EDUC 357
Dakin Henderson
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Hidden Villa Field Trip Paper

The Farm-Wilderness Distinction

When I was a child, I used to spend summers with my grandfather on Cape Cod, MA, in a wealthy town full of second homes for Bostonians. For years, cars driving around were likely to sport one of two bumper stickers which included a symbol of a windmill: one said "yes," the other said "no" (the "no" stickers drew a circle with a line through it over the windmill). Cape Wind, a proposal for a large windfarm located in Nantucket Sound, would harness the site's uniquely steady winds and shallow depth to provide an estimated 75% of the electricity demands of Cape Cod and the nearby islands Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket combined. It would also kill birds.

When the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound sued Cape Wind, claiming that the project violated the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act, the debate encapsulated a classic example of two versions of conservation facing off against each other. On the one hand, renewable energy is needed to reduce carbon emissions and global warming. On the other hand, even though the intentions of the prosecution may not have been genuine—opposition to Cape Wind tended to derive from aesthetic and financial reasons rather than conservation—huge wind turbines do kill a significant number of birds (Scott et al, 2013).

The debate can be traced back to the battle between John Muir and Gifford Pinchot over the construction of Hetch Hetchy Dam in Yosemite National Park. Similar to Cape Wind, Hetch Hetchy would provide power (not to mention water) to San Francisco, while at the same time flooding a beautiful valley. The underlying choice of values in such decisions tends to divide conservationists into two camps: preservationist, in which nature has value in its own right, and utilitarian, in which nature has value for humans. Hetch Hetchy and Cape Wind are utilitarian projects, by providing services to humans both directly and indirectly, while at the same time harming wildlife and wildlife habitat.

Environmental Education (EE) programs are often carried out by organizations that are "unabashedly committed to the importance of encouraging conservation behavior" (Ardoin 2009, p. 57). When EE organizations teach conservation values to children and adults, which values do they draw from? To what extent do EE organizations feel the need to identify themselves as preservationist or utilitarian? I will explore these questions through a case study of Hidden Villa, based on our field trip several weeks ago.

Hidden Villa's mission, articulated in the Goals and Philosophy page of their website, states:

> Our teaching philosophy involves three progressive concepts: awareness, care, and action. We begin by teaching awareness and respect for the natural world, then progress to the ethic of caring for it. Finally, we explore actions that can be taken to improve the world. (Goals and Philosophy, 2017)

Hidden Villa carries out this mission via two contexts which seem to embody each of the conflicting philosophies of conservation: a farm, and wilderness. During a single program, a student will experience both the operations of a farm and a nature hike. A farm represents an explicitly utilitarian relationship with nonhuman life. Agriculture is by no means the entity conservation is intended to protect. On the contrary, practically every organism on a farm is there because the farmer *wants* it to be. Weeds must be controlled, pests kept out, crops cultivated and animals fed. Hidden Villa does promote a holistic vision of farming, which is generally more compatible with wildlife and the environment. They teach students about integrating crops and using organic practices, among other things. But this is by no means a "natural" setting with intrinsic value. A farm is a highly managed, protected human creation which by definition exists for our benefit.

The farm portion of Hidden Villa's educational program also includes meeting the farm animals. These animals, which include sheep, goats, chicken, and pigs, essentially become zoo animals when groups of visitors observe and touch them. The educational value of zoo animals, according to Myers and Saunders (2002), aligns with a preservationist approach to conservation by inspiring care. When a child interacts with an animal, "the animal… becomes significant in its own right" (Myers and Saunders 2002, p. 160), which subsequently inspires concern. In apparent conflict with the utilitarian, anthropocentric message of agriculture practices, children may learn empathy for the intrinsic value of animals through their interactions with the farm animals. According to Myers and Saunders, animals can help children learn "to put the other's needs first" (Myers and Saunders 2002, p. 162).

The philosophy of caring, articulated by Noddings (1984), is absent of selfish motivation, therefor incompatible with the utilitarian approach to conservation. According to Noddings (1992), caring is an essential goal not just for EE, but education in general. She calls for a scheme of education centered around different modes of care: "care for self, care for intimate others, care for associates and distant others, for nonhuman life, for the human-made environment of objects and instruments, and for ideas" (Noddings 1992, p. 47). When visitors to Hidden Villa learn to care for the farm animals, are they learning a preservationist form of conservation, whereby animals and the natural world are worth protecting for their own sake?

There is a simple flaw in this train of logic: farm animals are not wild animals. With typical zoos, the animals on display are at least representatives of their counterparts in the wild, so empathy

people feel towards those animals may be transferrable to wildlife (Myers & Saunders 2002). Farm animals, on the other hand, have no counterparts in the wild, and the care children develop for them, if developed, would lead not to conservation but to vegetarianism and animal rights. Even for the captive wild animals in zoos, the challenge of transferring a visitor's empathy from the individual to the species—and then ideally to the ecosystem and broader environment—is a huge challenge: "ecosystems are not unitary animate others that naturally recruit our moral emotional responses, and nature itself doesn't care in a human way about animals…. Environmental care greatly increases the moral complexity of existence" (Myers & Saunders 2002, p. 166). Myers and Saunders here hint at the tension between caring for individual animals and caring for the environment. If children learn to care only in this way, one might imagine they could grow up driving cars with "no" bumper stickers about wind farms, to save the birds.

How does Hidden Villa resolve this tension? It does so by rejecting the underlying assumption behind the utilitarian-preservationist debate: that human civilization is separate from nature. For Hidden Villa's "Farm and Wilderness Exploration," students are invited to "appreciate the connectedness of all life while discovering the unique characteristics and roles of plants and animals on the trail and farm" (Farm and Wilderness Exploration, 2017). Students at Hidden Villa wander seamlessly from the anthropocentric creation of a working farm into the supposedly natural setting of a wilderness hike. In the philosophy imbued in Hidden Villa's educational programs, all life is connected—care for the intrinsic value of nature is perfectly compatible with care for the prosperity of human civilization. Global warming is the quintessential unifier of this view: the consequences are so broad they impact both human and nonhuman life. Seen through the lens of global warming, the Cape Wind and Hetch Hetchy debates (both involving the generation of zero-emission electricity) become less of a choice between human and natural benefit, more of a choice between short-term local and long-term global benefit.

Hidden Villa further attacks the separation of nature and humans in specific lessons within their curricula. For Kindergarteners, lesson ESS2-2 focuses on the question, "How plants and animals (including humans) can change the environment to meet their needs" (Programs Including NGSS, 2017). The parenthetical is significant. If humans are seen as part of nature, rather than separate from it, then caring for life requires no distinction or hierarchy of values. According to this philosophy, the animals in the zoo, the animals on the farm, wildlife, ecosystems, and the global climate all have the same fundamental needs as us humans. Nature has intrinsic value *and* value for humans.

When applied on a global scale, however, the "we are one" vision of humans and nature creeps back into the utilitarian jurisdiction. The idea that care towards nature and humans are one in the same has been argued economically. A 1997 analysis put a dollar value on natural services: thirty-three trillion dollars per year, compared with the total human economy of eighteen

trillion dollars per year (Constanza et al, 1997). From a financial standpoint, then, protecting nature is financially beneficial to humans. The reframing of nature's value from intrinsic to economical leads to a form of "eco-pragmatism" that would make John Muir turn over in his grave. Adding nature to the mix of currencies making up economic decisions in the free market inevitably results in loss of biodiversity, not to mention protected wilderness areas.

Thus I arrive at the unfortunate conclusion that Hidden Villa's blending of preservationist and utilitarian philosophies, via the integration of agricultural and wilderness care, offers a fairytale vision of conservation perhaps befitting the young children who visit, but, like Santa Clause, has no place in the adult world. Successful conservation requires that somewhere along the line people develop Nodding's vision of care—not towards farm animals or zoo animals or even wild animals—but for the entire interlocking network of organisms, materials and energy that make up the natural world. This means putting nature's needs first.

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