

**Reinventing Common Nature:**

**Yosemite and Mt. Rushmore--A Meandering Tale of a Double Nature**

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Preface

Just north of Copenhagen, the city where I have lived for the past twenty years, there is a special place called Dyrehaven.<sup>1</sup> It was established in the seventeenth century as a royal game park on the site of an ancient village, which was razed, leaving only the village pond and traces of high ridged fields. The game, partially tame deer, still roam the park's grassy open glades beneath high-trunked old trees. Copenhageners have made pilgrimages to this spot since time immemorial because it is the site of a holy spring. It is a public park today, and it is the natural place for Copenhageners to go on outings with friends, associates or family, to court, to recreate, and play in what is seen to be quintessential Danish nature. The park was a major cause celebre for the budding national nature preservation movement in the early twentieth century, and today the park is managed much like an American national park, complete with nature interpreters.<sup>2</sup> When I returned to my American homeland to "reinvent nature" in California I naturally took my half-Danish daughter and my Danish wife to Yosemite, my favorite American natural park. But the whole time I was there I kept thinking of Dyrehaven. I kept thinking about how words like "natural" have taken on different shades of meaning in different cultures and at different times.<sup>3</sup> These etymological speculations recalled Raymond Williams' statement that "the idea of nature contains, though often unnoticed, an extraordinary amount of human history."<sup>4</sup> It became clear to me that my musings were of more than semantic importance and I kept wondering what it was that made a

park a park, and what is it that makes a park both natural and national, not to mention "American." National parks would seem to be as much about the nature of national identity as about physical nature. If this is so, they should be able to tell us a lot about ourselves as Americans; a lot about the way we interact with each other and our environment. When seen in this light, parks become the places where we "reinvent nature" in our own image, and hence a good place to study the reflection of that image.

#### Nature and National Parks

Nature has a double meaning and represents at one and the same time both a physical realm and the realm of cultural ideals and norms—all which we lump together as the "natural".<sup>5</sup> If we say that Americans "naturally" love their country we are implying that this truth about the nature of Americans is to be taken for granted. To be an American is to love one's country. Much as it would be "unnatural" for Americans not to love their country, it would be "unnatural" to call this "truth" into question. But why is it "natural" to love the "purple mountains' majesty," and what do mountains have to do with the "leaves of grass" on the "fruited plane"? Despite the fact, then, that nature is one of the most abstract and complicated concepts we have, nature nevertheless signifies all that is concrete, unmediated and naturally given.<sup>6</sup> It is this doubleness of meaning which makes the term nature so duplicitous that it should never be taken at face value, yet we do so constantly, because not to do so is to challenge basic norms. The very idea of "reinventing" nature is no doubt offensive to many people because the natural is so bound up with their deepest, unreflected, individual, social, and national values. If, however, people are to become aware of the questionable ways that their concepts of nature can affect the way they act upon their physical environment, then they must question these values. They must realize that the "natural" values which they find in their environment are given not by physical nature, but by society.

This essay attempts to reinvent, or at least recover, an essentially premodern concept of nature in which people, and their values, do not appear to be excluded from nature. I wish to defend an older usage of the word in which nature is fundamentally a generative, creative principle. It is a principle which is, furthermore, akin to that of "love"--be it love toward an individual, "thy neighbor" or one's country. This usage of nature emphasizes sustainable reciprocity rather than domination, and makes of nature not a spectacle, but something to be dwelled within. Hopefully this will lead people to reflect upon that which they take most for granted, nature.

Yosemite and Mt. Rushmore are ideal vehicles through which to approach the nature of American environmental values and behavior. Yosemite valley is where the national park idea was pioneered in 1864.<sup>7</sup> It was the archetypical natural park which broke the ground for the establishment of a later system of national parks. Mt. Rushmore makes a useful counterpoint to Yosemite because it expresses a transformation in the idea of nature and in ideas of the natural way for Americans to interact with each other, and their environment. The comparison will point to the necessity of reinventing a "common nature." It was this idea of a common nature, I will argue, which gave rise to the idea of Yosemite as a natural park for the American people. If this natural ideal was the model for all of America, not just some of its parks, we might be able to rectify environmental policies which tend to create inviolable wilderness preserves in areas where people are largely excluded while overlooking the desecration of environments where we live and work.

#### Nature as Fertile Commons--A Meandering Stream of Consciousness

Yosemite is not just a natural area, it is a natural "park." The Yosemite valley, with its meandering stream of the Merced River--the river of mercy--flowing through green meadows at the bottom of a rock walled canyon, has always been immediately recognizable as a park to American visitors. According to Lafayette Bunell, who was among the first whites to

essay

penetrate the valley in 1851, it "presented the appearance of a well kept park." Bunell was the diarist of Major James D. Savage's military expedition, whose mission was to further mining interests by evicting the Ahwahneeche Indians from Yosemite.<sup>8</sup> To Frederik Law Olmsted, who first visited the valley in 1864, Yosemite was a "wild park," and represented "the greatest glory of nature."<sup>9</sup> He was the first chairman of the California Yosemite Park Commission which managed the valley until 1906, when the federal government retook control of the park. As the landscape architect of what was to become a similarly encanyoned scene of meadows and winding streams--New York's Central Park--Olmsted knew what he meant by park "scenery."<sup>10</sup> Even the great celebrant of a wild and sublime Yosemite, John Muir, the founding president of the Sierra Club (1892), praised its valleys for being "a grand landscape garden."<sup>11</sup> This is the term used for British landscape parks in the "natural" style which had its heyday in the eighteenth century. The new "natural" parks were called landscape gardens to distinguish them from the formal gardens they replaced.

It is this seemingly automatic recognition of Yosemite as being naturally a park, much more than the persuasive abilities of particular individuals, which arguably generated the national consensus which made Yosemite the pioneer national park. Drawings, paintings and written descriptions somehow effectively transmitted the idea to the American public that Yosemite was not just natural, but that it was and ought to be a park. This suggests, that if we are to understand the "nature" of Yosemite, we will have to look much more closely at the idea of the park as it has become ingrained in western civilization.

#### What is a Park?

The etymologically primary meaning of the word park, found in many early European languages, is an enclosed preserve for beasts of the chase. A "wilderness" was, in contrast, the place where the beasts (deoren in Old English) ran wild (wild-deer-ness), and it was related to "bewilderment" and going astray. The term park was later extended to mean a "large

ornamental piece of ground, usually comprising woodland and pasture, attached to or surrounding a country house or mansion, and used for recreation, and often for keeping deer, cattle, or sheep."<sup>12</sup> Olmsted was clearly thinking of this sort of park when he described Yosemite in terms of "the most placid pools . . . with the most tranquil meadows, the most playful streams, and every variety of soft and peaceful pastoral beauty." The meandering stream of the Merced, he tells us, "is such a one as Shakespeare delighted in, and brings pleasing reminiscences to the traveller of the Avon or the upper Thames."<sup>13</sup>

When woodlands are enclosed for wild game, or for the pasturage of domesticated animals in a pastoral economy, they take on a characteristically open, grassy, "parklike" appearance with scattered, "naturally" fully crowned, high-trunked trees. The "natural" appearance of parkland trees is due to the browsing of the animals, helped, perhaps, by the clearing activities of the game keepers, shepherds or gardeners. This environment is ideally suited to sport and recreation, and thus also for pleasure parks because people, even on horseback, can move freely and quickly after game, or a ball.

#### Natural Paradise and Unnatural Wilderness Desert

Parks appear to be attractive and comfortable by nature, and this clearly explains some of their appeal. It does not explain, however, the symbolic importance of national parks as places to preserve both nature and national values. This symbolic appeal of parks can be explained by way of the link between the idea of the park and that of paradise. The word "paradise" made its way from Persian to Greek and from thence to Latin and the languages of Europe. The primary dictionary derivation is "enclosed park,"<sup>14</sup> and the first paradises were indeed hunting grounds. The horsemen and hunters on Savage's expedition may have had this sort of happy hunting ground on their minds when one of them suggested calling the place "Paradise Valley."<sup>15</sup> The meaning of the word paradise also extended to mean "enclosed orchard or pleasure ground." In this context, it was natural to describe the Biblical Garden of

Eden as a paradise. It was, of course, in this mythical fertile orchard, watered by a river, and grazed by various creatures, that humankind was believed to have been born. The Germanic word "Garden," which is related to the modern English word "yard," also means enclosed area. Yosemite and the neighboring Hetch Hetchy Valley, which Muir described as "a spacious flowery lawn four or five miles long, surrounded by magnificent snowy mountains,"<sup>16</sup> have the physical attributes of such an enclosed paradisiacal park. It was, therefore not inappropriate for Muir to make the Garden of Eden, "its boundaries drawn by the Lord," a precedent for Yosemite as the first nature reserve.<sup>17</sup>

Paradise would not generate strong feelings concerning the need to preserve landscapes like Yosemite in national parks if the Garden of Eden merely called forth a nostalgic desire to return to an earlier idyllic form of existence. The garden idea is potent because it has long been a vital symbol in western culture of a moral society living in "natural" social and environmental harmony. Historically, the counterpositioning of the paradise garden park to the wilderness was a means of making a symbolic statement about the nature of natural national existence. The delightful garden park represents a fertile blend of the four elements: earth, wind, fire and water. It is counterpoised to a wild wasteland which is characterized by the infertile dominance of one element at the expense of the others. This basic framework is found in much Western art where the wasteland might be represented by everything from dry desert (a plethora of fire and earth), the sea (a plethora of water), to the steamy jungle (a plethora of water and earth).<sup>18</sup> When an environment is infertile it is "deserted" by life and becomes a desert, which in the original sense of the word need not be dry.

We find this structure in the classical and biblical literary sources which inspired artists. We see it, for example, in the Bible, where the nation of Israel is essentially told that if they behave according to God's command:

the Lord will comfort you;

he will comfort all her waste places,  
And make her wilderness like Eden,  
her desert like the garden of the Lord.

The Lord transforms the desert into a garden by rectifying the balance of the elements with water:

I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.  
I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive; I  
will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together.

When the Israelites did not love and obey the Lord, however: "Their lands became a wilderness because of the glow of Yahweh's wrath".<sup>19</sup>

The same counterpoising of a garden to the desert wilderness can also be seen in the tradition of Virgilian classical pastoral poetry in which the national importance of love and community is an important theme.<sup>20</sup> In Virgil's Eclogues the Roman empire is thus depicted as behaving unnaturally when it expropriates Arcadia's common garden pastures in order to divide the area into properties for outsiders. This is symbolized by the native shepherds being sent into exile to "thirsty Afri," to Scythia, "turbulent with mud," and to the Britons "sundered far off from the whole world."<sup>21</sup> The home they leave, on the other hand, becomes a wilderness, the oak under which they sang struck by lightning, the land they cross dry, formless, and barren--roamed by wolves. The reverse situation, however, is also possible as when Virgil describes in the Georgics the peace which brings the hammering of swords into plough shares and which results in the fertile rural idyll of a community of farmers and shepherds.

The physical "nature" of both the Biblical and the classical stories reflects the "nature" of the human community. The moral is that if people act naturally, and love both their god(s) and one another, they will be able to live in environments which are fertile and



comfortable; if they act unnaturally they will struggle in rugged, infertile wilderness desert. There is thus a clear relation between the character of physical nature and the idea of the natural as related to the behavior of the human community. This "double" character of the concept of nature is paralleled by that of love. When the two concepts are compared the relation between their physical and spiritual dimensions becomes clearer, and hence, less duplicitous.

#### Nature and "Love"

John Muir describes the Yosemite valley as the "mountain mansion [where] Nature had gathered her choicest treasures, to draw her lovers into close and confiding communion with her."<sup>22</sup> There is good historical precedent for Muir to be able to link the ideas of love and nature to Yosemite in this way. Love, like nature, has a dual meaning, involving both a physical dimension and a more spiritual, moral, dimension. Love and nature go together, as we are told in a poem by a contemporary of Shakespeare: "What makes the vine about the elm to dance, With turnings windings and embracements round? . . . Kind nature first doth cause all things to love; Love makes them dance and in just order move."<sup>23</sup> The word nature derives from the Latin word for birth natura, and giving birth, of course, requires making physical love. The word nation derives likewise from the same root. It refers to the native born who are the product not only of physical love, but of the love which binds the nation together.<sup>24</sup> It is this love that generates the inborn character, or nature, of that nation. This, in turn, is reflected in the nature of its environment. Muir saw a clear relation, in fact, between the nation's love for Yosemite, and the moral "nature" of the nation itself. He thus described those who would dam Hetch Hetchy as "temple destroyers, devotees of ravaging commercialism, [who] seem to have a perfect contempt for Nature, and, instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the mountains, lift them to the Almighty Dollar."<sup>25</sup>

By making "Nature" a beloved woman, Muir, like many other nineteenth-century nature writers, was drawing upon an ancient allegorical tradition which represented the generative force of nature by the figure of the goddess Natura, a goddess of love.<sup>26</sup> Note that he did not apply the word nature directly to the material environment of Yosemite, but to a more abstract generative force called "Nature." This is historically the most common use of the word. Until the Renaissance, in fact, the word nature was not used to refer to the material environment itself. The material environment was the expression of this abstract natural creative force and was not in and of itself nature. Olmsted was using the word in this traditional way when he referred to Yosemite as expressing "the greatest glory of nature." We can get a better idea of what that nature represented by following the winding stream of Olmsted's Merced as it meandered back to its symbolic British source.

#### The Meandering Stream of Nature

Throughout his 1865 report to the California Park Commission for Yosemite, Olmsted makes repeated references to the recreational benefits for the upper classes of the British landscape parks. He notes the existence in Britain of "more than one thousand private parks and notable grounds devoted to luxury and recreation." These parks were so valuable that the cost of their annual maintenance was "greater than that of the national schools." He criticizes, however, the fact that the enjoyment of the "choicest natural scenes in the country" is the monopoly of "a very few, very rich people." After comparing the recreational value of this scenery to the collective value of the waters of a river, and after favorably comparing democratic America to Britain, he concludes that: "It was in accordance with these views of the destiny of the New World and the duty of the republican government that Congress enacted that the Yosemite should be held, guarded and managed for the free use of the whole body of the people forever. . . ."<sup>27</sup> Olmsted's grasp of what was to become the American national park ideal was seminal precisely because he had such a good grasp of American social and cultural ideals.<sup>28</sup> It is

therefore important to note the way Olmsted plays upon the continuities and discontinuities between American values and those of America's imperial mother country. The various metaphorical meanders by which Olmsted traces the Merced back to headwaters in England provide a useful means of understanding American ideas of nature. In following the current of these ideas back to their source one soon discovers a vital cultural heritage which can help explain the genesis of American environmental values.

#### Yosemite and the Deserted Village

When Olmsted draws upon the symbolism of the English landscape park as land which has been privatized and so made inaccessible to the general public, he is striking a theme which would have been widely known to the educated nineteenth-century public. Among the most familiar sources would have been "The Deserted Village," by Oliver Goldsmith, from 1773, one of the most popular English poems ever written. In this poem Goldsmith describes the contemporary origin of the British parks in the gentry's imparkment of English village lands. I will dwell upon this poem at some length because it so wonderfully embodies the "natural" community values which Americans (and Goldsmith) felt Britain had deserted, and which the American folk had rightfully inherited. These natural values, as the poem makes clear, were heavily bound up with both the idea of the "park" and that of "imparkment," by which an area is enclosed. The village common or green in the poem is thus essentially a native community park which is imparked by a man of wealth in order to exclude that very community. The distinction between the community's park and the private imparked park is critical even though the naked eye may not be able to distinguish the grass on the village common from that appropriated for the manor's natural style landscape garden.

Though the description of Goldsmith's village of "sweet Auburn" seems quite realistic, we can only guess at its actual identity because it is a literary fiction. As fiction it is not about the historical details of actual places, but about the world of ideas attached to the long

history of controversy surrounding the enclosure and imparkment of the land of the village commoners. The commons were enclosed as part of ongoing social and economic processes which generated ever larger private estates.<sup>29</sup> The commons were not normally enclosed because of an ecological "tragedy of the commons" which necessitated the land's transferal to private ownership because of environmental abuse by the commoners.<sup>30</sup> This fact is made particularly poignant by the irony of the enclosure of Auburn's working community commons in order to make room for a park which is designed to look like a natural commons, but which, in reality, is an artificial construction for private pleasure. In treating the social issues generated by enclosure and imparkment this poem highlights the difference between the use of fiction to make people reflect upon their ideas of what is natural, and the use of æsthetics to deceive by creating a scenic "virtual reality" which disguises an unnatural world and makes it seem natural.<sup>31</sup> This poem is particularly relevant to our theme because it is about the æsthetics of imparkment and "scenery"--a term which, of course, itself derives from the realm of theatrical illusion. Guidebooks to our national parks are full of references to vantage points from which one might view natural "scenery." The origins of this word should alert us to the fact that the nature we are led to see might be staged.

In his poem Goldsmith describes an environment which could be Yosemite, with its stream and grassy lawns:

How often have I loitered o'er thy green, . . .  
The sheltered cot, the cultivated farm,  
The never-failing brook, the busy mill,  
The decent church that topped the neighboring hill,  
The hawthorn bush, with seats beneath the shade,  
For talking age and whispering lovers made!  
How often have I blest the coming day,

When toil remitting lent its turn to play,  
And all the village train, from labor free,  
Led up their sports beneath the spreading tree.<sup>32</sup>

Yosemite, of course, is the sort of place the nation goes to take vacations from work on the green beneath the park's spreading trees. Children romp and play in the glades along the stream, and it is even possible to spy whispering lovers. It is the sort of place where people who might have little in common in their work-a-day lives share the green. The only thing that appears to be missing is the village. Even though the Park Service has created an imitation Indian village, it is no doubt hard for the average modern visitor to imagine a village like Goldsmith's Auburn in Yosemite! And yet, there actually once was a village not unlike Auburn in Yosemite. It is difficult to find today because between 1959 and 1963 the Park Service razed its buildings to the ground, and the old village site is now the object of an extensive project to erase all archaeological traces of its existence. Soon the village will have been entirely rubbed out, with the exception of its 1879 church.

#### The Gentrification and Appropriation of Common Nature

The village in Goldsmith's poem is "deserted" because it has been turned into a park for the gentry. In Goldsmith's poem this was done by a selfish individual who had the village enclosed and its population dispossessed to create a landscape park. The park would have been in the then popular "natural" pastoral style, which created the idealized appearance of a grazed commons while transforming the actual commons into a private pleasure park.<sup>33</sup>

The man of wealth and pride  
Takes up a space that many poor supplied;  
Space for his lake, his park's extended bounds, . . .  
His seat, where solitary sports are seen,  
Indignant spurns the cottage from the green.<sup>34</sup>

The farmers must not just leave the land, but England itself, and this is not all that leaves:

E'en now, methinks, as pondering here I stand,

I see the rural virtues leave the land.<sup>35</sup>

The rural "virtues" of which Goldsmith speaks are quite similar to those which Americans think of in connection with Jeffersonian democracy:<sup>36</sup>

A time there was, ere England's griefs began,

When every rood of ground maintained its man;

. . . his best riches, ignorance of wealth.

But times are altered: trade's unfeeling train

Usurp the land, and dispossess the swain;

Along the lawn, where scattered hamlets rose,

Unwieldy wealth and cumbrous pomp repose.<sup>37</sup>

The meandering stream and its green meadows play an important role in this poem as a nationally recognized symbol of community love and place which characterizes the "rural virtues" of England. The imparkment of this landscape was thus not only a means of creating an idyllic scene, it was also a means of appropriating an important symbol of natural community and thus "naturalizing" a process of enclosure which was anything but natural.

#### The Historical Symbolism of Common Nature

The stream and meadows are ideal symbols of the natural because they combine physical and spiritual elements of nature and the related idea of "love." The stream and meadows are critical both to the fertility which sustains the village community physically through time and to the need for a community spirit which enables the population to manage its resources in an equitable and sustainable way. In this way the meadow becomes a vital symbol of the brotherly love which sustains community identity. The power of the symbol depends to some degree on an historical geographical knowledge of the working relation between people and

nature which, for many, has been lost.<sup>38</sup> The physical and community dynamics which make the stream and meadows so historically compelling as a symbol are, in fact, quite fascinating. First the physical dynamics: The meandering of the stream causes the water flow to slow and nutrient rich sediments to be deposited on the inside of the bend. As any canoeist knows, this causes the inside of the bend to become shallow and mucky, before it grades off into a mire of reeds and eventually grass. The fast-moving, turbulent water on the outside of the bend eats into the bank of the stream, creating sediment and causing the stream to meander further. During the spring the stream often runs over its banks and the reeds and grass slow the water, causing it to deposit even more sediment while cleaning the stream of sediments and nutrients which may have run off the grain fields. When the spring sun warms the soft muck, seeds germinate and feed on its nutrients, growing into a lush growth of reeds and grass in the summer. It is this grass which makes the pastures for the keeper's game and/or the pastoralist's flocks. In a more developed agricultural economy it is the manure from the grazing animals which fertilizes the farmer's grain fields.<sup>39</sup> It is for this reason that such meadows were often termed "the mother of the grain fields" and were regarded as being the farmer's most valuable land. The grass by the meandering stream was therefore not just a comfortable place for lovers, it was, in a very concrete way, a source of the sustainable generative power of nature.

The village green with its meandering stream was also an ideal symbol of the sort of love which binds a community together. Both the meadowlands along the stream and the green surrounding the pond were community property prior to enclosure, and the village green is still community property throughout much of Europe. The water of the stream was also a vital common resource which had to be apportioned fairly. The grazing of the meadowlands thus required the villagers to agree on issues such as how many animals could be grazed, by whom, and when, so as to sustain their environmental viability. Issues of this sort were

traditionally sorted out by the farmers in a kind of proto-democratic town meeting, or "moot," which was held on the green.<sup>40</sup>

Though the village green was grazed, its primary purpose may well have been for sport and recreation, and, of course, for community activities such as village meetings and fairs. The importance of the common use of grasslands both for grazing and for recreation is also attested to by the remnants of this landscape in the language we use today to express ideas of democracy and community. There is thus a close tie between the concept of the commons, commoners, and community. Even the word "fellowship" apparently derives ultimately from ancient Germanic terms referring to those who form (ship/shape) a body (lag-literally meaning "lay together") to share the grazing of animals (fe).<sup>41</sup> American metaphors for democracy and community are, in fact, filled with references to the green environment characteristic of a commons. These metaphors range from Walt Whitman's "leaves of grass" to the expression "grass roots democracy." It is also for this reason that the lawn on the New England village commons is freighted with much of the same symbolic load for many Americans as the Old England village commons was for Goldsmith. The guidebook statement "To the entire world, a steeped church, set in its frame of white wooden houses around a manicured common, remains a scene which says 'New England'" thus leads the historical geographer, Donald Meinig to comment :

... drawing simply upon one's experience as an American (which is, after all, an appropriate way to judge a national symbol) it seems clear that such scenes carry connotations of continuity (of not just something important in our past, but a viable bond between past and present), of stability, quiet prosperity, cohesion and intimacy. Taken as a whole, the image of the New England village is widely assumed to symbolize for many people the best we have



known of an intimate, family-centered, Godfearing, morally conscious, industrious, thrifty, democratic community.<sup>42</sup>

The Washington Mall, which despite its name is not a shopping plaza, is in many respects such a commons writ large, with the edifices and monuments of American democracy grouped around it.<sup>43</sup>

In some ways the lawns of Yosemite were heirs to the symbolism of the community green which had wended its way from England to America along with the meandering stream. Olmsted thus not only stressed in his report on Yosemite that "the establishment by government of great public grounds for the free enjoyment of the people . . . is a political duty." He also felt that laws were necessary "to prevent an unjust use by individuals, of that which is not individual but public property."<sup>44</sup> As Stephen T. Mather, the first director of the U.S. Park Service, wrote in a 1921 book on Yosemite: "our parks are not only show places and vacation lands but also vast school-rooms of Americanism where people are studying, enjoying, and learning to love more deeply this land in which they live."<sup>45</sup> The national parks were thus in many respects conceived of as a means of protecting what I would term "common nature" (or, perhaps better, "commons nature") by preserving it for use by the national community.

#### Was America Natural?

The unnaturalness of what was being done to the English national community was symbolized in Goldsmith's poem by the fact that the villagers were exiled from the garden into the wilderness. The wilderness of America! Wilderness was clearly a symbol of the unnatural. This is powerfully evident in Goldsmith's description of the New World to which his villagers are exiled:<sup>46</sup>

Ah, no. To distant climes, a dreary scene,  
Where half the convex world intrudes between,  
Through torrid tracts with fainting steps they go, . . .

The various terrors of that horrid shore:  
Those blazing suns that dart a downward ray,  
And fiercely shed intolerable day,  
Those matted woods where birds forget to sing,  
But silent bats in drowsy clusters cling;  
Those pois'nous fields with rank luxuriance crowned, . . .  
While oft in whirls the mad tornado flies,  
Mingling the ravaged landscape with the skies.  
Far different these from every former scene,  
The cooling brook, the grassy-vested green,  
The breezy covert of the warbling grove,  
That only sheltered thefts of harmless love.<sup>47</sup>

Goldsmith's poem helps explain, in a rather backhanded way, some of the motivation which led Americans to preserve the verdant meadows of Yosemite and Yellowstone as the first national parks. Americans were ashamed of the way Europeans like Goldsmith tended to depict the United States as having an unnaturally wild and unkempt scenery. When park scenery was discovered at Yosemite and Yellowstone which could rival the scenery of the natural landscape gardens of Britain, it seemed to prove that America was not by nature unnatural. It was only poetic justice to make these parklands into parks for the American people.<sup>48</sup> This, in fact, is precisely the way Olmsted saw Yosemite. Olmsted's idea for Yosemite was as American as the landscape parks of England were British, or as the Parisian state monuments to nationhood were French. Writing at the close of the Civil War, Olmsted clearly envisioned the park as a monument reaffirming America's national identity. He thus presented Yosemite as being on par with Thomas Crawford's Statue of Liberty, New York's

Central Park, Washington's Capitol Dome and fresco, Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way by Emmanuel Leutze.<sup>49</sup>

### Unnatural Scenery?

The bitter irony of the imparkment of the village green in Goldsmith's poem illustrates the way a natural physical scene can create an aesthetic appearance which "naturalizes" human conditions many would regard to be unnatural:

Thus fares the land, by luxury betrayed;  
In nature's simplest charms at first arrayed;  
But verging to decline, its splendors rise,  
Its vistas strike, its palaces surprise;  
While, scourged by famine from the smiling land,  
The mournful peasant leads his humble band;  
And while he sinks, without one arm to save,  
The country blooms--a garden and a grave.<sup>50</sup>

Similar rhetoric actually was used in the early disputes over Yosemite's imparkment. In 1868 Representative James A. Johnson of California thus opposed the appropriation of James Lamon's Yosemite farm and orchard by stating that the Constitution and laws of the United States made no provision "for the creation of fancy pleasure grounds by Congress out of citizens' farms." While Johnson's reaction may seem exaggerated, Yosemite did set a precedence, in principle, for the appropriation and destruction of farms which took place with the establishment of the Shenandoah National Park in the 1920's and 1930's. Some of these farms dated back to the 18th century and their removal involved the uprooting of several thousand people.<sup>51</sup> Early supporters of natural parks as wild scenery actually feared a public perception of Yosemite valley as an agricultural landscape, rather than as untouched natural

scenery. In their publications they therefore sought to to give the impression that the rural cultural landscape did not exist, or sought to have it removed altogether.

The tendency to define a landscape as being either natural, in which case it is ideally untrammelled virgin wilderness, or cultural is perhaps typically American. "It is no accident," as David Lowenthal puts it, "that God's own wilderness and His junkyard are in the same country."<sup>52</sup> He is referring to the American tendency to dichotomize between natural and wild landscapes, which are strictly protected against human development, and human landscapes which tend to be poorly protected and regulated. In Denmark, by contrast, the nature preservation movement has largely opposed setting aside nature in enclosed parks. Danes have essentially preferred to treat the entire nation as a park.<sup>53</sup> This is done, in part, by regulating land use in areas considered by experts and community representatives to be important examples of "nature." Few such areas would meet American standards for wildness, yet, as the example of Yosemite shows, American "natural" landscapes may not be as wild as they appear. England now has national natural parks which, unlike the aristocracy's landscape gardens, are expressly open to the entire nation. They are not, furthermore, pastoral paradises preserved from evidence of human labor, but working agrarian landscapes. Unlike their American counterparts, they tend to be conserved precisely because of their evidence of ancient habitation and stewardship, and it is widely recognized that the landscape must continue to be worked by the local community if it is to exist.<sup>54</sup>

The vistas of the gentlemen's park in Goldsmith's poem offer striking but deceptive surprises. At the same time as the prospect pleases, the working landscape, with its green and stream, is neglected. The overgrown state of a once sustainably productive environment is used to symbolize the unnaturalness of the rulers of the English nation:

And desolation saddens all thy green:

One only master grasps the whole domain,

And half a tillage stints thy smiling plain;  
No more thy grassy brook reflects the day,  
But, choked with sedges, works its weedy way.<sup>55</sup>

Much of the symbolism of Goldsmith's poem can be traced back to sources in the classical literary pastoral. But we are also dealing with what might be termed a "natural" symbol because it is born out of basic forms of human environmental activity such as hunting, pastoralism and agriculture. The Indian woman Totuya thus immediately remarked upon the deterioration of the Yosemite valley in 1929 when she returned for the first time since she had been driven out by Savages' troops in 1851. The granddaughter of Chief Tenaya, she was now the sole survivor of the band of Ahwahneeche Indians that had dwelled in the valley. The nature purists, such as Muir and his backers in the Sierra Club, who had opposed attempts to graze and burn the area "Indian style," were at least partially responsible for it becoming overgrown with vegetation.<sup>56</sup> It was conceptually impossible, of course, for the park to be both a wild scenic expression of U.S. values and an Indian cultural landscape. But the fact remained that the Yosemite that was "discovered" in 1852 "presented the appearance of a well kept park" because it was a park in the original sense of the word. The Indian game keepers burned it to promote, among other things, the growth of grass for game and black oaks for acorns. The open environment was also ideal for Indian field games. According to Lafayette Bunnell, in 1855 "there was no undergrowth of young trees to obstruct clear open views in any part of the valley from one side of the Merced River across to the base of the opposite wall." The extent of "clear open meadow land . . . was at least four times as large" as in 1894, when he made these comments.<sup>57</sup> The result of the white man's neglect was an environment which led Totuya to shake her head and exclaim: "Too dirty; too much bushy."<sup>58</sup>

Totuya's "aesthetic" judgement, was based on an environmental stewardship which sought to sustain the ability of the tribe to reproduce itself. This use oriented aesthetic is

foreign to the visually oriented, scenic aesthetic of the champions of the natural park. Olmsted, for example, made a point of arguing that "savages" were little affected by "the power of scenery," and he decried the Indians' burning.<sup>59</sup> The problem, unfortunately, is that when the park is not regularly burned and cleared, the accumulation of detritus and bush ultimately makes for much more violent fires which can also destroy the venerable ancient forest which preservationists are so anxious to save. Ironically, the lack of burning also means that the very scenic views from the valley bottom which Olmsted so prized become obliterated by vegetation. This suggests that Olmsted's British landscape garden ideal is somewhat insufficient as a model for natural parks. A better ideal might be landscapes showing forms of sustainable community stewardship. This, however, would mean accepting the natural priority of the Indian cultural landscape, not as a visual scene, but as a place of dwelling.

#### Raw Nature, Raw Power

After the designation of Yellowstone as a national park in 1872, more than twenty years went by before the next parks were named. Many of these new parks were characterized solely by wild infertile environments, with no counterbalancing green meadows, meandering streams, and pools such as are found at both Yosemite and Yellowstone. It is as if the ideal symbol of the natural has shifted focus from the valley bottom of Yosemite to the rugged walls and high mountains which surround it.

In some ways this change in focus reflects the difference in scenic values between Olmsted and the more transitional figure of Muir. Olmsted clearly saw Yosemite as a beautiful recreative park for the general population, and he emphasized the experience of the ensemble formed by the encompassing scenery surrounding the "native" vegetation at the valley bottom. He was not so interested in particular sights. For him it was "conceivable that any one or all of the cliffs of the Yo Semite might be changed in form and color, without

lessening the enjoyment which is now obtained from the scenery." The cascades were "scarcely to be named among the elements of the scenery," and he actually preferred the park when the cascades were dry.<sup>60</sup>

Muir, on the other hand, was emphatically a cliff and cascade man who climbed the valley's walls alone and preferred the view from the top down. The elite which followed in his singular footsteps traditionally have looked down on the hoipolloi flocked below, and the two differing points of view have made of the park contested territory. As a Club member wrote in 1919: "to a Sierran bound for the high mountains the human noise and dust of Yosemite [Valley] seem desecration of primitive nature."<sup>61</sup> Though he was concerned about the living nature of the valley bottom, Muir was particularly interested in reading the "glacial hieroglyphics," written the stone of the valley walls, "whose interpretation is the reward of all who devoutly study them"<sup>62</sup>

The change in prevailing ideas of the natural, as reflected in the difference between the original American natural parks and the newer variety, can perhaps best be symbolized by the figures on Mt. Rushmore. They look out from a mountainside not unlike the walls of Yosemite, but they do not look down on an enclosed green and watered valley.

#### The Nature of Mount Rushmore

At Mount Rushmore we have graven, into the very nature of a South Dakotan mountain, images which were intended to express American national values by their creator Gutzon Borglum. According to Borglum's wife, who acted as the sculptor's spokesman, the effigies expressed a "sincere patriotic effort to preserve and perpetuate the ideals of liberty and freedom on which our government was established and to record the territorial expansion of the Republic."<sup>63</sup> These values are not only jack-hammered and dynamited into the commonly owned physical nature of the nation; they represent, as it were, a vision of the commonly shared spiritual nature of the nation. This was a vision of manifest destiny which is believed

to have come to Borglum when he first stood on the crest of the mountain and was overwhelmed by the magisterial view "out over a horizon level and beaten like the rim of a great cartwheel 2,000 feet below."<sup>64</sup>

Mt. Rushmore belongs to a later era of parks and monuments when barren cliffs did not need to be contrasted with fertile meadows in order to conjure up a picture of nature. One can imagine that Teddy Roosevelt, the favorite of Borglum and a friend of Muir, is quite happy on his cliff, spying out over the wilderness. He had a hunting lodge in the Dakotas, and this was an area where he loved to test his masculinity against a rugged nature. This rough-riding warrior, outdoorsman, big game hunter, and father of American imperial expansion, would probably look down his long stoney nose at the soft nature lovers in Yosemite valley.<sup>65</sup> His national values are more like those expressed by William C. Everhart, an official in the National Park Service, when he described the parks as preserving the memory of an era in American history when the "exemplary virtues of rugged individualism and free enterprise were the foremost commandments of Manifest Destiny."<sup>66</sup>

If Teddy is happy with the magisterial view from Mt. Rushmore, Jefferson and Washington are no doubt longing for the grassy lawns of Monticello or Mt. Vernon (which despite their names are on hills not mountains). Abraham Lincoln probably identified more with the leaves of prairie grass and the lilac bedecked dooryards of prim Midwestern farm houses. Honest Abe too is no doubt wondering what he is doing carved into a mountain, alone in a wilderness with three other men. In the period between Jefferson and Roosevelt a sea change occurred in prevailing ideas of nature and the natural.<sup>67</sup> Though this sea change had been brewing since the Renaissance, it is during the nineteenth century that we see a virtual reversal in the symbolism of the natural. The wild, which had once been the epitome of the unnatural, now becomes a natural ideal.

#### The Idolization of the Wilderness



In times past the wilderness was associated with daemons--the most famous, of course, being the devil himself. It is in the wilderness that Jesus, the prophet of love, is bewildered and tempted by Satan. Wild environments are places where one "strays from the path" and becomes lost both physically and spiritually. The meaning of the word "diabolic" (from which the word devil derives) is highlighted when it is contrasted to that of "symbolic." A symbol is something which stands for something else. The Greek and Latin prefix "sym" means "together," suggesting that a symbol brings meanings together. The word diabolic, by contrast derives from Greek and Latin words which literally means "thrown across," which suggests that the symbolic and the diabolic might be at cross purposes.<sup>68</sup> The diabolic is thus typically identified with the graven image or idol which does not stand, symbolically, for the abstract idea of God, but which is treated as being itself a God. The graven image or idol is diabolic because it blocks, or confuses meaning when it no longer stands for the abstract divine nature of the godhead, but is seen to be the Godhead itself.

"In the beginning was the Word," according to the word of the Scripture, "and the Word was God".<sup>69</sup> The message of God was not to be found in the pantheism and graven images of the pagans, but in the intangible symbolic expression of the word with which God ordered and created nature. If you followed that holy word, and loved thy neighbor as thyself, you would live as in a garden paradise. And the physical "nature" of that garden would be a physical symbolic expression of the spiritual "nature" of that love. The reverse, however, is not true. People do not necessarily love one another because they live in a paradisiacal garden. It would be diabolic, and at cross purposes to the word of the Bible to confuse the Biblical ideal of a natural state of human affairs with the physical nature which symbolizes that state. This, however, is just the sort of confusion which is generated when we treat concrete wild nature as something which in and of itself is holy. People or businesses do not necessarily become moral or natural because they preserve nature. Natural environments

are generated and preserved because people act morally or naturally. The central point here, however, is not moral or religious, though it derives historically from arguments couched in moral and religious terms. The central point is simply that meaning is confused when physical nature is not seen to be an expression of human values but rather is seen to embody values in and of itself. The values which humans place in physical nature are displaced and obscured when they are made to appear to derive from the objective authority of that nature rather than from a subjective human source. It then becomes difficult to discern the true origin and meaning of these values, and the resultant confusion can be quite diabolical.

A painting which captures the new idolization of wilderness is Caspar David Friederich's depiction of a lone figure staring across a sea of clouds and mountain tops from ca. 1818 called Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer. In this painting nature becomes something raw and rugged that lies opposite the lone viewer, who gazes upon it across a chasm of space. For people like Friederich the sublime wild mountain scenery was sacred.<sup>70</sup> It was this sort of nature that the transcendental philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson was looking for, bearing a German dictionary and a work by Johann Wolfgang Goethe, when he visited John Muir at Yosemite in May 1871.<sup>71</sup>

Muir himself had originally gone to Yosemite in 1868 in search of "any place that is wild."<sup>72</sup> The experience of the wild was, for him, a religious experience, and he heard a "sublime psalm" in the "pure wildness" of a cataract.<sup>73</sup> At Yosemite he found a 2500 foot high "grand Sierra Cathedral" built by "nature" where one could worship.<sup>74</sup> Yosemite, for him, was a place where "no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man."<sup>75</sup> For Emerson and Muir alike the most sublime aspect of the park was the magisterial views downward from the valley walls.<sup>76</sup> The religiosity of Yosemite is a theme that was also picked up by the National Park Service. We thus find this sentiment expressed in 1926 by Stephen Mather when he wrote: "from Nature can be learned the scheme of creation and the

handiwork of the Great Architect as from no other source."<sup>77</sup> These sentiments persist, as one can see by the way quasi religious statements like the above are used to adorn the interpretive sepulchre of many modern national parks.

#### The Daemon in the Wild

However grateful we might be to Muir and others for their religious efforts to preserve the glories of Yosemite, there was a dark side to the venture which reveals the dangers of idolizing wilderness as nature. When wildness is sanctified, it is difficult to interpret the theology expressed by the "hieroglyphics" of its landscape scenery.<sup>78</sup> Muir's temple was bloodied from the start by the violent eviction of the native Indians. This tale is not made prettier by stories of false treaties of sale and suggestions of wanton murder and rape.<sup>79</sup> Such stories also abound, of course, in the vicinity of Mt. Rushmore, where Wounded Knee and Custer State Park are located. Questions are also raised by the odd alliance between wilderness preservers and industrial interests, particularly the railroads, which were not otherwise noted for their environmental concerns. We must even confront the schism, on the personal level, between Muir the wilderness purist and Muir the Yosemite Sawmill operator at the base of Yosemite falls, producing lumber for tourist development.<sup>80</sup> Finally, there is the troubling support by the wilderness preservationists for militarizing the park. As Muir wrote in 1895, "The effectiveness of the War Department in enforcing the laws of Congress has been illustrated in the management of Yosemite National Park." He was impressed by the army's work because: "The sheep having been rigidly excluded, a luxuriant cover has sprung up on the desolate forest floor, fires have been choked before they could do any damage, and hopeful bloom and beauty have taken the place of ashes and dust." To him, "one soldier in the woods, armed with authority and a gun, would be more effective in forest preservation than millions of forbidding notices."<sup>81</sup> Such words are in the worst tradition of the British park and game wardens who were known for their use of violence.<sup>82</sup> It cannot have been what the

pacifist and lazy man's gardener Henry David Thoreau had in mind when he coined the oft-abused phrase, "In wildness is the preservation of the world!"<sup>83</sup>

The point in noting this dark side of the wilderness preservation movement is neither to discredit important prophets of the environmental movement nor to decry the existence of the American national parks. The point is rather to encourage us to rethink the nature of these parks and to find the place where our modern concept of nature may bewilder us and lead us astray. It is time, I believe, to reconsider the idolization of wilderness. It is one thing to respect and fear a wilderness conceived as something "wholly other," like the Biblical Leviathan. This beast is a symbol of that wildness which is beyond the limits of human comprehension or control, which we neither can nor should attempt to fathom, tame or worship. It can be useful to learn to respect human limitations and to fear the consequences of environmental hubris. It is quite another thing, however, to sanctify a wilderness that symbolizes not American community values, but a rugged, misanthropic individualism which, in the face of historical evidence, often assumes the "tragedy of the commons" to be a foregone conclusion?<sup>84</sup> In this case the wilderness is not "wholly other," but "wholly us," and to idolize such a wilderness is to idolize, unwittingly, ourselves.<sup>85</sup>

#### Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Waters

One person who appears to have understood the ambivalence of idolizing wild scenery was Johann Wolfgang Goethe. The figure seen in Friederich's painting is aptly captured in a nearly contemporaneous passage from Goethe's Faust which Marshall Bermann uses to capture the essence of the modern idea in his wonderful book, All That is Solid Melts into Air. Faust's figure, however, is not entirely alone in that he is accompanied by the daemonic figure of Mephistopheles. Both are depicted, backs to us, looking through a beclouded space <sup>sitting on a Q.</sup> at rugged ~~mountains~~. Bermann describes how Faust contemplates the sea and lyrically evokes its surging elemental majesty, "its primal and implacable power, so impervious to the works of man."

Faust is enraged because he cannot understand why men should allow things to continue to be the same. He would like to see mankind assert itself against nature's tyrannical force which expends its enormous energy by merely surging back and forth with nothing being achieved.

Faust exclaims:

This drives me near to desperate distress!

Such elemental power unharnessed, purposeless!

There dares my spirit soar past all it knew;

Here I would fight, this I would subdue!

... And it is possible! ... Fast in my mind, plan upon plan unfolds.

Faust envisions gigantic reclamation projects which include dams for large-scale irrigation and waterpower for industry. The only thing which stands between Faust and his dream is an old couple who live in pastoral harmony with their surroundings and who are a model of community virtue. Faust becomes obsessed with this old couple and their land. They must go, he believes, to make room for the culmination of his work: an observation tower from which Faust and his public can gaze out into the infinite at the new world they have made.<sup>86</sup>

It becomes clear from this passage that what we are seeing in the modern period is not just a change in the natural ideal from the pastoral and agrarian to the wild, but a fundamental change in the idea of nature itself. Nature is no longer the love and community which brings together the elements in fertile harmony. Faust's project necessitates the destruction of that community's symbol, the old couple in the pastoral idyll. The new nature would be worshipped for the pure power within the raw material of the separate elements. The freeing, breaking apart and purification of the elements becomes the natural occupation of the lone heroic male developer who will put their power to use for the collective good of an abstracted conception of man and progress. And yet the diabolical figure of Mephistopheles

hovers over Faust like a mushroom cloud, casting a deep shadow that causes one to wonder just how natural this progressive modern nature really is.

This passage from Faust prefigures the vast dams and power projects, with adjacent recreational parks, which were subsequently undertaken to "conserve" nature by centralized authorities. Living communities were often submerged in the process, but they had to make way for the industry and recreation of an abstract society which belonged to the future. These projects invoke a vision of nature and progress which brings to mind not only Theodore Roosevelt's stony imperial gaze from Mt. Rushmore, but also the modern era of large-scale dam building which began during his administration.

#### The Enframing of Nature

Friedrich's lonely figure stands not only on a precipice, staring out into a distanced, wild, elemental nature. He also stands within a frame. The presentation of nature as scenery within a window-like frame expresses a Renaissance revolution in western thought. The frame is important because it enables the construction of a framework of invisible lines converging on a vanishing point that illudes infinite spatial depth. In this way, the earth's organic forms are transformed into landscape scenery. The geometric lines of perspective run through this scenery like the tracks of a train, revealing the potentiality of a progressively unfolding spatial infinitude. We draw upon this pictorial cosmology every time we speak of being "visionary," "having perspective," "seeing the point," or "getting the picture."<sup>87</sup>

Friederich's figure on the jagged mountain, Goethe's Faust, and Mt. Rushmore's Teddy Roosevelt are all images of visionary individuals staring into the infinite and seeing infinite possibilities for human development. Friederich's figure of the observer stands squarely within the frame. As spectators you and I thus tend to be drawn into the picture so that we look over the shoulder of this observer. This, I think, is a useful metaphor for grasping the way we tend to be drawn into the framed space which the modernist visionaries create for

us.<sup>88</sup> The lines of perspective in the modernist's world picture are no longer invisible geometric coordinates for structuring a pictorial space. The progressivist vision of the world is achieved by transforming the world itself into a picture in which the lines of perspective are materialized as vast linear lines of power, straightened concrete waterways and huge rows of housing developments, all with "picture windows." Even national parks become moving pictures <sup>viewed through car windows</sup> in which streams of asphalt link vantage points along vast skyline drives through naturalized "wilderness" landscapes that have been cleansed of human dwelling.

#### The Post-Modern Meandering Stream

The meandering stream in Yosemite has been preserved, but in much of California the rivers have become linear open sewers made of concrete. From California to Europe, hardly a waterway has gone untouched. In Denmark over 90% of the waterways have been straightened. These massive changes have led to calls to restore the nature of streams ranging from the Los Angeles River to the Skjern River in Denmark. This is to be done by "re-meandering" the streams. The Danish case is illustrative because it shows how impossible it is to separate cultural and physical factors when "restoring" nature. The straightening of a stream allows the farmer to drain the meadowlands and grow grain. Fertilizer needs no longer be provided by grazing cattle, petrochemicals now do the job. Not only have the streams been straightened, so too have agriculture's nutrient flows. No longer do we see a cycle of movement of nutrients from meadow, to cow, to field and back. Now that animal husbandry is not dependent upon the meadows it tends to be concentrated in particular places, creating a super-abundance of manure which becomes a pollutant rather than a fertilizer. Elsewhere, farmers drop cattle production and become dependent upon a cornucopia of artificial fertilizers which are rapidly leached into the streams. The streams, which have now become efficient drains, flush the water into the bays and sea where eutrophication causes plants and fish to die. Game and wildlife which depended upon the meandering streams and meadows for survival

are lost along with the recreative and amenity value of the areas where they once lived. Agricultural production, however, has increased and become more efficient, so efficient that the market is glutted. As over-production drives prices down the pressure mounts to increase efficiency or give up, and farmers increasingly must withdraw from the agricultural community and sell their land. The agricultural value of the drained meadow lands, however, is falling because as the soil dries out it sinks and requires re-draining. All of these factors work, in turn, to create a nostalgia for the meandering streams of recent memory, and a desire to restore their nature.

The Danish case is not unique, there is now an almost worldwide call to restore riverine nature. In Denmark the most ambitious environmental project of our time is the unstraightening of the Skjern River which was linearized just three decades ago in the sixties.<sup>89</sup> The work will probably be done by some of the same firms with the same sort of machinery that was used to straighten the river. In Denmark as elsewhere, this will be done in the name of nature. It will be done for the wildlife, for the purity of the water, and most of all for the "naturalness" of the visual scenery which it reinvents. Such projects will be in vain, however, if they merely restore the picturesque appearance of nature. In Denmark, for example, it is necessary not only to allow the stream to meander again. One must also restore the agricultural systems which maintained the meadowlands as a fertile environment for both domestic and wild animals. In the long run, the re-meandered stream cannot be maintained by a Park Service, but must be cared for by a productive human community.

#### Reinventing Nature

There are, in fact, few environments, including those in the American national parks, which are not the product of a long history of interaction with humanity, and which do not require some form of use to be preserved. It is not enough to simply re-meander our streams and pretty up their meadows; we must re-evaluate the nature of the communities which shape the



physical nature in their "watershed."<sup>90</sup> A concept of nature which has been purified of its human touch; objectified and cleansed of its human values, will not serve this purpose. A natural ideal which is common to human communities and their environment is much needed.

It is important to protect national parks and the extraordinary places where we can go, like pilgrims, to recreate physically while regenerating our community and environmental values. We must not, however, lose the connection between the "nature" of these uncommon places and the "nature" of the ordinary worlds where we spend our daily lives.<sup>91</sup> We cannot survive by merely escaping to the wilderness and preaching an "earth first" prophecy of ecological doom. The natural ideals which we hope to restore in the "headwaters" of our national parks must be given form in the planning and protection of our daily environments further "down stream." The two cannot be separated, as anyone can testify who has witnessed the polluted air stream of L.A. smog in the Grand Canyon. The damming of Hetch Hetchy and the imparkment of Yosemite reflect two sides of the character of San Francisco's interaction with its "watershed."

What I propose is not that we invent a new nature, but rather that we reinvent a conception of a "common/commons nature" that is quite old, and which gives our cultural heritage much of its meaning. It is through this cultural heritage that we learn to appreciate the significance of our natural heritage as a sustainable recreative and productive resource for human communities which, itself, is dependent upon the continuing stewardship of those communities. Such a heritage is symbolized by the meandering stream and the common nature of its meadowlands. By regaining this common nature it might become easier for us to understand that the physical nature we share as a nation is also an expression of the nature of our society. We cannot improve the nature of our environment without improving the nature of our communities.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup>It means "game grounds" or, more literally, "game garden."

- <sup>2</sup>Flemming Kiilgaard Madsen, Naturfredningssagens historie i Danmark (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1979), 44-53.
- <sup>3</sup>The Danish equivalent, naturlig, is not applied to parks because it would imply that some parks are "unnatural." Is Central Park an unnatural park? Is the Badlands National Park natural?
- <sup>4</sup>Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in Problems in Materialism and Culture (London: Verso, 1980), 67.
- <sup>5</sup>For a differing presentation of this issue see: Neil Evernden, The Social Creation of Nature (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).
- <sup>6</sup>I have presented this problem more fully in: Kenneth Robert Olwig, Nature's Ideological Landscape (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984). For a classic discussion of the complexity of the concept of nature see: Yi-Fu Tuan, Man and Nature (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Geographers, 1971).
- <sup>7</sup>Yellowstone, from 1872, is technically the first national park, because Yosemite was initially managed by the state of California, but Yosemite was the first park set aside by act of Congress. There was no precedent for establishing a national park in 1864 so it was placed under the control of the State of California. Since there was no state to administer Yellowstone when this park was formed in 1872 it was born a national park, and set a precedent for the nationalization of Yosemite. A national park was created for the area surrounding Yosemite valley in 1890. The National Park Service first assumed control of the valley in 1906.
- <sup>8</sup>Alfred Runte, Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 37.
- <sup>9</sup>Margaret Sanborn, Yosemite: Its Discovery, its Wonders and its People (Yosemite: Yosemite Association, 1989), 11; Frederick Law Olmsted, "The Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Trees: A Preliminary Report (1865)" Landscape Architecture, 43 (October 1952): 16.
- <sup>10</sup>As Anne Whiston Spirm shows in her essay, Olmsted was also someone who knew about estate management and the creation of rural parks, not just for the gentry--such as at George Vanderbilt's colossal Biltmore Estate in Ashville, NC--but for the nation as a whole, as at Niagra Falls. He first went to California to manage the vast Sierra mining estates of General Fremont. In 1866 he resigned from the Yosemite Park Commission in order to resume work on Central Park.
- <sup>11</sup>John Muir, The Yosemite, with a Foreword by David Brower (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1988; orig. 1914), 194. He was writing of Yosemite valley's smaller twin, the Hetch Hetchy Valley.
- <sup>12</sup>O.E.D. Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), paradise, park, wilderness, wild.
- <sup>13</sup>Olmsted, 14,16.
- <sup>14</sup>Merriam-Webster, Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam, 1961), paradise.
- <sup>15</sup>Sanborn, 46.
- <sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 195.
- <sup>17</sup>Quoted in Runte, 71.
- <sup>18</sup>W. H. Auden, The Enchafed Flood: Three Critical Essays on the Romantic Spirit (New York: Vintage, 1967).
- <sup>19</sup>George H. Williams, Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought: The Biblical Experience of the Desert in the History of Christianity (New York: Harpers and Brothers, 1962), 9, 12; Quotes from: Isaiah 51:3 f., Isaiah 41: 18 f., Jeremiah 25: 38 f.
- <sup>20</sup>See: Kenneth R. Olwig, "Literature and 'Reality': The Transformation of the Jutland Heath," in Humanistic Geography and Literature, ed. Douglas C.D. Pocock (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 47-65.
- <sup>21</sup>Michael C. J. Putnam, Virgil's Pastoral Art (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 56. (Virgil Eclogues 1. 64-68).
- <sup>22</sup>Muir, 5.
- <sup>23</sup>The poem is Sir John Davies's, Orchestra from 1596, quoted in: E.M.W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960), 97.
- <sup>24</sup>On the connection between sexuality and the concept of nature see: Kenneth R. Olwig, "Sexual Cosmology: Nation and Landscape at the Conceptual Interstices of Nature and Culture, or: What does Landscape Really Mean?" In Landscape: Politics and Perspectives, ed. Barbara Bender (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 307-343.
- <sup>25</sup>Muir, 196-97.
- <sup>26</sup>See: George D. Economou, The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1972) for an analysis of the relationship between the concept of love and nature as represented by the goddess Natura in the Medieval period. For a more modern conception of the relation between love and nature see: Wendell Berry, "The Futility of Global Thinking," Harper's Magazine, (September 1989): 16-22.
- <sup>27</sup>Olmsted, 21-22.
- <sup>28</sup>See Runte, 28-44: see also Anne Whiston Spirm's essay.

- <sup>29</sup>See: J.M. Neeson, Commoners: common right, enclosure and social change in England, 1700-1820 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- <sup>30</sup>The theory of the tragedy of the commons was propounded in: Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," Science 162 (1968): 1243-1248. For a critique see: Bonnie J. McCay, and James M. Acheson, eds., The Question of the Commons: Culture and Ecology of Communal Resources (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1987).
- <sup>31</sup>See N. Catherine Hayles' essay.
- <sup>32</sup>Oliver Goldsmith, The Deserted Village (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, n.d. ; orig. 1773), 7-9.
- <sup>33</sup>John Barrell, The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).
- <sup>34</sup>Goldsmith, 33.
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid., 43.
- <sup>36</sup>On the relation between Jeffersonian democracy and the pastoral literary tradition see: Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid., 13.
- <sup>38</sup>See Richard White's essay.
- <sup>39</sup>On turbulence and the feminine see: Katherine N. Hayles, "Gender Encoding in Fluid Mechanics: Masculine Channels and Feminine Flows," Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies, 4, no. 2 (1992): 16-44; on the feminine and agrarian fertility see Carolyn Merchant's essay in this book.
- <sup>40</sup>Black's Law Dictionary gives the following definition of a "Folc-mote" or "Folc-gemote": "In Saxon law, a general assembly of the people in a town or shire. It appears to have had judicial functions of a limited nature, and also to have discharged political offices, such as deliberating upon the affairs of the commonwealth or complaining of misgovernment, and probably possessed considerable powers of local self-government." "Folc-land" is "Land belonging to the people or the public. Folc-land was the property of the community. It might be occupied in common, or possessed in severalty; and, in the latter case, it was probably parceled out to individuals in the folc-gemote or court of the district . . . . But while it continued to be folc-land, it could not be alienated in perpetuity." Henry Campbell Black, Black's Law Dictionary (St. Paul: West Publishing Co., 1979), 578.
- <sup>41</sup>Merriam-Webster, fellow, ship. As "fellows" at the Humanities Research Center at the University of California, we shared, as part of a larger academic community, a lovely, mowed campus green where we could sit together and "reinvent" nature.
- <sup>42</sup>D.W. Meinig, "Symbolic Landscapes: Some Idealizations of American Communities," in The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays, ed. D.W. Meinig (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 165.
- <sup>43</sup>See essay by Jenny Price.
- <sup>44</sup>Olmsted, 21-22.
- <sup>45</sup>Quoted in: Stanford E. Demars, The Tourist in Yosemite, 1855-1985 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991), 94-95.
- <sup>46</sup>See: Roderick Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, 3 ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Marjorie Hope Nicholson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite (New York: W.W. Norton, 1959).
- <sup>47</sup>Ibid., 39-40.
- <sup>48</sup>Paul Shepard, Man in the Landscape: A Historic View of the Esthetics of Landscape (New York: Ballantine, 1967), 244-55.
- <sup>49</sup>Olmsted, 13-14.
- <sup>50</sup>Ibid., 35-36.
- <sup>51</sup>Shenandoah National Park was a cause celebre for the elites of Washington much as Yosemite was for the elites of San Francisco, with George Freeman Pollock playing an analogous role to that of Muir. See: George Freeman Pollock, Skyland: The Heart of the Shenandoah Nation Park, ed. Stuart E. Brown Jr. (n.p.: Chesapeake Book Co., 1960). On the imparkment and depopulation of Shenandoah, and its eventual designation as wilderness, see: Henry Heatwole, Guide to Shenandoah National park, 4th ed. (Luray, Virginia: Shenandoah Natural History Association, 1992), 27-44; Carolyn Reeder and Jack Reeder, Shenandoah Heritage: The Story of the People Before the Park (Washington, D.C.: The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, 1978).
- <sup>52</sup>David Lowenthal, "Is Wilderness 'Paradise Enow'? Images of Nature in America," Columbia University Forum 7, no. 2 (1964): 40.
- <sup>53</sup>Madsen, 144-148.

- <sup>54</sup>See, for example: Timothy O'Riordan, Christopher Wood, and Ann Shadrake, Landscapes for Tomorrow: Interpreting Landscape Futures in the Yorkshire Dales National Park (Grassington: Yorkshire Dales National Park Committee, 1992). For a critical view see: Marion Shoard, The Theft of the Countryside (London: Temple Smith, 1980).
- <sup>55</sup>Ibid, 13.
- <sup>56</sup>Runte, 28-82.
- <sup>57</sup>Ibid., quoted 37.
- <sup>58</sup>Sanborn, 237-243, quote 238. On St. John, U.S.V.I., there is another U.S. national park which has grown unkempt. The "native born" St. Johnians have a phrase which suggests an environmental aesthetic similar to that of Totuya: "man die, bush grow a he door mout." See: Karen Fog. Olwig, "National Parks, Tourism, and Local Development: A West Indian Case," Human Organization 39, no. 1(1980): 22-31.
- <sup>59</sup>Olmsted, 18, 22. In his foreword to Muir's The Yosemite David Brower notes that the only example that he knows of Indian "eye for beauty" is a panoramic vista point with a "magnificent" broad view near Yosemite where Indians made arrow heads. Totuya, I would venture, is expressing a form of aesthetic appreciation which Brower probably would have difficulty comprehending given his emphasis upon the "eye," and his approval of Muir and Olmsted's successful efforts to prevent the Indian style burning of Yosemite. David Brower, foreword to The Yosemite, by John Muir (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1988), xii, xvii.
- <sup>60</sup>Olmsted, 16.
- <sup>61</sup>Quoted in Demars, 109.
- <sup>62</sup>Muir, 127.
- <sup>63</sup>Quoted in: Albert Boime, The Magisterial Gaze (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 161-162. The effigies date from 1941.
- <sup>64</sup>Ibid., quoted on 158.
- <sup>65</sup>On Roosevelt and his ideals see: Richard Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 29-62.
- <sup>66</sup>William C. Everhart, The National Park Service (New York: Praeger, 1972), 6.
- <sup>67</sup>A particularly pertinent source on this sea change is, Nash.
- <sup>68</sup>These definitions are taken from Merriam-Webster: "wilder," "desert," "devil," "symbol" and "graven."
- <sup>69</sup>John 1:1-2.
- <sup>70</sup>See Albert Boime, Art in an Age of Bonapartism, 1800-1815 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 523-26.
- <sup>71</sup>Sanborn, 140-47.
- <sup>72</sup>Muir, 1.
- <sup>73</sup>Ibid., 15.
- <sup>74</sup>Ibid., 10.
- <sup>75</sup>Ibid., 197.
- <sup>76</sup>Whereas Friederich's figures tended to look upward in reverence, Americans tended to look downward from a high vantage point with, in the words of art historian Albert Boime, a "magisterial gaze." This was the same magisterial gaze which Borghum was later to carve into stone at Mt. Rushmore, see Boime, 158-166.
- <sup>77</sup>Quoted in Demars, 95.
- <sup>78</sup>See: Laura H. Graber, Wilderness as Sacred Space (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Geographers, 1976); for a relevant analysis of American landscape art see: William Cronon, "Telling Tales on Canvas: Landscapes of Frontier Change," In Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts, ed. Jules David Prown (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 37-87.
- <sup>79</sup>Sanborn, 42-52.
- <sup>80</sup>Muir, 193, 196, 209.
- <sup>81</sup>Quoted in Runte, 61-62.
- <sup>82</sup>Alistair D. Graham, The Gardeners of Eden (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1973).
- <sup>83</sup>See William Cronon's essay for a discussion of this phrase. See also: Nash, 84-95.
- <sup>84</sup>For an interpretation of the parks as a "tragedy of the commons" see Runte, 188-189, 197-199.
- <sup>85</sup>Anthony Brandt, "Views." Atlantic Monthly, July 1977, 46-49; William Leiss, The Domination of Nature (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974). See also William Cronon's essay.
- <sup>86</sup>Marshall Berman, All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 60-71.
- <sup>87</sup>I have discussed much of the relevant literature in: Olwig, "Sexual Cosmology."

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<sup>88</sup>A useful discussion of issues relevant to this topic is to be found in: Jonathan Crary, Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990) .

<sup>89</sup>See Olwig, Nature's Ideological Landscape, 95-103.

<sup>90</sup>Anne Whiston Spira, The Granite Garden: Urban Nature and Human Design (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 129-168.

<sup>91</sup>The English organization, "Common Ground" is taking steps in this direction, see: Susan Clifford, Angela King, and Richard Mabey, eds., Second Nature (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984).