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**Henry David Thoreau: Greatness of Soul and Environmental Virtue**

**Abstract:** I read Henry David Thoreau as an environmental virtue theorist. In this paper, I use Thoreau’s work as a tool to explore the relation between the virtue of greatness of soul and environmental virtues. Reflecting on connections between Thoreau’s texts and historical discussions of greatness of soul, or magnanimity, I offer a novel conception of magnanimity. I argue that (1) to become magnanimous, most individuals need to acquire the environmental virtue of simplicity; and (2) magnanimous individuals must possess the environmental virtue of benevolence in order to achieve their goals.

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Philip Cafaro convincingly argues that we can read Henry David Thoreau as an environmental virtue theorist who links “environmental awareness and protection” to an account of virtues, human flourishing, and the “pursuit of excellence” (Cafaro 2012, 69; Cafaro 2004, 139). In this essay, I focus on one of the virtues Thoreau discusses: the virtue of magnanimity, or greatness of soul. I argue that, while Thoreau’s conception and treatment of this virtue is unique, his discussions of it can be seen as an extension of historical discussions of greatness from ancient to modern times. Reflecting not only on what Thoreau explicitly suggests, but on what we, living today, can take his claims to *imply*, I argue that we should adopt a new understanding of greatness, according to which it is directly related to environmental ethics.

I contend that most people must acquire the environmental virtue of simplicity, discussed by Gambrel and Cafaro (2010), in order to acquire the virtue of greatness. I further argue that great-souled men and women must possess the environmental virtue of benevolence, discussed by Jennifer Welchman (1999), in order to achieve the kinds of world-changing goals they will likely pursue. Cultivating the virtue of magnanimity, in addition to environmental virtues, will make us better able to face environmental concerns and lead excellent lives.

**I. Greatness of Soul: A Philosophical Tradition**

I provide a brief snapshot of historical treatments of greatness of soul, tracing the notion from Aristotle to David Hume. For the sake of future discussions, I highlight some details, and for brevity’s sake, I ignore many others. This section is meant, not as a full historical treatment, but instead as a tool for developing future arguments. Later, I draw connections between this discussion and Thoreau’s writings, and provide an account of how we might think of greatness of soul in relation to environmental ethics.

Aristotle suggests that the virtue of greatness of soul concerns honor; the great-souled individual “thinks himself, and is, worthy of great things” (Aristotle 2002, IV.3),[[1]](#footnote-1) and honor is “the greatest of the external goods” (ibid.). According to Aristotle, magnanimity has more to do with *deserving* honor than it does with claiming or receiving it, and the great-souled man finds honor itself “of small consequence” (ibid.; Hanley 2002, 5-7). Aristotle explicitly suggests that the philosopher Socrates is great-souled, as are heroic warriors such as Achilles and Ajax (Aristotle and Barnes 1976, 97b16-25).

Saint Thomas Aquinas discusses Aristotle’s notion of greatness of soul (Aquinas 1981, II-II, q.129, a.1),[[2]](#footnote-2) calling it “*magnanimitas*,” which translates into English as “magnanimity,” and provides a unique conception of it as a Catholic virtue. While Aristotle’s notion of greatness seems closely related to the notion of pride, Aquinas claims that a person can simultaneously possess both magnanimity and humility. As Carson Holloway suggests: “Aquinas distinguishes that which is in us that is God’s and that which is in us that is our own” (Holloway 1999, 590), and Aquinas calls the former the “gift of God” (Aquinas 1981, II-II, q.129, a.3). Aquinas suggests that we can be simultaneously magnanimous and humble if: (1) thinking of our own human weakness and the gifts of God in other people, we “honor” and “esteem” those others “better than ourselves”; and simultaneously (2) thinking of our own gifts of God and others’ weakness, we contemn those others and consider ourselves “worthy of the greatest things” (ibid.; Holloway 1999, 590).

Thomas Hobbes, who provides a unique conception of magnanimity that nonetheless belongs to the same tradition, suggests that those who are magnanimous possess “glory well grounded upon certain experience of power” (Hobbes 2005a, I.9.20),[[3]](#footnote-3) and have an accurate conception of their own ability to accomplish great deeds. Hobbes suggests that pusillanimous people, who lackmagnanimity and do not have an accurate understanding of their own power, are more likely either to pursue a course of action which is too easy for them, thinking that it is the best they can do, or to pursue action that is too difficult, believing themselves more powerful than they really are (ibid., I.9.2; Hobbes 2005b, I.XI.11-12).[[4]](#footnote-4) Hobbes claims that pusillanimous people are often focused on “trifles” (ibid., I.XI.14), and “are snatched from their purpose by everything that comes into their thought into so many and so long digressions and parentheses that they utterly lose themselves” (ibid., I.VIII.3). In contrast, since magnanimous people have an accurate conception of their own power, they can also demonstrate “contempt of little helps and hindrances” (ibid., I.VI.26), and do not waste time on trivialities – on “little helps” – but instead wholeheartedly pursue the best means to their greatest ends.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Hobbes sometimes implies that magnanimity is necessary to fully possess the virtue of justice. For example, he seems to refer to magnanimity when he claims that those who possess the virtue of justice must also possess “a certain nobleness or gallantness of courage, rarely found” (Hobbes 2005b, I.XV.10; Strauss 1963, 54 & 24-25; Krook 1959, 129-130). Hobbes also closely connects the virtues of courage and magnanimity (Strauss 1963, 53; Hobbes 2005a, I.19.2; Hobbes 2005b, I.X.40).

David Hume reflects on the notion of magnanimity, which he claims belongs to the set of virtues he calls “greatness of mind,”[[6]](#footnote-6) and which he claims is central to leading the most successful life. Hume identifies greatness of mind with a “steady and well-establish’d pride and self-esteem” (Hume 2000, 3.3.2.13),[[7]](#footnote-7) or an accurateunderstanding of one’s substantial power and ability. Hume writes that “nothing is more useful to us in the conduct of life” than this well-grounded pride, which “gives us confidence and assurance in all our projects and enterprizes” (ibid., 3.3.2.8). If we were unaware of our own power and ability, we might never live up to our potential, since we would be unaware of how much we could accomplish (ibid.). Hume, like Aristotle, suggests that Socrates is magnanimous. Hume claims that Socrates demonstrated “magnanimous care of preserving liberty” (Hume 1998, 7.17),[[8]](#footnote-8) and Hume links magnanimity with “dignity of Character” and a “disdain of slavery” (ibid., 7.4).[[9]](#footnote-9)

Hume is clear that to live a life of human excellence requires the possession of two distinct categories of virtue. Greatness of mind is not sufficient on its own; a person must also possess virtues of benevolence (Martin 1992, 384 & 389). Hume suggests that virtues of greatness of mind, “when not regulated by benevolence, are fit only to make a tyrant and a public robber” (Hume 2000, 3.3.3.3). In order to be excellent human beings, who are good for society, people must not only recognize their own power and ability, but also possess benevolence – a desire for the happiness of others and an aversion to others’ misery (ibid., 2.2.9.3).

**II. Thoreau’s Conception of Greatness of Soul**

Over the course of his work, Thoreau develops a unique conception of magnanimity. While his notion is different from those of earlier philosophers, it is grounded in the same tradition, and recognizing this helps make sense of Thoreau’s philosophy. I focus here on the relations between magnanimity, benevolence, and philanthropy. My discussion is not meant as a full treatment of relevant notions but rather as a tool for developing later arguments relating greatness of soul to environmental virtues.

I begin by briefly discussing an excerpt of Thomas Carew’s poetry from his masque *Coelum Britannicum*, which Thoreau quotes at length and claims is complimentary to *Walden*’s chapter on “Economy.” I here quote a few lines of Carew’s poetry as they appear in *Walden*,with Thoreau’s modernized spelling:

Thou dost presume too much, poor needy wretch,

To claim a station in the firmament,

Because they humble cottage, or thy tub,

Nurses some lazy or pedantic virtue . . .

We not require the dull society

Of your necessitated temperance . . .

. . . This low abject brood,

That fix their seats in mediocrity,

Become your servile minds; but we advance

Such virtues only as admit excess,

Brave, bounteous acts, regal **magnificence**,

All-seeing prudence, **magnanimity**

That knows no bound, and that heroic virtue

For which antiquity hath left no name

But patterns only, such as Hercules,

Achilles, Theseus . . . (Thoreau 2008, 57-58; Carew 1870, 217-218, my emphasis).

These lines of poetry refer to a notion of magnanimity similar to the notion of greatness of soul discussed by ancient philosophers such as Aristotle (Cafaro 2000, 28-29; Cafaro 2004, 48-50). Aristotle claims that Homeric heroes, such as Achilles, possess the virtue of greatness, and Carew’s poem refers to the “heroic virtue” possessed by “Hercules, Achilles[and] Theseus.” Carew’s notion of “heroic virtue” also closely relates to Aquinas’ conception of magnanimity. Carew’s poetry calls heroic virtues “virtues . . . as admit excess,” which sounds very similar to Aquinas’ assertion that: “the magnanimous in point of quantity goes to extremes, in so far as he tends to what is greatest” (Aquinas 1981, II-II, q.129, a.3). Additionally, Carew’s poem closely relates the notion of “magnanimity” to “magnificence” in a way similar to that of Aquinas, who writes that “magnanimity intends something great in every matter” and that “magnificence does the same in every work that can be produced in an external matter” (Aquinas 1981, II-II, q.134, a.2). Aquinas, however, suggests that a person could be magnanimous without being magnificent; magnificence, unlike magnanimity, specifically requires external, bounteous actions that often require great expenditure of money (ibid., II-II, q.134, a.3). Finally, Carew’s poem seems to anticipate Hume’s later division of natural virtues into two categories: those of greatness of mind (“such virtues as admit excess”), and those of benevolence (“pedantic virtue” . . . “necessitated temperance.”)

Regardless of whether Thoreau was directly aware of earlier philosophical discussions of greatness of soul, and there is no strong evidence that he was,[[10]](#footnote-10) Thoreau’s work is indirectly connected to those historical discussions through Carew’s poem and perhaps other works of literature of his time. This literature acts as a bridge between Thoreau and that historical tradition, enabling us to see some of Thoreau’s passages as an extension of those discussions. Thoreau suggests that Carew’s poetry and the ideas it discusses are relevant to his preceding chapter on “Economy,” and we can read sections of his chapter in relation to the poem and the historical discussions of greatness to which it relates.

For example, earlier in “Economy,” Thoreau explicitly contrasts the notions of magnanimity and magnificence in much the same way as Carew’s poem and Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica*. Thoreau explicitly suggests that good philosophers might be magnanimous without being magnificent. Thoreau first writes about philosophers who “so love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, **magnanimity**, and trust” (Thoreau 2008, 13, my emphasis), and Thoreau claims that they live without “most of the luxuries and many of the so called comforts of life” (ibid.). A philosopher is not “fed, sheltered, clothed, warmed, like his contemporaries” (ibid.). It is easy, here, to imagine that Thoreau has in mind Socrates, who, as we have seen, Aristotle and Hume both claim is a magnanimous man.[[11]](#footnote-11) Thoreau contrasts the magnanimity possessed by these philosophers with the magnificence of individuals who have “strong and valiant natures” (14) but who, unlike the magnanimous philosophers, live in luxury and “build more **magnificently** and spend more lavishly than the richest, without ever impoverishing themselves” (ibid., my emphasis). Like Aquinas, Thoreau implies that one need not expend great wealth in order to be magnanimous; philosophers, without luxury, can be magnanimous, too.

Throughout *Walden*, Thoreau suggests that he himself wishes to live, like true philosophers, magnanimously but not magnificently. He is clear that he is seeking to live a life without the luxuries which he claims are too often “hindrances to the elevation of mankind” (ibid., 13). Thoreau clearly values this kind of elevation. For instance, he writes: “I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by conscious endeavor” (ibid., 64). He writes in praise of what he calls a “Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose” (ibid., 66).

Thoreau’s use of the terms “elevate” and “elevation” also helps to tie him to the philosophical tradition discussing greatness of soul, since these are terms often employed in those discussions. Hume frequently uses these terms when he discusses the virtues associated with magnanimity and greatness of mind, remarking, for example, that what “we call *heroic virtue*” is that which we “admire under the character of greatness and **elevation** of mind” (Hume, 2000, 3.3.2.13, my emphasis). Hume also implies that any occasion which “inspires us with a more than ordinary grandeur and magnanimity” will “invigorate the soul and give it an **elevation**” (Hume 2000, 2.3.8.4, my emphasis).

Thoreau’s use of language also links his discussion to the greatness of soul tradition in other ways. Thoreau uses the term “noble” to describe magnanimous individuals, suggesting that magnanimous philosophers are “progenitors of a noble race of men” (Thoreau 2008, 13), and comparing magnanimous philosophers to “nobler plants” (ibid., 14). Not too differently, Hume equates “greatness of mind” with “noble pride and spirit” (Hume 1998, 7.4) and refers to man’s “elevation” as “noble” (ibid., 7.11, 7.22, & 8.10). Hobbes likewise relates magnanimity to “nobleness or gallantness of courage” (Hobbes 2005b, I.XV.10).

In some ways, Thoreau’s description of magnanimity is novel. Thoreau, with his unique emphasis on nature and environmental virtue, claims that the noble elevation he seeks is, metaphorically, the height that a tree can grow from the ground. Thoreau suggests that this magnanimous elevation allows a man’s life to bear the best fruit:

Why has man rooted himself thus firmly in the earth, but that he may rise in the same proportion into the heavens above? – for the nobler plants are valued for the fruit they bear at last in the air and light, far from the ground, and are not treated like the humbler esculents, which . . . are . . . often cut down at top (Thoreau 2008, 14).

Only someone who gains magnanimous elevation can bear the best fruit, and Thoreau values this fruit wholeheartedly: “I want the flower and fruit of a man; that some fragrance be wafted over from him to me, and some ripeness flavor our intercourse” (ibid., 56). Thoreau implies that these fruits are the great artistic, scientific, and political accomplishments of superior individuals such as “Shakespeare, Bacon, Cromwell, Milton, Newton, and others” (ibid., 55).

In the end of Thoreau’s chapter on “Economy,” where this last quote appears, Thoreau discusses human excellence in relation to magnanimity. Carew’s poem, like Hume, distinguishes between two sets of human virtues – the virtues of greatness of mind and the virtues of benevolence. In “Economy,” while Thoreau does not employ the exact same terms as Hume or Carew, he nonetheless similarly distinguishes between these two kinds of virtues and claims that both are valuable to human excellence. But Thoreau suggests that while benevolence and the philanthropy to which it corresponds are valuable, *Walden*’s audience should not overvalue them in relation to magnanimity.[[12]](#footnote-12) Thoreau claims that philanthropy (conventionally understood) is “greatly overrated” (Thoreau 2008, 55), suggesting that:

I would not subtract anything from the praise that is due to philanthropy, but . . . I do not value chiefly a man’s uprightness and benevolence, which are, as it were, his stem and leaves. Those plants of whose greenness withered we make herb tea for the sick, serve but a humble use . . . I want the flower and fruit of a man; that some fragrance be wafted over from him to me, and some ripeness flavor our interactions (ibid., 56).

I take this passage to relate to his earlier remark that magnanimous elevation allows a person to metaphorically grow the best fruit. Overall, Thoreau suggests that while benevolence is a person’s stem and leaves, magnanimity is his fruit and flower. Both are good for a plant, but Thoreau most praises the fruit. Likely he does this because he believes it is our “fruit” – the best actions and creations of which people are capable – that we are most likely to lose sight of in our everyday lives.

As Mason Marshall argues, it is inappropriate to think that Thoreau was *opposed* to benevolence, doing service to others, or conventional philanthropy (Marshall 2005, 398). In fact, Thoreau strongly values benevolence and service, but he particularly values the benevolence demonstrated by magnanimous men and women. To best help others and “restore mankind” Thoreau suggests that one should “not stay to be an overseer of the poor, but endeavor to become one of the worthies of the world” (Thoreau 2008, 57). To best help others, one should strive to be magnanimous – to live a life like those who are “the greatest of the great” (ibid., 55) and deserve to be “elevated,” such as “Shakespeare, Bacon, Cromwell” (ibid.), etc. Thoreau implies that a person can often contribute more to the common good by focusing on self-development than by focusing solely on performing good deeds (Cafaro 2000, 31). Thoreau does not recommend that one “go about doing good,” but instead recommends that one “set about being good” (Thoreau 2008, 53).

How might a magnanimous person – one of the “best men and women” (ibid., 55) – better help redeem the world than traditional humanitarians? Thoreau provides an example in John Brown, who – far from being a traditional humanitarian – attempted to overthrow the institution of slavery in America through murder and violent raids. Following Brown’s failed uprising, Thoreau wrote and spoke copiously about Brown, urging his countrymen to admire rather than revile him.

Thoreau suggests that we should “recognize” and appreciate the “magnanimity” of John Brown (Thoreau 1972c, 123; Thoreau 1972a, 147). Thoreau claims that Brown possesses “transcendent moral greatness,” which is “nearly identical with greatness every where and in every age” (Thoreau 1972b, 139). Thoreau suggests that John Brown, a magnanimous man, did much good for America, arguably more than traditional humanitarians. Brown “stirred” men through his behavior and words, affected a “revolution of public opinion” (ibid., 145), “quickened the feeble pulse of the North” (Thoreau 1972c, 135), and showed us what we needed “assistance to see” (ibid.., 129), namely the brutal nature of a government that permits slavery. As a result, Brown metaphorically “liberated many thousands of slaves, both North and South” (Thoreau 1972a, 149). These were principally men and women who were not literally slaves, but whom Brown “liberated” by waking up, and goading them to follow the moral principles they knew to be true, rather than passively allowing slavery to continue. John Brown’s philanthropy, which Thoreau approves, is the philanthropy of the magnanimous man rather than the philanthropy of the traditional humanitarian: “I speak for the slave when I say, that I prefer the philanthropy of Captain Brown to the philanthropy which neither shoots me nor liberates me” (Thoreau 1972c., 133). Thoreau particularly values the kind of benevolence and philanthropy that magnanimity makes possible.

This is the sort of philanthropy which Thoreau seeks in his own life. As Marshall notes, Thoreau does not want to pursue the kind of philanthropy “which society demands” (Thoreau, 2008, 53; Marshall 2005, 399 & 420n31-32). Instead, Thoreau hopes to magnanimously help other people by metaphorically liberating them from slavery and urging them to live the lives they would know would be best for them if they listened to their geniuses, lived deliberately, and behaved in accordance with their reason and conscience (Marshall 2005, 403 & 408). Thoreau urges that if one does not do this, then one is, metaphorically, a slave to oneself, one’s society, or one’s possessions:

There are so many keen and subtle masters that enslave both north and south. It is hard to have a southern overseer; it is worse to have a northern one; but worst of all when you are the slave-driver of yourself” (Thoreau 2008, 8).

Thoreau writes about wealthy people who “have accumulated dross, but know not how to use it, or even get rid of it, and thus have forged their own golden or silver fetters” (ibid., 14). Thoreau also suggests that a farmer who earns enough to purchase a house might discover that “the house has got him” (ibid., 26) since it is psychologically and logistically difficult to sell a house and leave the lifestyle it affords, and “our houses are such unwieldy property that we are often imprisoned rather than housed in them” (ibid.). Like John Brown, who magnanimously and metaphorically liberated thousands of men, North and South, so too Thoreau hopes that *Walden* will help its audience become liberated and enact “self-emancipation” (ibid., 8) from the metaphorical slavery he describes. This is the kind of benevolence that Thoreau values – the benevolence of a great-souled man.

Thoreau values magnanimity insofar as it enables people who possess it to live as they know to be right, even if the rest of the world considers it wrong. Thoreau urges us to follow our genius “even if the world call it doing evil, as it most likely they will” (Thoreau 2008, 53). Thoreau seems to imply that magnanimity is what enables individuals to truly follow their geniuses, even if it would lead them to what seems to others like “extremes and even insanity” (ibid., 147). Thoreau is clear that magnanimity enabled John Brown to follow his own genius and obey his own principles (Hanley 2001, 68). Further, as Thoreau would have predicted, other people did, as a result, pronounce Brown “insane” (Thoreau 1972c, 121), because he was “actuated by higher motives than they are” (ibid.), and “they know that *they* could never act as he does” (Thoreau 1972c, 121). Brown did not possess the virtue of philanthropy in any *traditional* sense, or the kind of benevolence that belongs to gentle-hearted humanitarians, but Thoreau is clear that Brown is notable for his magnanimity. Brown’s defining characteristic is that, out of “obedience to an infinitely higher command” (Thoreau 1972c, 119), he “stands up serenely against the condemnation and vengeance of mankind” (Thoreau 1972c, 125). I take it that magnanimity made this possible for Brown, and enabled him to have “the courage to face his country herself, when she was wrong” (ibid., 113).

Thoreau’s concept of magnanimity can be considered a distant cousin of what theorists such as Matthew Pianalto call “moral courage.” Individuals demonstrate moral courage when, motivated by “some morally motivated cause” (Pianalto 2012, 165), they take a stand, knowing that there is a possibility of facing social or physical punishment or retaliation in response. It is also key to moral courage that those who take a stand never objectify others, not even those who oppose them in value or action (ibid., 165-167). I do not wish to debate whether Brown possesses the kind of moral courage Pianalto describes. I mention Pianalto’s discussion because moral courage thus defined seems *related* to Thoreau’s magnanimity, even if someone might possesses one without the other.

The idea that magnanimity enables a person to take a moral stand, even with the threat of social or physical retribution, fits nicely within the philosophical tradition discussed in **Part I.** For Hobbes, the notions of magnanimity and courage are closely related, and a magnanimous person consistently pursues the best means for achieving his or her greatest ends. If standing up for a moral principle is of great importance to a magnanimous person, that person will courageously pursue the most effective means to achieve this end and will not let the possibility of punishment or repercussions stop him or her.

**III. Greatness of Soul and the Environmental Virtue of Simplicity**

Here I provide a novel argument – not directly drawn from Thoreau – that people cannot achieve the virtue of magnanimity, or greatness of soul, without also acquiring the environmental virtue of simplicity. I base the argument’s premises not on what Thoreau directly suggests, but rather on what we, today, can take his claims to imply.

Thoreau, I think correctly, states that many people spend too much of their time and energy pursuing ends that are not truly important to them, or pursuing means to those ends that are not the most effective ways of achieving them. Regardless of Thoreau’s actual intent when writing, we ourselves might conclude then that the majority of people are not, in Hobbes’s sense, magnanimous. Hobbesian magnanimity requires that we pursue the best means to our ends, without being distracted by trifles. But Thoreau suggests that, for many:

Our life is frittered away by detail . . . In the midst of the chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands and thousand-and-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live, if he would not founder and go to the bottom . . . by dead reckoning (Thoreau 2008, 65).

According to Thoreau, the vast majority of people spend too much of their time focused on trivialities, pursuing goals that do not really matter. Thoreau remarks, for instance, that “there is greater anxiety, commonly, to have fashionable, or at least clean and unpatched clothes, than to have a sound conscience” (Thoreau 2008, 18). In other words, people are more concerned with what is less important. Thoreau scorns the “spending of the best part of one’s life earning money” (ibid., 40). Many people waste their time trying to earn more money than they need. Thoreau also contends that even when people do actively pursue important goals, they nonetheless often fail to pursue the best means to achieve them: “The farmer is endeavoring to solve the problem of a livelihood by a formula more complicated than the problem itself. To get his shoestrings he speculates in herds of cattle” (ibid., 26).

Suppose we consider people to be metaphorical “slaves” if they fail to live the kind of life they would know would be best for them were they to listen to their geniuses and live deliberately. Then it is clear why Thoreau suggests houses can be prisons and wealth can be a fetter. According to him, many people spend far more time, energy, and anxiety on acquiring wealth, spending it, using what they buy, and maintaining it, than they would if they listened to their geniuses. Thoreau remarks that “superfluous wealth can only buy superfluities only” and produces the risk of becoming a “trifler” (Thoreau 2008, 221). Many spend too much time and energy on things that are not truly important to them, and so we can conclude that the majority of people are not magnanimous in Hobbes’s sense.

Thoreau proposes a solution. If you find that your life is frittered away by detail, strive for: “Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! . . . Let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand” (Thoreau 2008, 65). For Thoreau, simplicity is a virtue which is key to freedom – to avoiding Thoreau’s metaphorical slavery. If we live simply, we will not need to work as hard or long to attain the wealth and resources to live lavishly, and we could instead spend that time and energy as we wish, on more important things (Cafaro 2005, 33; Gambrel & Cafaro 2010, 96 & 98). Thoreau recommends living without substantial luxury because:

If you are restricted in your range by poverty . . . you are but confined to the most significant and vital experiences; you are compelled to deal with the material which yields the most sugar and starch. It is life near the bone where it is sweetest. You are defended from being a trifler (Thoreau 2008, 221).

Given the discussion in **Part** **I**, we can think of pusillanimity (“small-souledness”: the opposite of magnanimity) as being a trifler, and it appears that avoiding excess wealth can help a person to avoid pusillanimity and become magnanimous.

Thoreau seems to praise the same sort of virtue of material simplicity which Gambrel and Cafaro describe as the trait or quality which can dispose us to “act appropriately within the sphere of our consumer decisions” and is “a conscientious and restrained attitude towards material goods” (Gambrel & Cafaro 2010, 90). If we had this virtue then we would not make purchases or waste time obtaining resources that are not, in fact, conducive to a flourishing life. We would instead lead lives of “decreased” and “more conscientious consumption,” with a “more nuanced appreciation for things besides material goods” (ibid., 90).   
 Reflecting on Thoreau’s work, we can come to value the virtue of simplicity for a novel reason: the virtue of simplicity is, for many people, necessary to become magnanimous and lead a life of elevation.[[13]](#footnote-13) As long as people are spending their time and energy on acquiring or using unnecessary resources – as long as people’s lives are *complicated* – then we can imagine that they will likely either fail to effectively pursue goals that are more important to them than consumption, or they will fail to pursue the best means to achieve their important goals. In contrast, as we saw earlier, Hobbes suggests that magnanimous individuals always pursue the best means to their greatest ends. So, we can conclude that as long as people’s lives are complicated and they do not possess the virtue of simplicity, they are unlikely to become the best people they can be, or truly magnanimous. While Thoreau does not explicitly arrive at this conclusion, he does fittingly suggest that magnanimous philosophers must lead lives of “simplicity” without “most of the luxuries and many of the so called comforts of life” (Thoreau 2008, 13).

I contend that, for the vast majority of people living in developed countries, living a life of material simplicity would be absolutely necessary to become magnanimous. Most people spend too much time and energy on acquiring and using unnecessary resources, and material simplicity would free up time and energy that could be better spent on more important goals. So too, for most people, material simplicity contributes to magnanimity, which demands the wholehearted pursuit of one’s most valued ends. Yet there will be exceptions. It is possible to imagine that, for some people, wealth and luxury come easily. Such individuals might be magnanimous – wholeheartedly and successfully pursuing their important goals – while nonetheless indulging in excess. Even Thoreau seems to admit that it is logically possible for individuals to be both magnanimous and magnificent, wholeheartedly pursuing their goals while also spending great deals of wealth, sometimes on excessive luxury and consumption (Thoreau 2008, p. 14). But for the majority of us, neither wealth nor luxury is that easy, and material simplicity is the best means to achieve personal greatness.

To further support my claims about the relations between magnanimity, simplicity, and consumption, we can turn to studies about what psychologists call “flow.” In one study, participants, who had been given pagers, were paged 56 times at random intervals over a week. Each time they received a page, they were asked to fill out a form requesting that they (1) describe the activity in which they were engaged, (2) rank their level of skill at performing the activity, (3) rank the activity’s level of challenge, and (4) rate their own levels of affect, motivation, creativity, and satisfaction (Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre 1989, 815 & 817). Researchers determined that individuals are significantly more likely to experience “flow contexts” – contexts in which both their skill level and challenge level were higher than their personal averages – while they were at work rather than while they were at leisure (ibid., 818). This appears to be true because of the kinds of passive activities many individuals pursue in leisure. For example, watching television ranks lower for challenge and skill than any other common, regularly performed activity (Kubey and Csikzentmihalyi 1990, 81 & 85).

While many individuals’ affect is not significantly better in flow contexts than in boredom contexts, individuals who spend more time in flow over the course of a week also have, considering the week in total, better affect, motivation, creativity, and satisfaction (LeFevre 1988, 312). Individuals who spend more time in flow have, on average, higher reported levels of happiness, friendliness, cheerfulness, and sociability.

I take these studies as evidence, though not decisive proof on their own, that when, like magnanimous individuals, we wholeheartedly pursue the best means to our greatest ends, we also feel the best. When we engage in activities that push our skills to their limits and help us achieve our challenging goals, we also have better affect. In contrast, when, like pusillanimous, small-souled individuals, we are focused on trifles that do not contribute to our goals, employ our skills, or challenge us, we also do not feel as good.

Likewise, if we, like Csikzentmihalyi (1999, 826-827), grant that excess consumption is often linked to passive activities that do not encourage the experience of flow, we might also reasonably think that people tend to experience less flow and fewer positive experiences when they frequently engage in activities that involve excess consumption. We might conclude that those who live simply also tend to live more actively and more wholeheartedly pursue their challenging goals. If so, then we might think that those who live simply also tend be more magnanimous and experience more flow and better affect.

Gambrel and Cafaro note that in addition to furthering human flourishing, the virtue of simplicity contributes to the flourishing of nonhuman animals, plants, and the ecological world broadly (Gambrel and Cafaro 2010, 100-102). They note that overconsumption is one of the driving forces behind ecological degradation, and, by definition, those who possess the virtue of simplicity do not overconsume. For example, if, living simply, we did not own cars or fly around the world numerous times annually, our carbon footprints would decrease substantially. Gambrel and Cafaro point out that overconsumption leads to environmental problems in indirect ways, as well (ibid., 91). For example, they note that the average American consumes 25% more calories than necessary (ibid., Putnam et al. 2002). They suggest that farmland and pesticide use could decrease if people did not consume as much, and fewer food products needed to be produced. They further recognize that greenhouse gas emissions would decrease if we consumed less, since 20% of our greenhouse gas emissions are a result of transporting and growing foods (Gambrel & Cafaro 2010, 91; Pollan 2007).

In sum, since we have reason to think that most people must acquire the virtue of simplicity in order to become magnanimous, it further appears that most magnanimous people would behave in a way that is advantageous for the natural world.

**IV. Environmental Virtue Theory**

Nonetheless, it might initially seem possible to imagine magnanimous individuals who live simply, in the way described above, and yet have no real concern for the environment and act in ways that are destructive to it. Imagine magnanimous individuals who live without luxury, and spend their time and energy wholeheartedly pursuing their most important goals rather than trivialities. It might seem we can also imagine that these same magnanimous individuals nonetheless have highly valued goals such that, if they were they to pursue these goals as well as possible, they would devastate the natural world. If we can imagine magnanimous individuals like this, then it would be easy to imagine that they would take action that devastates the environment, especially since magnanimous people always pursue the best means to their most important goals. In fact, even if pursuing the goals just *slightly* less well would save the environment, we could still, it seems, imagine these individuals taking action that would devastate it.

Ultimately, I suspect that magnanimous people like those just described are impossible. I cannot imagine magnanimous people who, after listening to their geniuses, greatly value goals the successful pursuit of which would unnecessarily devastate the natural world. I cannot imagine truly magnanimous individuals who greatly value goals that are contrary to what is required for human flourishing, and I take it that human flourishing is inseparable from the flourishing of the natural world (Rolson III, 2005, 70; Gambrel & Cafaro 2010, 87; Sandler 2005, 3). Humans simply cannot live well if they are unnecessarily devastating their environment. Further, I take it that nonhuman animals and plants have intrinsic value – value in and of themselves – regardless of their usefulness to humans and regardless of the fact that interacting with them can help humans become more virtuous (Rolston III, 2005, p. 70). I find it impossible to imagine truly magnanimous individuals who greatly value goals that demand the unnecessary destruction of nonhuman plants and animals and who do not take their intrinsic value into account. Magnanimous people find important what is truly and objectively valuable, and that includes the flourishing of the natural world.

I hold that anyone who is environmentally virtuous would, by definition, preserve the natural world and act in sustainable ways, but would not do so *because* doing so would help them to live better lives or become more virtuous. Rather, those who are environmentally virtuous act in sustainable ways because they have genuine concern for nonhuman plants and animals, and recognize those plants and animals’ intrinsic value (Rolston III 2005, 70 & 72).[[14]](#footnote-14)

I will not provide arguments that nonhuman plants and animals have intrinsic value, or that magnanimous individuals could never greatly value goals that would devastate the natural world. These arguments are beyond the scope of this paper. Likewise, moving forward, I will not heavily rely on any of these claims. Suppose that plants and animals have no intrinsic value, and environmentally virtuous individuals need not be concerned for them beyond how interacting with them can help these individuals achieve their goals and develop good characters. Suppose, too, that it is possible to imagine magnanimous people who live simply, yet have no real concern for the environment and act destructively to it. Nonetheless, my major conclusions and arguments stand.

To recognize this, consider a broader definition of “environmental virtue” that does not demand that plants and animals have intrinsic value, or that there is moral value to being concerned with the environment. Ronald Sandler defines environmental virtues as “the proper dispositions or character traits for human beings to have regarding their interactions and relationships with the environment” (Sandler 2005, 3). While the virtue of gratitude, understood as a standard interpersonal virtue, means having the proper disposition toward other humans who have benefited us, the virtue of gratitude, as an environmental virtue, means having the proper disposition toward a natural environment that has benefited us (ibid.; 4). Environmental virtues, which promote “human and nonhuman flourishing” (Gambrel & Cafaro 2010, 87), lead individuals: to act in ways that are environmentally sustainable and to endorse environmentally sustainable policies and practices (Sandler 2004, 479); to encourage others to do so as well; and, generally, to behave in a way that does not promote ecosystem collapse, species loss, or causing non-human animals unnecessary pain or death (Gambrel & Cafaro 2010, 88 & 89).

Any disposition that leads most individuals to consistently act in environmentally sustainable ways would be considered an environmental virtue according to this definition. So, for instance, individuals could have the environmental virtue of benevolence provided their benevolent disposition consistently leads them to preserve the environment, even if they have no real concern for the environment, itself, but instead preserve it because they have a benevolent concern for other humans who could benefit from it (Welchman 1999, 414-416 & 421). So too, insofar as those who possess the virtue of simplicity do not overconsume and thus, by and large, consistently act in ways that are more environmentally sustainable, the virtue of material simplicity could be considered an environmental virtue. Since material simplicity is necessary for the majority of people to become magnanimous, we can then conclude that environmental virtue is central to magnanimity.

We might think that this is true even if a small percentage of magnanimous individuals, who possess the virtue of simplicity, nonetheless have no particular concern for the environment, and act in ways that are destructive to it. We might recognize that the virtue of simplicity, on its own, leads them to act in sustainable ways, even if, because of the ways in which they pursue their goals, they nonetheless devastate the environment.

**V. Greatness of Soul and the Environmental Virtue of Benevolence**

I contend that most magnanimous people not only have the environmental virtue of simplicity, but also possess the environmental virtue of benevolence. I provide a novel argument, inspired by but not directly based on Thoreau’s claims, that once people have become magnanimous, they will need to acquire the environmental virtue of benevolence in order to achieve the kinds of philanthropic goals that are characteristic of them.

To arrive at my conclusion about benevolence, we must first consider the following question: How can one acquire the virtue of simplicity, a virtue most people need in order to become magnanimous? Ultimately, Thoreau contends that gaining this virtue will be difficult as long as one constantly remains in a society of people who live lavishly. It is difficult for many people to break a herd mentality, and stop following the lead of the lavish: “It is the luxurious and dissipated who set the fashions which the herd so diligently follow” (Thoreau 2008, 28). Rather, it is very easy for “most men” to fall into the trap of thinking “they must have such” things “as their neighbors have” (ibid., 27). According to Thoreau, is easy to focus on how other people view you – say if you aren’t wearing nice clothes – rather than on what is genuinely important. It is easy to focus “not on what is truly respectable, but what is respected” (Thoreau 2008, 18; Marshall 2005, 402-403). As suggested earlier, many philosophers suggest that we should, instead, be focused, like Aristotle’s great-souled man, not on receiving honor, but on being worthy of it. Thoreau remarks that it is very easy for us to fall into patterns of behavior that aren’t ideal for us, and he implies that even our *mental* life can fall into “ruts”:

The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths

which the mind travels . . . How deep the ruts of tradition and conformity! (ibid., 217)

Thoreau suggests that, as long as we remain in a society constantly surrounded by people who live lavishly, it will be difficult to live simply, because, in “civilized life” there are “clouds and storms and quicksands and a thousand-and-one items to be allowed for” (ibid., 65).

So, in order to gain the virtue of simplicity and stand a better chance of becoming magnanimous, Thoreau suggests that we should seek to interact with wild nature, even if it “is in the midst of an outward civilization” (ibid., 11) because, stepping to some degree outside of society, we can better come to live simply and differently from the herd. We can focus on what really matters and is necessary, rather than on wealth and all of the superfluities that come with it; we can “learn what are the gross necessaries of life and what methods have been taken to obtain them” (ibid.). Thoreau suggests that “our village life would stagnate” in its ruts of tradition and conformity “if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it” (ibid., 213). He claims that we “need the tonic of wilderness” (ibid.) to jar us from our routines, and to show us that there is more to the world than the way we currently live: “We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander” (ibid.). Wild nature lets us see ourselves in a larger context, in which humans have less control, and which is not as tame as we are in our everyday life (Cafaro 2012, 87).

Reflecting on Thoreau’s claims, we have reason to conclude that for many people, the best way to achieve simplicity, and thus also the virtue of magnanimity for which simplicity is necessary, is to spend time directly engaging with wild places and wild things.[[15]](#footnote-15)

An opponent might initially be concerned that those who have sufficient money and free time to enjoy wild spaces, and to travel to national parks or country estates, are those who live lavishly and do not embrace material simplicity (Cronon 1995, 78-79). But when Thoreau writes about wilderness, he is not referring, as other theorists might (ibid., 69 & 83), to wild places that are remote, untouched, and unaffected by human culture. Rather, he encourages us to enjoy wild areas that are close to where we live (ibid., 86) – spaces with nonhuman animals and plants where easy evidence of nearby humans might still be found. Thoreau’s cabin near Walden Pond, where he enjoyed wild nature and wrote about it, was very close to his childhood home; it was wildness in his own backyard. It is easy to imagine Thoreau similarly applauding modern individuals who appreciate and spend time in humble, not-so-glorious “undeveloped” areas near their homes where highway traffic might still be heard, and where they might still stumble across a piece of trash or two. Arguably, most individuals, even those who live simply, have sufficient time and resources to seek out wild places like this.

Why is it relevant to the topic of benevolence that, in order to live simply, most individuals must engage with wild nature? I contend that Thoreau’s benevolent goal is to help his audience to become magnanimous, by encouraging them to live simply. So, then, I maintain that wild nature plays a key role in helping Thoreau to achieve his specific, benevolent goal. As we have seen Thoreau has several other goals which are interconnected with magnanimity and simplicity. He is deeply concerned with waking people up, and freeing them from metaphorical slavery. He also hopes to help them to listen to their geniuses, obey their consciences, and act on the moral principles they know to be true. This is the kind of philanthropy Thoreau’s virtue of benevolence leads him to pursue.

It seems reasonable to think that if the citizens of a society were all free from Thoreau’s metaphorical slavery, thinking for themselves and living lives which they could fully endorse, then that society would, *ceteris paribus*, better support liberty and oppose the actual institution of chattel slavery (Schliesser 2012). Granting that interacting with wilderness is conducive to Thoreau’s goal of ending metaphorical slavery, it also would be conducive to John Brown’s goal of ending literal slavery. Brown and Thoreau both demonstrate benevolence, defined as caring about others’ interests and acting for the sake of others’ benefit, rather than solely for oneself (Welchman 1999, 415). Further, the preservation of wild nature is conducive to both of their benevolent goals.

I contend that preserving wild nature is greatly conducive to the benevolent goals of most magnanimous people, and that magnanimous individuals do, by and large, seek to preserve it. True magnanimous individuals benevolently strive to help others to become magnanimous, and, like Thoreau, they require wild nature in order to achieve this goal. No matter what a magnanimous individual’s goals in life happen to be, it will be in that magnanimous individual’s best interest if the people with whom he or she collaborates are also magnanimous. It is ideal for a magnanimous person if his or her collaborators become magnanimous and thus wholeheartedly pursue the best means to shared goals, without being distracted by trifles. Since magnanimous individuals consistently pursue the best means to their goals, magnanimous individuals will help their collaborators to become magnanimous. Then, since wild nature is so conducive to living simply, and since living simply is necessary for most people to become magnanimous, magnanimous individuals will seek to preserve wild nature. Engaging with wild nature is the best way for them and their collaborators to become magnanimous, and they will be sure to preserve it.

I do not claim that magnanimous individuals will help their collaborators become magnanimous out of selfish motivations. Helping their collaborators will enable them to accomplish their own goals, but that does not mean that their *motives* for helping must be selfish. Rather, I contend that they will help others out of genuinely benevolent concern for the others’ wellbeing.

I do not think it is a coincidence that Hobbes claims magnanimity is key for fully possessing the virtue of justice or that Hume thinks of magnanimity in direct relation to a concern for liberty and a disdain for slavery. Rather, I suspect the underlying idea is this: magnanimous individuals who wholeheartedly pursue what is genuinely most important to them will tend to pursue justice, liberty, and the end of slavery, both metaphorical and otherwise, because these are the sorts of benevolent goals which people would recognize as truly important, if they listened to their geniuses and obeyed higher motives. If this is right, then it appears that magnanimous individuals quite naturally have benevolent goals and wish to help others.

One might wonder if, once freed from metaphorical slavery, magnanimous people might choose to pursue solely self-interested goals, rather than benevolent ones. I suggest they would not. Magnanimous people – who have learned to listen to their geniuses – would recognize that they highly value benevolent goals (if perhaps not the goals of *typical* humanitarians), and, since magnanimous people wholeheartedly pursue their greatest goals, they often act benevolently. All people have great, other-regarding goals, and strongly value family, friends, and/or their community. People who think that all of their greatest goals are self-regarding are mistaken, and would recognize their error if, freed from metaphorical slavery, they could listen to their geniuses.

It seems impossible to imagine a magnanimous person who lacks strongly held benevolent goals. I hold that magnanimous people would highly value those things which are central to human flourishing, and I take this to include not only the flourishing of the natural world, but the pursuit of a variety of benevolent goals. Still, even if this contention were wrong – even if we can imagine magnanimous individuals who are completely self-serving – the vast majority of magnanimous individuals would still seek to preserve wild nature. As suggested above, regardless of their goals, it will be in their best interest for more of their collaborators to become magnanimous, and enabling those collaborators to engage with wild nature is a necessary means to ensuring that they will.

Finally, as Welchman implies, people with many different kinds of benevolent goals often have more direct and straightforward reason to preserve the natural world. Welchman suggests that interactions with wild nature – walking in the woods, hunting, camping, etc. – help to illustrate moral values for us (Welchman 1999, 418). As suggested, these kinds of experience may even be necessary for some people to acquire virtues such as simplicity and magnanimity. Welchman correctly implies that, if we experience benevolence and love for others, then that will lead many of us to promote the preservation of the wilderness, so that they might acquire these virtues for themselves and thus lead better, flourishing lives (ibid., 419). Even if individuals do not share Thoreau’s goal of helping others better listen to their geniuses, if they nonetheless recognize that wilderness is key to acquiring virtues that are necessary for human flourishing, then benevolence for others would motivate many of them to act in a way that promotes preserving wilderness.

Often, theorists write as if benevolence provides *negative* motivation: we experience benevolence toward people of future generations, so we act, now, to *mitigate* the effects of global warming and the depletion of resources so that those generations do not *suffer* as much as they otherwise might (Welchman 1999, 413). Thoreau offers us a *positive* view of benevolence: we experience benevolence toward others, and we recognize that enabling them to interact with wilderness and a healthy environment can help them achieve the virtues that are key to a flourishing life, so we act, now, to preserve nature and mitigate global warming so that people can *acquire* virtues that will make them *happier*.

**VI. Conclusion**

In this essay, I have reflected on Thoreau’s work in relation to historical discussions of magnanimity and have argued that: (1) for many people to become magnanimous, they will need to acquire the environmental virtue of simplicity; and (2) magnanimous people will often need the environmental virtue of benevolence in order to achieve their philanthropic goals. If it is true that the virtue of magnanimity is key to a life of human excellence, then we would have even greater reason to think that the environmental virtues of simplicity and benevolence are necessary for human excellence, as well.

I have drawn a sketch of human excellence, one that takes both human flourishing and environmental flourishing into account. My account does not suggest that the way we live, right now, is anywhere near good enough. To live excellent lives, we would need to re-evaluate and likely revise even our most basic habits regarding economic consumption and the ways we spend our time. Like Thoreau, we would likely have to experiment with lives that are very different from those we currently live, and strive for “simplicity, simplicity, simplicity” (Thoreau 2008, 65). Finally, my account of human excellence does not sell short environmental virtues, interpersonal virtues, or personal virtues: simplicity, benevolence, or magnanimity. Each kind of virtue is directly connected with the rest, such that it is difficult to have any one, or live well, without the others.

Rachel Fredericks argues that many people who care about the environment fail to take action to advance positive change out of a lack of the moral courage (Fredericks 2014, 343 & 348-350). A similar case could be made for the value of magnanimity. What good is caring about the environment, or any sort of benevolence, if trifles constantly distract us from doing anything to help? What good is benevolence if, because we doubt our power and ability to make a difference, we do nothing? Instead, we should live simply, cultivate magnanimity, recognize our own great power, and consistently pursue the best means to our ends. Only then could we most successfully pursue our greatest benevolent goals.

\* \* \*

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1. All references to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* are cited by book and chapter number. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. All references to Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica* are cited by part, question, and article number. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. All references to Hobbes’s *The Elements of Law* are cited by part, chapter, and paragraph number. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. All references to Hobbes’s *Leviathan* are cited by part, chapter, and paragraph number. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For my much more detailed discussion of Hobbes’s approach to magnanimity, see (Corsa 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Martin notes that, for Hume, “Greatness of mind is not a particular virtue, but a category of what Hume refers to as the ‘heroic’ virtues” (Martin 1992, 385). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. All references to Hume’s *Treatise* are cited by book, part, section, and paragraph number. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. All references to Hume’s *Enquiry* are cited by section and paragraph number. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For my much more detailed discussion of Hume’s approach to magnanimity, see (Corsa 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Aquinas, Hobbes, and Hume do not appear in the bibliographical catalogue of the texts Thoreau read, assembled by Robert Sattelmeyer (1988). While Thoreau did read some Aristotle, there is no strong evidence that he focused attention on Aristotle’s account of greatness. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Hanley suggests that Thoreau’s notion of magnanimity can be found in “Socrates’ humble and singular self-knowledge” (Hanley 2001, 72). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Hanley suggests that, for Thoreau, the best great-souled man – someone like John Brown – harmonizes in himself his primitive wild side, and his higher, civilized side, which Thoreau describes in *Walden*’s chapters “Higher Laws” and “Brute Neighbors” respectively (Hanley 2001, 59-60 & 68). In this essay, I do not focus on man’s primitive and civilized sides. I focus on magnanimity and benevolence. But, while I will not discuss this point further, I suspect that the relation between one’s civilized and primitive sides directly relates to the relation between benevolence and magnanimity. I see my discussion as paralleling Hanley’s. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Though Cafaro does not focus on the relation between magnanimity and simplicity, he does suggest that, for Thoreau, there is a “strong correlation between simplicity and the other virtues” (Cafaro, 2000: 37). He provides evidence that, for Thoreau, if a person possesses the virtue of simplicity, that person would possess the virtues of independence, honesty, and trust. Further discussion of this is outside of this current paper’s scope. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Holmes Rolston III worries that environmental virtue theories tend to imply, at least at times, that we ought to preserve nonhuman animals *because* doing so will help us develop good characters (Rolston III 2005, 70). He writes that: “It seems unexcellent – cheap and philistine – to say that excellence of human character is what we are after when we preserve endangered species” (ibid., 70). Rather, he suggests that theories ought to emphasize that noble humans act, not to develop better characters, but out of a genuine concern for animals and their intrinsic value (ibid., 73). I hope to avoid these worries by making his suggested emphasis part of the definition of “environmental virtue,” itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Cafaro suggests that interacting with a “varied and partially wild landscape” can, according to Thoreau, advance a number of other virtues and positive values as well, including “patience, stillness, alertness . . . the pursuit of scientific and historical knowledge, and . . . creativity and personal expression” (Cafaro 2012, 79). Further discussing these points is outside of this paper’s scope. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)