-doctoring (or alleviating the mere symptoms of land sickness) is being practiced, but the science of land-health is a job for the future' (95). Extending the land-health metaphor, we see wilderness, or flora and fauna relatively unaffected by human habitation and use, as a norm or 'base-datum' with which to measure land health elsewhere. Similar to Leopold, Stephen H. Spurr answers the question of whether 'there (is) such a thing as a wilderness devoid of man's influence' in the negative (127). Since wilderness is a relative, not an absolute, concept; preservation involves employing technology and science in order to improve wild areas for specific, usually human, purposes, not to return them to some 'perfect' prior state.

In the second part of the anthology, Nelson and Callicott switch the emphasis from statements of the received view and gradual shifts away from it to strong critiques of the received view motivated by concerns about race, class and culture. In 'Wilderness Preservation and Biodiversity Conservation', Sohatra Sarkar deploys a cogent argument for conserving the widest possible range of biological diversity. She defines biodiversity as 'diversity at all levels of biological organization, from alleles, to populations, to species, to communities, to ecosystems' (231). When policy goals cannot be reconciled, wilderness preservation, she argues, should be jettisoned in favor of managing wild areas so as to ensure the greatest possible biodiversity. In one of the few essays offering an intercultural perspective, Feng Han shows how the received view of wilderness differs from the traditional Chinese view of nature. Importing the American model of wilderness as a pristine, non-human nature into China only generates 'moral and cultural crises', such as the removal of indigenous peoples, the perpetuation of harmful tourism, and the destruction of local economies. Thus, Han's essay reminds us that wilderness and nature cannot be appreciated apart from culture and context. Kimberly K. Smith's contribution, titled 'What is Africa to Me? Wilderness in Black Thought, 1860-1930', looks to African-American intellectual history for another perspective neglected by the received view. What Smith calls 'the black concept of wilderness' integrates elements of human experience, such as 'one's relationship to the community and to the land' as well as 'obligations of history', that are typically ignored or marginalized in traditional studies of wilderness (320).

The third part of *The Wilderness Debate Rages On* addresses how some of the major developments in wilderness science in the past fifty years bear upon this ongoing debate. In the first contribution by one of the anthology's editors, J. Baird Callicott argues that we need to abandon the expression 'wilderness area' and substitute 'biodiversity reserve' if we are to move past the debate's most intractable difficulties. While some might dismiss this move as merely semantic, Callicott insists that the change in terminology transforms the emphasis from protecting wildlife areas for human use to preserving habitat for endangered species. In his own words, '(t)he baggage that freights

the received wilderness idea, in my opinion, makes it an unsuitable conceptual tool to meet the challenge of the biodiversity crisis' (373). Dave Foreman's contribution presents a nice foil for Callicott's essay. According to him, Callicott constructs a straw-person, a version of the wilderness idea that cannot be located in the history of U.S. environmentalism. Clues about the 'real wilderness idea' can be found in the legislative history of the 1964 Wilderness Act, the philosophical notion of 'self-willed land' and the metaphor that the conservation movement is a 'river's watershed' that 'spread(s) out before us' (382-3, 388). In an effort to mediate these opposed positions, Jill M. Belsky claims that we should keep the expression 'wilderness area' (contra Callicott) and adopt a more hands-on policy of managing wild areas (contra Foreman). We also ought to avoid dualistic thinking that would make wilderness either a social construction or a physical reality, choosing instead 'to transcend thinking in binary, opposing categories and … universalist solutions and models' (420).

In the fourth and final section of the anthology, the wilderness idea comes into conversation with recent developments in ecology, our religious ideals and the practice of wildlife management. Callicott's second contribution to the anthology tells the story of how the 'conservation paradigm' shifted along with the ecological paradigm from an equilibrium/preservationist view to a non-equilibrium/resourcist view and, finally, to the mature view. According to the mature view, the value of conserving biodiversity outweighs any value gained from pursuing anthropocentric ends. In 'Wilderness as a Sabbath for the Land', environmental writer Scott Russell Sanders interjects a faith-based reason for preserving wilderness: namely, that it gives new meaning to celebrations of God's creations here on Earth, particularly on the 'day of our Lord'. In the final sentence, Sanders demonstrates that religious piety and environmental consciousness share more in common than we might expect: 'The Sabbath and the wilderness remind us … that we did not make the Earth, that we are guests here, that we are answerable to a reality deeper and older and more sacred than our own will' (610). Transitioning to a more technical topic, Rolf O. Peterson inquires about the best ways to manage wilderness fauna, particularly those species at the top of precarious food chains. He considers the advantages and disadvantages of managing the Isle Royale wolves, a disappearing pack that had never been captured or handled by humans before. Peterson concludes that scientific management of predator populations and their habitat proves superior to a hands-off approach: 'Enlightened by 35 years of scientific research and sensitive to an informed public, humans have a magnificent opportunity to use intellect in sustaining nature' (662).

While the collection is not without its defects—one being its daunting length and the other the editors' slightly disingenuous claim that they take a neutral position in the debate—it is nevertheless a worthwhile addition to a course reading list, particularly one for a graduate seminar on environmental philosophy or a special topics course on the wilderness idea. One insight I gained as a participant in the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities summer institute on Aldo Leopold and environmental ethics (2009) is that debates in environmental ethics—for instance, between those advancing anthropocentric

and non-anthropocentric accounts of environmental value—can appear naïvely simplistic and thoroughly 'academic' (in the pejorative sense) to some ecologists, biologists and other environmental scientists. Many of the essays in this volume attempt to bridge the gap between these seemingly esoteric, or purely philosophic, discussions and more applied exchanges about wildlife management, ecosystem maintenance and wilderness preservation. In this way, anthologies such as Nelson and Callicott's ensure that the dialogue about what constitutes wilderness will persist as an inclusive and, most importantly, an interdisciplinary undertaking.

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