

Philosophy – Community – Environment

Philosophical Rhetoric to Inform Community Engagement

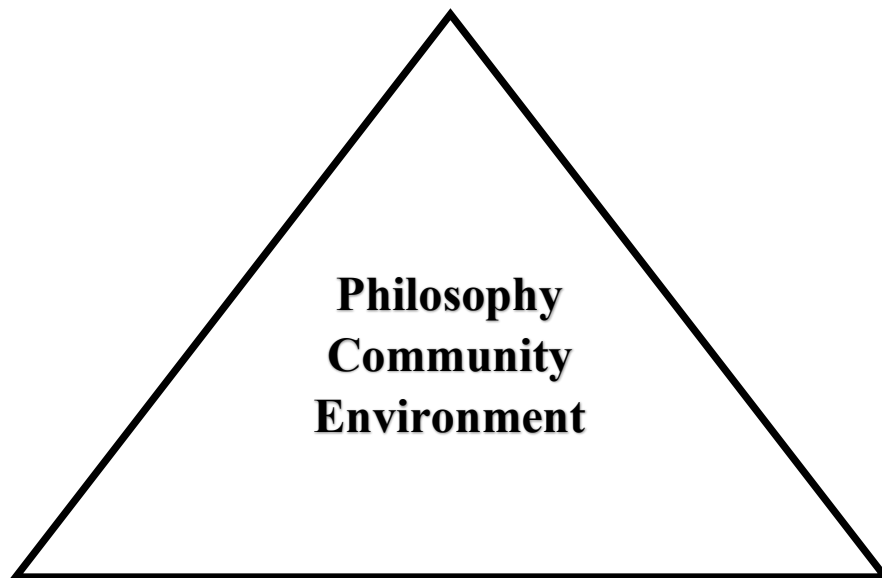
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Environmental Philosophy Civic Engagement Project

Intro

My Civic Engagement Project (CEP), *Philosophy - Community - Environment*, was a collaboration alongside three different non-profits that aimed to incorporate philosophy into different forms of community engagement. Within this project exists an underlying theme of how this form of philosophy and community engagement gets one to think about the environment(s) around them. I created different forms of engagement material for The Democracy Project, Merlin CCC, and Here Montana. The form of this material took shape as an Environmental Philosophy Toolkit for high school students, a public event utilizing philosophy to address grief, and a digital resource library which addresses different ways in which we interact with wilderness and barriers to outdoor access. These three different engagement pieces are interconnected through the ways each of them brings together elements of philosophy, the community, and the environment.



One can see the triangle that exists above this paragraph. Within this triangle exists the theoretical space where philosophy, community, and environment converge. I invite the reader to

imagine at each of the three points of the triangle are different ways in which this convergence may happen. It is my hope that throughout this portfolio, the reader will garner an understanding of what this space *might* look like through the engagement projects I completed alongside theoretical material taken from courses in my graduate program. Referring to the triangle, the bottom right corner is “Applied/Tangible,” which was my work with Merlin CCC. The bottom left is my material for Here Montana which is the “Theoretical/Intangible.” At the top of the triangle the applied/tangible and theoretical/intangible intersect, seen through the largest engagement piece of my project that I created for The Democracy Project.

Of the three organizations I collaborated with, most of my work was done with The Democracy Project, a teen-led, non-partisan initiative supported by local libraries, community partners, and Humanities Montana. This program gives teens the resources to effect change and know their role in an evolving democracy through direct civic participation. This piece of my CEP was creating an Environmental Philosophy Toolkit. This toolkit was made to be used as a resource intended to engage high school students in entry-level philosophical rhetoric to intellectually challenge and motivate them to start thinking philosophically about the world around them, particularly in the context of their surrounding environments. The toolkit is a 30+ page “curriculum” that interactively teaches different topics in environmental philosophy. It is discussion based, with lessons, activities, articles, readings, and various forms of media used throughout. For this engagement piece as well as my other two, I will go more in depth into the specific contents, context, and steps involved in creating each in the “Actions Taken” section of this portfolio.

My second engagement piece involved assisting in creating a public event alongside Merlin CCC. Merlin is a public philosophy non-profit dedicated to enriching lives and

strengthening the community and environment through philosophy. The event was titled “How Do We Think About Grief?” This was part of Merlin’s ongoing Loss & Legacy Symposia Series. This community event’s goal was to provide philosophical forum for understanding and communicating the aesthetic nature and experience of loss – one that incorporates beautiful opportunities for self-reflection, seeing grief in others as part of our shared community, and establishing rituals to encounter and process these personal and communal experiences as a united culture and/or world. I created an internal evaluation that can be used for public philosophy events as well as a post event survey. This was a concrete example of how philosophy can be used tangible in the community.

My third engagement piece was working with Here Montana, a non-profit aiming to engage, empower, and elevate communities of color to spend time outside in a safe and informed way, thereby building an outdoor community of People of Color and developing leaders within that community. The material I created was a digital resource library for their website, where I added academic papers that talk about wilderness and access to outdoor recreation. I broke down each of these papers into study guides that disseminate the information and offer room for discussion, as well as included specific discussion questions. This material allows Here Montana activity participants, as well as the public, to better understand issues within outdoor access and wilderness by addressing (the lack of) inclusion and social justice in these spaces.

My engagement pieces were three distinctly separate projects that emphasized the links between philosophy, community engagement, and the environment. Each engagement piece highlighted different ways of incorporating these three themes into material that can be brought into use by different members of the community in their own philosophical journeys. The materials allow us to engage with pressing issues such as social and environmental justice,

environmental values, and the ways in which we can personally use philosophy to be a more informed community member and caretaker of the environment.

Background Context

In recent years, there has seemingly been a growing interest in the field of philosophy and community engagement. Philosophers have increasingly sought to engage with local communities and bring philosophical inquiry into public discourse. In doing so, they aim to bridge the gap between academic philosophy and everyday life. Examples of this work include philosophers engaging with local schools and organizations to teach courses on philosophical topics, hosting public lectures and debates on philosophical issues, and collaborating with local organizations to develop projects that address social justice and equity issues. Additionally, some philosophers have used technology to increase the reach of their work, such as through online forum. Overall, these efforts emphasize the importance of connecting philosophical inquiry with everyday life, democratizing philosophical knowledge, and increasing access to it for members of marginalized communities. Much of my inspiration for this project came from my interest in how philosophy can be made more accessible to the community via a range of methods. I have had a few specific experiences in my life that were extremely formative in my intellectual and academic development, that continue to inform how I think about the world around me.

Two experiences come to mind when considering what brought a lot of these ideas to fruition. I have a vested personal interest in experiential learning – where educators of various types purposefully engage with students through direct experience and reflection. Experiential learning has an emphasis on learning through the experience itself as well as our reflections of the experience. Typically, these programs will be outdoor based and utilize different environments, cultures, and peoples to inform the “experience” in the learning process. My

motivations to pursue a graduate degree came directly out of a semester long experiential learning program I did my junior year of my undergraduate studies in Nepal with the School for International Training (SIT). Throughout the semester, we traveled throughout Nepal, living with host families, in refugee camps, and rural villages in the Himalaya. We engaged directly with the land and the many different groups of people that live in these areas. Through hands on learning, I received an extremely intimate look into these Himalayan cultures, religions, and identities. This was perhaps the most formative experience in my life. It was almost as a lightning bolt hit me telling me, “This is *it*.” I felt that in this one semester I had garnered much more of an educational grounding than my entire academic career to that point. This type of learning just made so much more sense to me, particularly in my own views on philosophy and how I interact with the world around me and the people within it through the ways we process knowledge. I wanted to further explore a lot of these thoughts in my head, so I came to this program eager to investigate how environmental philosophy informs experiential learning.

With this in mind, I was able to get an internship at the Wild Rockies Field Institute (WRFI) as a Teaching Assistant on a three-week Environmental Ethics course. This was an experiential learning program where undergraduate students spend the course backpacking in multiple wildernesses in Montana as well as meeting with Indigenous leaders, farmers, national park employees, and educators across the state. Every day, even on the backpacking trips, we would have an academic lesson. We would talk about ethics, ideas of wilderness, human/animal relationships, and climate change just to name a few. In the paper I wrote for this internship, I talked about the “Experience *in* Experience” – that there is *something* within learning and engaging with material about the environment around you while you are in that environment that greatly differs from learning it in a traditional classroom setting. On one of our backpacking trips

in the Bob Marshall, we had a scary run in with a grizzly bear. The following day we had a conversation on our relationships with animals, animal ethics and animal personhood. In the context of the program, being miles back into a wilderness area, and having seen an angry grizzly bear much closer than anticipated, made this information and knowledge much more visceral. Learning about the environment while directly engaging in it changes how we intake that information – in turn changing how we engage within it. More importantly, it changes how we *think about* engaging within it.

Initially, my CEP was going to be focusing on this idea of experiential learning and environmental philosophy. However, I had some thoughts that came from my own experiences on these programs that I couldn't shake. There was an extremely significant common denominator in both programs. I was able to see it firsthand as a student in Nepal and as an instructor in Montana. It was the ways the relationships that formulated between students made the experience much more influential. Within that shared experience is something unnamed but quite powerful. We discussed it at length, and how it is not something you can share with your close peer groups or family, as the experience itself is what made it so powerful, and there are sometimes things that just cannot be put into words. However, we can take the weight of the experience and translate it into how we do engage with others and inform our thinking and learning. As I was thinking about this, it came to me that this is not something that only exists within the parameters of an educational program. Interacting intimately with the natural world with other people is a common practice. I am interested in this intimate environmental engagement and my CEP is an exploration of this through three engagement pieces.

Theoretical Applications

1) Philosophy of Science, Technology, and Culture

The major concern of Dr. Albert Borgmann's *Philosophy of Science, Technology, and Culture* course was how we may examine technology and culture through a philosophical lens. We covered issues that connected to both global warming and justice in conservation, restoration, agriculture, wilderness, the distribution of prosperity, the internet, the status of the arts, and the structure of the economy. Further guiding concerns of the course were *space* and *place* and looking at how these affect us as individuals through our Orientation as Kant says, and our Positionality, or Being-In-The-World, per Heidegger. The specific material from this course that ties into my CEP is Bill McKibben's *End of Nature*, Kant's "Orientation" theory, and Heidegger's "Positionality."

"Nature, while often fragile in reality, is durable in our imaginations" (McKibben 49). The assignment for our first meeting was to read Bill McKibben's *The End of Nature*. This set a premise for the course to get us thinking what "nature" really is – and more importantly, the cycle of violence we have perpetuated against it. The connection to technology and culture is right under the surface of this. "By changing the weather, we make every spot on earth man made and artificial" (50). McKibben argues that humans have so fundamentally changed the natural environment that we have effectively ended nature. He points to climate change, species extinction, and the pollution of air, water, and soil as evidence that humans have become a force of nature unto themselves. The technological changes we have induced on nature have not only altered nature as a whole, but also our perceptions of nature and the ways in which we think about it. When we think about the physical space we occupy, a significant amount of that thinking correlates to the natural world. Our relationship to nature is paramount in our philosophical considerations.

In Kant's "What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?" we see how orienting ourselves through intentional considerations allow us to better relate to our relationships to the world around us. This is especially important in our considerations of the environment, as we need to be able to orient ourselves in order to think about the environment and our relationship to it. We need to be able to think about the ways in which we impact the environment and the ways in which the environment impacts us. We also need to be able to think about the ways in which our thinking *about* the environment can change the environment. The concept of Orientation, for Kant, is the ability to judge what is good and bad in the world. People who are oriented are able to reason and make decisions based on what is good for themselves and others. People who are not oriented are unable to reason and make decisions based on what is good, and instead make decisions based on what is bad. We must work to discover this Orientation, so we are not doing the latter out of ignorance. Finding orientation for us is combining what we discover with our aspirations. Kant believes that humans are born without any innate knowledge, and that we must rely on our own experiences and observations to orient ourselves in the world. We must use our reason to understand the world around us, and to determine how we should behave in it. This means that we must learn about the world through our own observations and use our reason to figure out how to behave in it. While there may be a lot of pre-determination to our ideas, we cannot rely on pre-determined ideas or notions about the world as guidance. Instead, we must figure that out for ourselves. Technology continues to have a significant impact on this, particularly when it comes to "figuring out for ourselves" our understandings and perceptions.

In his Bremen Lectures, Heidegger discusses a similar concept, what he calls Positionality. Heidegger's positionality states that humans are always situated in a specific place and time, and that this affects the way they view the world. Heidegger's positionality has a

significant impact on our relationship to the environment. He argued that humans can never view the environment objectively, because they are always situated within it. Essentially, our understanding of the environment is always filtered through our own perspective. In reference to technology, Heidegger himself says “technology essences as positionality” (Heidegger, 43). We find ourselves in the entrapment, so to speak, of our positionality’s essence being that of technology. Further looking at positionality, its technological essence manifests itself in how we interact with the world. To us, not only are tangible instruments perceived as resources to be arranged, rearranged, then thrown out, but so are other humans. Every *thing* presents itself to us technologically, thus, losing its very foundation – its independence, its form. There is a dually existing nature of man and technology: we are subservient to technology, while also being the ones who construct it. To expand, “In the age of technological dominance, the human is placed into the essence of technology, into positionality, by his essence” (35). While the concepts from this course are quite theoretical, they pertain to my final project in a few specific ways.

As the reader, one might question how *The End of Nature*, Orientation, and positionality pertain to a project surrounding Philosophy, Community, and Environment. The title encompasses exactly what my intentions are with my project – bringing environmental philosophy into the community. Academic philosophy itself has long been quite the opposite of practical and applied. My CEP challenges this notion in tangible ways. Philosophy itself forces one to reflect on their values and ground oneself as to why they hold these values, along with ethical considerations that may arise. There are the theoretical concepts as I have discussed, but how are those seen in an applied way? Creating an Environmental Philosophy Toolkit for high school students does this while also reiterating the substance of those concepts themselves *through* the creation of the toolkit.

As one of the three pieces of my final project, the Environmental Philosophy toolkit aims to introduce philosophical rhetoric surrounding how we think about the environment around us – and how we engage within it. There are five total modules within it, covering different “themes” of environmental philosophy. The goal is to invite readers to think about the world around them and how they interact within it – particularly living in the state of Montana. Looking back at our Orientation or our Positionality – our immediate surroundings play a big part of this. Living in Montana, students are fortunate to be close to some of the most spectacular natural environments. Here we find a tangible example. We start with talking about how we interact with the environments around us. Next, we look at the *actual* environments around us – where we are currently situated. In Montana, we have vast wildernesses, National Parks, whitewater rivers, and keystone animal species all in our backyard. There is an existing and underlying theoretical thread connecting how we talk about environments and how we interact within *our* environments. A section of my toolkit invites discussion of why it matters that we live in Montana. Besides the material specific to Montana’s environments, the toolkit could be taught anywhere. However, there would be a notable difference in how a student in Montana processes this information in relation to *their* environment versus a student in say, Ohio. That is what much of my final project became.

These concepts also translate into the event that I assisted in facilitating in Helena on Philosophy and Grief. We had three panelists present different ways in which we think about grief – one through storytelling, one through their artwork, and one through a historical lens. If one looks beneath the surface, all of the presentations contain connections to how we Orient ourselves in the world around us, in this case using grief and loss as a focal point. One may refer back to Heidegger’s writings on technology’s impact on positionality. The technology becomes

an intimate and intrinsic part of our positionality. Tim Holmes creates both painting and bronze sculptures that often strongly depict negative emotions, portrayals of haunting and despair. One of his oil paintings, *Some Grievance for our Heart to Tear* depicts a wooden boat with two individuals being swallowed by the sea in a storm. His description of the painting is,

“Are we not all suddenly cast to sea, our world shaken to liquid around us? The horizon heaves as we scramble moment by moment to make sense of our surroundings and to try to make progress toward solidity. Our condition is beyond understanding, rooted only in hope. I am painting this frustration in oils, over and over, trying to find a place of peace.”

I talked to Tim about the making of his art, and what pieces of himself he puts into these creations. Each meticulous stroke of the brush contains multitudes of meaning. To Heidegger’s point, when we swing a hammer with intention of building a house, we don’t think about the hammer. However, it is precisely the *use* of this hammer which is an extension of our positionality. Creation necessitates a way of being created. The ways in which we use *things* are quite grounding if given the thought. The paintbrush, the pen that writes the words of a grieving daughter. Heidegger’s concept of positionality helps us to think about how we engage with the environment by considering the “thing” as both something that is embedded within our world and also something that has its own agency. Heidegger argues that a thing has not just a physical presence, but also an ontological presence, which is why it can be meaningful to us. By understanding this relationship between ourselves and the environment, we can begin to understand our individual and collective responsibilities to one another and the environment. By thinking about our positionality in relation to the environment, we may develop a better understanding of how we interact with it and how we can work together to sustain it.

Going back to McKibben, our relationship to nature is quite important. We can think of our relationship to nature, our Orientation, and our Positionality as reciprocal benefactors. Nowhere could this be more present than in the setting of Western Montana. A toolkit that

begins to inform the thinking of high schoolers in a philosophical way reinforces all these notions. Questions asking what we value about humans, about the environment, non-human values, and how they affect a shared community requires one to consider the physical space they occupy. There is an interconnectedness between understanding our relationship to the natural world, our place within it, and how we can better inform ourselves and engage with that knowledge.

2) Environmental Aesthetics

Dr. Matt Strohl's *Environmental Aesthetics* course provided me with an invaluable perspective on how our views of beauty, art and the environment can shape the way we interact with them. In this course, I learned that our aesthetic appreciations can have serious implications for how we use and treat the environment, both in urban and natural settings. It is therefore essential to take into consideration the role humans have in the environment and use our aesthetic appreciations to guide us in cultivating greater care and respect for it. The knowledge I gained in this course has been instrumental in formulating my views on environmental aesthetics and values and has had a significant theoretical impact on the development of my CEP. By understanding the far-reaching consequences of our interactions with the environment, we can use our aesthetic appreciations to develop a more harmonious relationship between ourselves and our surroundings.

When pondering our aesthetic experiences, one presumably considers the pleasant aspects of them initially. The vibrant colors of a painting, the harmonic symphony of an orchestra, and the delight that comes with watching a favorite film all come to mind. In the natural world, we may gaze at a magnificent sunset, feel excitement exploring the wilderness, and develop strong emotions and attitudes towards it due to our interactions within it.

Aesthetic appreciation at first glance seems to draw from a hedonistic approach.

Aesthetic hedonism has dominated the aesthetic value theory domain. As Servaas Van der Berg states, “hedonism could arguably lay claim to being the commonsense view of aesthetic value. After all, who would deny that our encounters with the aesthetic are often a source of great enjoyment?” (Van der Berg 1). As aesthetic hedonists “reduce aesthetic value to the value of the experience” (van der Berg 4), the intuitive answer is that the experience necessitates a positive emotion, as it is deriving from the sought pleasure. The hedonistic approach requires an inherent preference that looks to aesthetic experience as having value in the capacity of afforded pleasure. Aesthetic hedonism is a viable theory when considering the criteria inherent to our aesthetic experiences. However, perspectives of what constitutes hedonistic are not the same for different groups of people. This will be clearer in how the BIPOC community may relate to aesthetic experiences, particularly on the environmental side.

The different environments we are in shape our aesthetic experiences differently. These environments have important ramifications conducive to the aesthetic experience. There are cases which the environment is the foundational makeup of the aesthetic appreciation. There is a significance that the environment one is in plays into their aesthetic judgements, as well as into the aesthetic itself. There is much conversation and debate in environmental aesthetics surrounding what is encompassed within terms such as “environment” and “nature.” Following human influence and the role technology has played in our relationship with the natural world, there is no clear demarcation for what is natural anymore. This is taken a step further when considering how these fit into concepts of nature. In Carlson’s *The Aesthetics’ of Human Environments*, he expounds on this, and how we might move forward:

It is no longer plausible to think of nature, in any significant sense, as separate from humans. We are all bound up in one natural system, an ecosystem of universal

proportions in which no part is immune from the events and changes in the others. The natural world is incorrigibly artificial and the human world incorrigibly natural. We might conclude that nature has become all-inclusive, in, for example, either Spinoza's sense of a total world order or Heidegger's sense of existential habitation, of dwelling poetically (Carlson 15).

The makeup of our idea of what environment is at its core cannot be singular or unified. It itself is a concept created by humans. What it *is* and what it *means* are important distinctions and both require a holistic approach. Carlson further adds to what environment may mean, as it can assume "other forms such as the social, cultural, cognitive, and perceptual context of experience or the whole 'life-world'" (14). In Carlson's *Appreciation and the Natural Environment*, his core claim in his environmental model is that appropriate nature appreciation requires knowledge of natural history, just as appropriate art appreciation requires knowledge of art history. One must appreciate nature in reference to correct categories, and these are specified by natural history. Nature is both natural and an environment, and scientific knowledge guides our appreciation. Carlson states:

Our knowledge of the nature of the particular environments yields the appropriate boundaries of appreciation, the particular *foci* of aesthetic significance, and the relevant act or acts of aspection for that type of environment (Carlson 671).

There are particular identities to different environments that allow us to better aesthetically appreciate. These identities reveal themselves to us if we possess the appropriate knowledge. We as individuals accentuate this knowledge with our own lived experiences. The knowledge we possess is imbued into our personal cultures, identities, histories, and past. Referring to my first theoretical application, we can see a relationship between aesthetic appreciation and Heidegger's Orientation. Intuitively, our Orientation influences our aesthetic

experiences and our aesthetic experiences influence our Orientation. Our personal sense of place is deeply intertwined with aesthetic theories, and my CEP reflects this in different ways.

Two major components of my CEP are relevant to environmental aesthetics. Community engagement and the environment is the underlying framework of my CEP, and environmental aesthetics have a significant role in how different communities respond to different environments. The environmental philosophy curriculum I am writing for The Democracy Project exemplifies this. The curriculum itself does not mention aesthetics specifically, as it is designed as a toolkit for high school students to start thinking philosophically about the environments around them, and their place and role within them. A goal of this toolkit is encouraging youth to understand the importance of being environmental stewards in appropriate, respectful, and conscientious ways. We may refer to aesthetic hedonism as a baseline. Simply put, we appreciate the environment because it brings us *joy*. In the myriad of ways we connect to the environment, it is not controversial to say that one of those reasons is because we simply enjoy it and want to be a part of it. It feels good to spend time in nature, feel like we are a part of it, recreate in it, and learn from it. We can follow a hedonistic aesthetic approach into Carlson's environmental model. This toolkit is educating students on different ways we value the environment. The four modules in look at how we value other humans, non-human animals, the natural world, and values in community, highlighting indigenous values. Following Carlson, we can better aesthetically appreciate the environment with the appropriate knowledge. This toolkit serves as a baseline for this type of knowledge. Even without taking a class on aesthetics, students will have a more robust aesthetic appreciation of environments as they are learning material that allows them to formulate their own environmental philosophies, as well as highlight that the environment is something we ought to care about as it brings us joy.

The above ways that environmental aesthetics pertain to The Democracy Project toolkit also directly correlate to the work completed for Here Montana, as well as other important ways. Here Montana serves to provide outdoor adventures to People of Color and intersecting communities. Participants can experience backpacking, rafting, skiing, climbing, and more throughout all of Montana. There are two additional major correlations to environmental aesthetics that need to be considered here. First, it is that the ways in which we aesthetically appreciate the environment, particularly through hedonistic views, is different. This also follows for Carlson's environmental model; the knowledge we bring to our aesthetic experiences can be varying due to personal identities. The BIPOC community faces more barriers to participating in outdoor activities and represent a small margin of those that do recreate in the environment. In her article "A Darker Wilderness: Reconsidering the Black Outdoor Experience," Rosalind Bentley states, "It's well documented that people of color are much less likely to live in spaces with ready access to nature. There is also research suggesting that the legacy of racial discrimination can make Black people feel unsafe in certain outdoor spaces" (Bentley). Activities like hiking, mountain biking, kayaking, and climbing can be generally associated with white people for people of color. This leads to a couple important points. First, the ways in which we approach aesthetic experiences through a hedonistic lens are not the same for people of color. Historical connections for the BIPOC community to the environment do not at all share the same grandeur that white people have with it. Black Americans may associate wilderness directly with slavery. In their paper *African-American Wildland Memories*, Johnson and Bowker write,

Collective memory can be used conceptually to examine African-American perceptions of wildlands and black interaction with such places. The middle-American view of wildlands frames these terrains as refuges—pure and simple, sanctified places distinct from the profanity of human modification. However, wild, primitive areas do not exist in the minds of all Americans as uncomplicated or uncontaminated places. Three labor-related institutions—forest labor, plantation agriculture, and sharecropping—and terrorism and

lynching have impacted negatively on black perceptions of wildlands, producing an ambivalence toward such places among African Americans (Johnson 57)

The “pleasure” aspect of aesthetic experience does not hold same the merit for everybody. Indigenous peoples were forcefully removed from land that we currently reside on. People of color also bring different knowledge of the environment to their aesthetic experiences. In Indigenous communities, there are many different creation stories and interpretation of the existence of the natural world. It is an entirely different ontological view into our aesthetic experiences. It is important to recognize the ways in which we aesthetically value the environment differ across lines seen and unseen. Environmental aesthetics can serve an important role in addressing the ways different communities relate to the world around them.

3) Environmental Philosophy

Much of the theoretical material covered in Dr. Preston’s PHL 422 – Environmental Philosophy course has interlaced with my Civic Engagement Project. The course syllabus references six major debates in the environmental philosophy canon. Three of these are quite prominently featured in my CEP: environmental (virtue) ethics, environmental justice, and wilderness debates. This course looks at different relational ethical approaches as ways of formulating our ethics towards other people – and the environment. These include care ethics, environmental virtue ethics, and indigenous ethics as a few. These stray from traditional, “rational” based ethical theories. These relational ethics focus on our place within the world, the context of our relationships with others and the environment, and the importance of our lived experiences. In this theoretical application, I will discuss some of these theories and wilderness debates that we covered in the course and how they directly influenced my CEP.

The bulk of the outside material done for my CEP was an introductory toolkit, or “curriculum” into environmental philosophy. The toolkit has five modules covering different

themes in environmental philosophy. The modules are an Introduction to Environmental Philosophy, Values and Humans, Values and Environment, Values and Animals, and Values and Community. The material in these modules has been influenced either directly or tangentially from the material covered in this course. Much of the material works in tandem with each other. The debates within environmental philosophy I mentioned in the opening paragraph often overlap and reciprocate many questions that arise from the material.

Environmental Ethics and Environmental Justice

These two debates within environmental philosophy came up frequently in the course. They show themselves starkly in my CEP as well. Both debates influence each other quite heavily. Discussing environmental ethics may create rhetoric focused on why it is important to care about the environment and different ways we may do so. Environmental ethics itself is an area of study concerned with the moral relationship between humans and their environment. It focuses on the ethical responsibilities that humans have to protect and sustain the natural world as well as how we should respond to environmental challenges such as climate change. Environmental ethics looks at how our actions and decisions impact the environment in both direct and indirect ways, and how we can work together to ensure a sustainable future for all. This works in tandem with addressing environmental justice, which may be described as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Environmental justice seeks to ensure that all communities and individuals, including racial and ethnic minorities and economically disadvantaged populations have the right to live in and enjoy a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

As mentioned, relational ethical approaches such as Indigenous perspective, environmental virtue ethics, and care ethics allow us a different avenue of ethical considerations to the natural world that stray from the binaries that exist in traditional Western ethics. Care ethics “refers to approaches to moral life and community that are grounded in virtues, practices, and knowledges associated with appropriate caring and caretaking of self and others” (Whyte & Cuomo 2) Whyte and Cuomo’s paper, *Ethics of Caring in Environmental Ethics* is quite emblematic of what I hope students take away from the toolkit, particularly in their layout of indigenous conceptions of care, in how they

“(1) emphasize the importance of awareness of one’s place in a web of different connections spanning many different parties, including humans, non-human beings and entities (e.g., wild rice, bodies of water), and collectives (e.g., forests, seasonal cycles); (2) understand moral connections as involving relationships of interdependence that motivate reciprocal responsibilities; (3) valorize certain skills and virtues, such as the wisdom of grandparents and elders, attentiveness to the environment, and indigenous stewardship practices; (4) seek to restore people and communities who are wounded from injustices by rebuilding relationships that can generate responsibilities pertinent to current environmental challenges such as biodiversity conservation and climate change; (5) conceive of political autonomy as involving the protection of the right to serve as responsible stewards of lands, the environmental quality of which is vital for sustenance” (6).

Utilizing ethical conceptions of care are helpful for unearthing deep connections and moral commitment and for guiding environmental decision making. Similar parallels exist in Indigenous storytelling. A piece from this course is Robin Kimmerer’s *Returning the Gift*, which is present in my Values and Community module. In *Returning the Gift*, Kimmerer discusses the idea of gift-giving as a reciprocal act that binds people together and creates relationships of mutual respect and obligation. She observes that gift-giving is a fundamental aspect of human culture, and that it is often used to build and maintain relationships with others. Kimmerer argues that the act of giving is a powerful way to create connections with others, and that it can help to build community. This reinforces Indigenous ethical perspectives that also supplement

environmental justice. In my Values and Animals module I reference Katie McShane, who examines the ways in which climate change has had a devastating effect on animal populations around the world. McShane further notes that the effects of climate change on animal populations will continue to worsen unless more is done to mitigate its effects. She emphasizes the importance of taking action to protect animals from further harm and suggests that conservation efforts should take greater priority. I raise questions that revolve around how we ethically consider non-human animals – or more specifically – how we fail to do so.

Wilderness Debates

We read a few different pieces in this course surrounding the wilderness problem. One that I had read previously and find particularly exciting is Cronon's "The Trouble with Wilderness." Cronon attacks wilderness environmentalism, saying that the idea of wilderness has been central to environmentalism and is harmful. His criticisms are not of wild nature itself, but the concepts *of* it. It is acknowledging that wilderness is a culturally and historically relative human creation. Attitudes towards wilderness have shifted from negative to positive through the lens of a Western, Judeo-Christian value system. Cronon argues two intellectual movements fueled this, the romantic sublime and a nostalgic, primitivist ideology. Cronon talks heavily of the influence of God in the idea of wilderness, then offers criticisms. As I mentioned, much of the material in this course worked its way quite directly into my CEP. Cronon's piece came into play as something covered in this course that then went directly into my CEP, as well as Johnson and Bowker's "African-American Wildland Memories." For both of these pieces, I have workshopped a "study guide" to offer fruitful discussion pertaining to these issues.

Johnson and Bowker explore the ways that African Americans have interacted within the context of wildlands within the United States. Johnson and Bowker discuss how black

Americans have used and shaped natural spaces, often in the face of discrimination. The authors argue how the collective memory of African Americans related to wildlands is one of exclusion and oppression. Collective memories are shaped by social structures and contexts, as well as individual experiences. The authors elaborate,

The middle American view of wildlands frames these terrains as refuges-pure and simple, sanctified places distinct from the profanity of human modification. However, wild, primitive areas do not exist in the minds of all Americans as uncomplicated or uncontaminated places. Three labor-related institutions-forest labor, plantation agriculture, and sharecropping-and terrorism and lynching have impacted negatively on black perceptions of wildlands, producing an ambivalence toward such places among African Americans

To fully comprehend black experiences related to wildlands in the United States, we must consider the larger social, economic and historical contexts that have shaped these experiences. African American history in the U.S. is very much intertwined with the concept of land. It is important to recognize the relationship we have to the environment through many different levels. One of those levels is the ways we have interacted with wilderness historically. My initial assumptions of wilderness as something awe-inspiring are not shared by everyone. As we work to address how systemic racism still perpetuates in the environmental sphere, gaining an understanding of racial contexts within that space are paramount in building our own environmental philosophies.

This resource is quite an important one as the intended audience is the BIPOC community and the authors here write from that lived experience, unlike Cronon who is white. The idea of wilderness comes up in one of my modules for the Democracy Project. It is asking students to contemplate what wilderness means to them, and then to explain why they came up with what they did. One can see where ideas of wilderness covered in this course translated directly into my CEP.

Conclusion

From the Environmental Philosophy course, my own environmental ethics have been impacted, particularly in how I view them being able to address environmental justice. This course provided me innumerable subject matter that helped me theoretically work through my CEP. Just as importantly, it provided me with several tangible resources to use to address important underlying themes in environmental philosophy and its relationship with community engagement. I consider this course as the “engine” of my CEP, providing me with excellent theoretical material that I turned into application through community engagement in three important ways.

Actions Taken

My CEP involved three different engagement pieces that fell under the theme of Philosophy, Community, and Environment. I worked alongside three non-profits and created a range of material involving and utilizing the subject matter in unique ways. I have separated the three different pieces to three points of a theoretical triangle, mentioned in my introduction. To reiterate, at the bottom right is my work with Merlin CCC which I call the tangible/applied. At the bottom left is my work with Here Montana, the intangible/theoretical. At the top of the triangle is my material for the Democracy Project, which combines the tangible with the intangible and the applied with the theoretical. Again, one can imagine within the triangle exists the underlying thematic element of my project – the intersections of philosophy, community, and environment. I mention the work that each of these organizations do in the introduction and context portions of this portfolio but will reiterate them briefly. Here I will lay out the steps I took in the creation of the material for each of these pieces of my project.

The bulk of my engagement work was done with The Democracy Project. For the Democracy Project and Humanities Montana, I created an Environmental Philosophy toolkit. This toolkit is for high school students across the state of Montana. The aim of the toolkit, as mentioned in the introduction to this portfolio, is to introduce philosophical rhetoric to high school students to intellectually challenge them to think about the environment around them and their place within it – particularly being situated in Montana. This project started with a Zoom call with the director of the Democracy Project, Jennifer Bevill, and the Program Manager of Humanities Montana, John Knight. In the initial Zoom call, I spoke to my personal interest in environmental education and the formative impact it has had on me. Learning about the Democracy Project's goals, we struck up a conversation on how to introduce some semblance of environmental and philosophical material to students. Over the course of the semester, I developed a 30+ page toolkit on environmental education and philosophy. Within the toolkit are five separate modules on themes in environmental philosophy: An introduction, Values and Humans, Values and the Environment, Values and Animals, and Values in Community. Within each module are interactive lessons, activities, and various forms of media. Much of the focus of this toolkit was to leave room for the students to formulate their own opinions based on information given to them. The goal was not at all to tell students *what* they ought to think about certain issues, but rather *how* to think about these issues in a myriad of ways. The toolkit and its contents are available on my webpage for free access. I happened to be taking a graduate level course on environmental education curriculum development with Dr. Fletcher Brown alongside the development of this toolkit. Much of the course material pertained directly to the creation of this toolkit. Learning about curriculum development theory, issue analysis, and ways of incorporating engaging activities just to name a few were instrumental in the development of this

toolkit. I also had numerous Zoom and in person meetings with Jenny and John on molding the toolkit to fit the Democracy Project's goals, and how to address sometimes sensitive issues in a tactful way. The process of this toolkit development went smoothly, with the only hiccups being sometimes conflicting schedules between Jenny, John, and I. This engagement piece primarily worked well as it developed over the course of a timeline that was existing in tandem with the class I was taking, allowing me a better sense of accountability.

For the more concretely applied/tangible piece of my CEP I worked with Marisa Diaz-Waian, the Founder and Director of Merlin CCC. Merlin is putting on a 2023 Philosophy Symposia Series titled *Loss and Legacy: Living Forward While Looking Back*. The role of philosophy in addressing grief is that it offers a particular set of tools by which to consider loss and legacy – not as *the* set of tools but rather as *a* set that can take us to some different places than other tools might. I had been in contact with Marisa for quite some time before this event. Originally, my plans were to be involved in a larger role, creating my own event in Missoula. However, that was sidelined due to a broken leg and some other factors which I will address in the challenges section of this portfolio. What I came away with was creating an internal evaluation for community philosophy events, as well as a post-event survey that allowed for feedback from community participants. Six internal evaluations were created for the event. I will list the six as well as one example question from each. Structure: Did the format allow panelists, audience members, and the facilitator to contribute meaningfully? Dialogue: Was the conversation thought provoking and relatable? Panelists: Did the panelists provide helpful perspectives and context? Performances: How did the opening performance(s) and/or visual/slide-shows offered by the panelists contribute to the Q&A and community discussion? Audience: How did community members engage with the material? Facilitator: How did the

facilitator navigate the discussion (between panelists, and audience and panelists)? For the post event survey I used survey monkey was able to get scannable QR codes that went on the back of every brochure for the event that directed the participant directly to the survey. Access to the survey is also available on my web-page. The actions I took for this aspect of my CEP could be described as follows. Basic on-site logistics: this included help with set-up/tear-down, assisting film crew/facilitator/panelists, greeting guests/helping folks to their seats, egress assistance, other. Event design analysis: conceptual design of event, objectives/aims, along with a specific set of evaluation-oriented questions. These questions are largely geared toward observations having to do with aspects community engagement. Questions directly related to the intersection of philosophy and community engagement were incorporated. Input here will be used not only for evaluation purposes related to the specific event but also relative to considerations for future event design. Event survey: Designing survey questions for participants inquiring into various aspects of their experiences and thinking relative to the event and topic. This was created in a digital format so that the organization (Merlin) can utilize and distribute the survey to participants. Capture some direct testimonials from audience members during the event. Data from the survey and testimonials collected will be used for evaluation purposes of this event (which will also be incorporated into a final report to program funders — e.g., Humanities Montana).

The third engagement piece of my project was creating a digital resource library for Here Montana. The first step I took for this was to meet with Director Alex Kim, a friend of mine that I met through climbing. Based on a few passing conversations we had previously, we learned about several shared interests in a lot of our work. One of the first questions I asked Alex was if it was okay for me to be creating material for a community that I am not part of. It was my

explicit goal from the start offer resources in a back-seat role to assist in the implementation of Here Montana's mission. I broke down three academic papers that pertain to our relationships with wilderness. They are written from black, indigenous, and white perspectives. For each of these papers, I attached the paper itself along with a broken-down summary and study guide. I broke each paper down into sections and themes, creating bullet-point style notes as well as discussion questions at the ends. Speaking with Alex, he mentioned that they do many backpacking trips, and he has only ever taught "hard" technical backcountry skills on his trips. He had been interested in incorporating conversation into trips surrounding the ideas around wilderness and giving attention to the theoretical landscape in which Here Montana does its programs. The papers I broke down were Bill Cronon's *The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature*, *African-American Wildland Memories* by Cassandra and J.M. Bowker, and *Before the Wilderness: Native Peoples and Yellowstone* by Mark David Spencer. The papers themselves along with the study guides are available on my web page, and soon to be on Here Montana's website.

Accomplishments and Challenges

Reflecting on the completion of my project, I am quite proud. I feel that my CEP articulates much of what I took away from this graduate program in a pragmatic and applied way. My biggest accomplishment might be the personal feelings I have surrounding this CEP as a consummation of my graduate school experience. That being said, there were challenges that came along with it.

My initial plan for my CEP was to focus on experiential education as the core content. I did my internship with the Wild Rockies Field Institute as a TA on their environmental ethics course and was hoping to center my work around utilizing philosophy in place-based education.

Unfortunately, that work did not pan out, and I had a moment of feeling lost as to what I wanted to do. The upside to this was the recognition that came – the recognition that philosophy has an unlimited potential to be used in our everyday lives in the same way that it could be used in experiential based learning. This internal challenge ended up resolving itself, as the material I created allowed me to see the engagement of philosophy within the community in a myriad of ways. This was a huge accomplishment for me.

Perhaps the biggest challenge that came along with my CEP had nothing to do with the CEP itself. Two days before my last semester of graduate school started, I broke my leg skiing. This was a major disruption to essentially the entirety of my existence. I am someone that is extremely active and find much of my identity embedded within the activities that make me feel gratitude for being alive. Suddenly, I could not do any of these activities. On top of that, I was not able to work at either of my two jobs for an extended period. Reflecting on Heidegger's positionality, it is safe to say mine was thrown totally askew. I told myself that this injury presented a unique shining light, I now had all the time in the world to focus on my academic work as I could not do most everyday activities, even getting out of bed was a major challenge. To simplify it, this did not end up being the case. My entire orientation was thrown off, and I had a lot of trouble motivating myself to do the work I needed to. This challenge is not relatable to the actual work of my CEP, but the point I am trying to make is that the ways in which we produce academic material are certainly impacted by the quality of life we experience in some way.

The challenges that arose for my engagement activities were mostly logistical in nature. For the toolkit I developed, I did find some trouble in creating the *Values in Community* module where I incorporate indigenous ways of knowing into the material. I needed to give special

attention to the language I used as oftentimes indigenous people are Othered through our language. With Here Montana, I struggled with the notion of being a white person creating material for the BIPOC community. However, I was able to have some engaging conversations with people involved within those communities. My biggest challenge with Merlin was tied into my leg breaking. Much of my coordination with Marisa was happening right around that time. Some bigger plans I had fell to the wayside in trying to maintain my sanity during the initial stages of the injury.

Out of these challenges arose material that again I am quite proud of. I am proud and excited to introduce environmental philosophy to high school students. That is something I would have enjoyed, and quite frankly needed, in my high school education. The feelings I had after taking my first philosophy class in undergrad are still visceral. At the end of the day, I am just excited about philosophy – so this piece to me is formative in that regard as well as what it may inspire in others. It was rewarding to see 50+ community members attend the Merlin event in Helena and engage with philosophy in something as heavy as grief. I did a lot of reflecting on that event, as well as how I personally address grief. I feel privileged to be able to contribute material for Here Montana in creating a more inclusive outdoor recreation space for all people. Outdoor recreation is severely lacking in representation from the BIPOC community due to perpetuating systematic injustices towards people of color. I involve myself in countless ways in the outdoors and feel obligated to recognize the privileges I receive from it – and how that is not the same for others.

Throughout the progress of my CEP, there was an underlying feeling that I was not doing enough – although I can admit that is a feeling that permeates most everything I do. Feelings of imposter syndrome arise frequently, particularly being involved in the canon of academic

philosophy. The counter to this is the beautiful relationships I've made along the way in my own philosophical journey, both in my personal life and my academic career. The completion of this CEP validated that I have a voice to use in creating philosophy for the community to address how we engage with the world around us and recognizing the significance and beauty within that engagement.

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