

# **Nature Restoration as a Paradigm for the Human Relationship with Nature**

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# Preservation as the Reigning 20<sup>th</sup>

## C. Nature-Protection Paradigm

- To protect nature we must set aside nature preserves and keep them “untrammelled by man” (Wilderness Act, 1964)
- Nature’s key value is naturalness/wildness (its degree of independence from human influence)
- By and large, humans are separate from nature



# The Rise of Nature Restoration

- Given the extent of human degradation of earth, the attempt to restore degraded nature has become a key environmental goal
- Examples . . .

Exxon spent over 3 billion to try to clean up Prince William Sound after the Exxon Valdez oil spill



# Wolves have been restored to Yellowstone



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- A photograph of a dam with water cascading over its spillway. In the background, a bridge with a brick railing spans across the river. The foreground shows a concrete structure with some green plants growing in it.
- Dams are being removed for the first time in history

# National war on exotic species



Fire is being returned to—rather than  
banished from--the many fire  
dependent ecosystem





# \$8 Billion plan to restore the Everglades in the works





A photograph of a pine plantation. The foreground is filled with dense, green, spiky vegetation, likely a type of grass or sedge. In the background, a dense stand of tall, thin, vertical trees, likely long-leaf pines, stretches towards the horizon under a clear blue sky. The text is overlaid in the center of the image.

Here at the College of Charleston, Dixie  
Plantation is being restore to the long-leaf  
pine ecosystem it once was



# The Restoration Paradigm challenges Preservationism

- Preserving nature won't save it; instead we must restore
- Nature's value is its thriving biodiversity and its “classic ecosystems” (not its lack of humanization)
- Humans need not be separate from nature; through restoration we can be part of it

# The Restoration Paradigm

- Helps us identify significant flaws in pure preservationism
- Pushes us to identify a positive role for humans in nature
- But fails to articulate such a positive vision

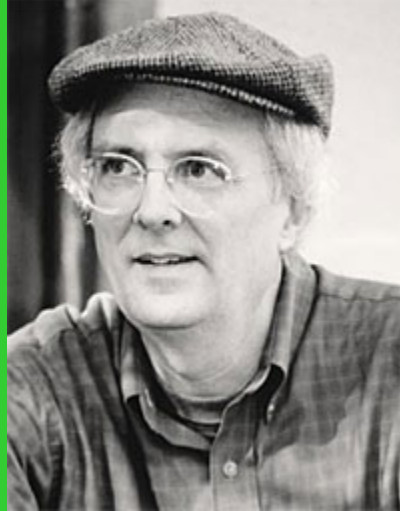
# Many thoughtful environmentalists embrace the restoration paradigm

- The “*emergence of ecological restoration is . . . the most important environmental development since the first Earth Day. It allows people to participate in healing the wounds left on the earth, acknowledging the human power to create as well as to destroy.*”

(Gary Paul Nabhan, 1991)



# William Jordan, Restoration's Leading Visionary



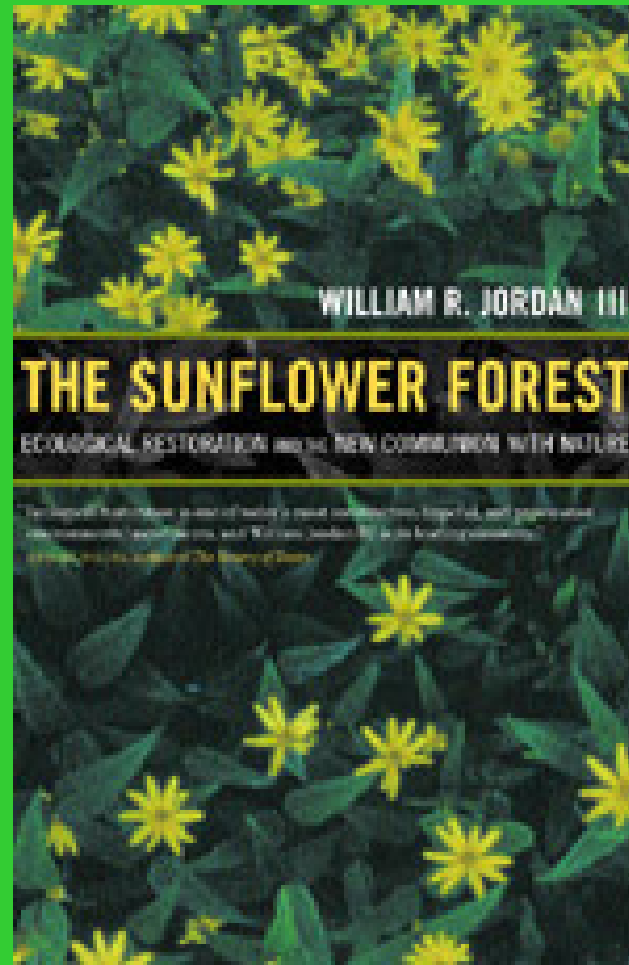
- "Ecological restoration is one of today's most constructive, hopeful, and provocative environmental movements, and William Jordan III is its leading visionary."

(Michael Pollan, 2003)

# I focus on Jordan's account of restoration in

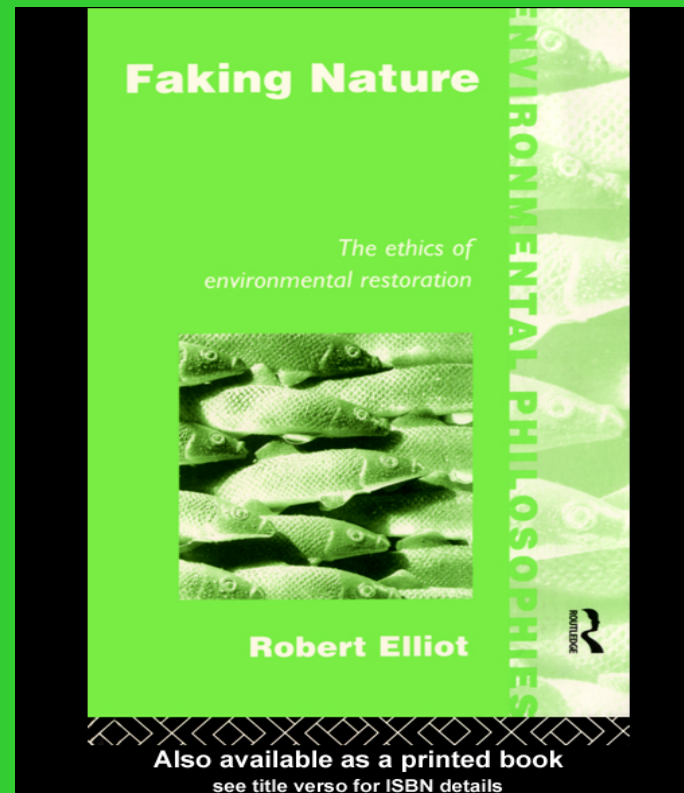
- “Restoration and the Reentry of Nature” Orion Nature Quarterly (1986)
- “Sunflower Forest: Ecological Restoration a Basis for a New Environmental Paradigm” Beyond Preservation (1994)
- “Restoration, Community, and Wilderness” Restoring Nature (2000)

# Ecological Restoration and the New Communion with Nature





# Many thoughtful environmentalists reject the restoration paradigm



# Robert Elliot, “Faking Nature”

## 1982/1997

- Restoration undermines preservation and fakes nature
- Worry: If a restored nature is as good as new, why preserve rather than utilize/degrade and then restore nature?

# Elliott's response:

- A restored nature is not just as good; instead it is “faking nature”
- Like a replicated artwork, it is not as valuable as the original for it lacks the same genesis
- It's a product of human culture and technology rather than a product of natural history

# Stanley Kane: Restoration as paternalistic domination of nature

- “By holding that humans are the lords of creation, restorationist metaphysics tolerates no enclaves anywhere kept free of human domination and control.”
  - Stanley Kane (1994) “Preservation or Restoration? Reflections on a Clash of Environmental Philosophies”
- Restoration manipulates and control natures for its own good
  - Restorationists decide when nature will burn, what plants and animals are allowed, etc.

# Eric Katz

## Dean of the Anti-Restorationists

- Restoration = “The Big Lie” (1992)
- “A ‘restored’ nature is . . . an unrecognized manifestation of the insidious dream of the human domination of nature” (1992)
- Our mastery of nature is shown by our ability to repair and reconstruct degraded ecosystems



## Katz: Restored “nature” is an anthropocentric human artifact

- In restoration “*we are creating artifactual systems that resemble nature, but they are not authentic nature*” (2000)
- Rather than healing nature and making it whole again, restoration is “*putting a piece of furniture over the stain in the carpet*” (1992)

# I focus on Katz's

- “The Big Lie,” Research in Philosophy and Technology (1992)
- “Another Look at Restoration: Technology and Artificial Life,” Restoring Nature (2000)
- “Understanding Moral Limits in the Duality of Artifacts and Nature: A Reply to Critics,” Ethics & the Environment (2002)

# Environmentalists' ambivalence toward restoration is justified:

- The idea that restoration is the paradigm human relation to nature provides deep insight and equally deep confusion concerning the proper human relationship with nature
- I now examine the insights and perils this paradigm offers us



# INSIGHTS OF THE ECO-RESTORATION PARADIGM

- 1. Restoration can help heal nature: It needn't be anthropocentric
- 2. Acknowledges the massive damage to nature humans have caused
- 3. Sees the need for full human participation in nature
- 4. Cautions against the danger of apartheid-style preservationism
- 5. Tries to correct preservationism's lack of positive vision for human's place in nature

A photograph of a bison grazing in a field of wildflowers. The bison is the central focus, with its head down and horns visible. The field is filled with various wildflowers, including yellow and purple ones. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape under a clear sky.

# 1. Restoration can help heal nature and needn't be anthropocentric

- Restoration is an important and valuable human activity
- Not only can it help humans, but it can help nature and it needn't be anthropocentric
- Katz denies this



Despite stigmatizing it as “the big lie,” Katz says he favors restoration

- *“Nothing I have said . . . should be taken as an endorsement of actions that . . . injure areas of the natural environment and leave them in a damaged state” (1992)*
- *“I believe that remediation of damaged ecosystems is a better policy than letting the blighted landscape remain as it is” (2002)*

# Ironically, Katz can only endorse **anthropocentric** restoration

- Because restoration creates artifacts (or **further artifactualizes** ecosystem already affected--and thus for Katz, artifactualized--by humans), from nature's perspective, the best we can do is to leave it alone.
- Thus Katz cannot consistently support restoration for nature's sake, though he could for humans
- Thus (his view entails that ) when the human costs of cleaning up (e.g., an oil spill) outweigh the human benefits, we should not clean it up

But we need restoration for  
nature's sake



## 2. Acknowledges the massive damage humans have caused

- Pure preservation ignores extent of human influence on nature and pretends nature will be okay if we just leave it alone





- But sometimes, “We must shoot deer to save nature,” Jared Diamond, Natural History (1992)



- Sometimes, inaction can mean the further degradation of natural areas due to ongoing affects of past human action (introduced exotics, fire suppression, predator/prey inbalances)



# But Restorationists Overstate Necessity of Restoration

- William Jordan claims we will need to manage and restore the entire earth:
- *“Preservation is impossible. . . All systems are constantly changing, and reflect at least some degree of human influence”* (1994)
- The Midwest's tallgrass prairies and oak openings are examples where *“the entire native ecosystem has been virtually eliminated as a direct or indirect result of new kinds of human activities. This situation is actually paradigmatic, however, and is true in the final analysis of all ecosystems everywhere.”* (1994)



# But not all human influence requires restoration

- That humans have touched virtually the entire surface of the planet doesn't make preservation impossible
- For example, a slightly higher level of acidity in Yellowstone's rain does not make aggressive, aggressive, high human impact, restoration necessary there

### 3. The importance of full human participation in nature

- Jordan (1994 & 2000) argues that preservation offers a severely limited human relation to nature
- It limits people's role in nature to a non-participatory “*take only pictures, leave only footprints*”
- Makes humans visitors on the planet, instead of active, contributing members
- Such participation, he argues, is a necessary part of a healthy human/nature relation

Katz's non-participatory approach: **Love and respect nature, but don't touch her**

- *“Here is my solution: as much as possible, we humans leave nature alone. To “let it be” seems to be to be the highest form of respect we can muster . . . And while I leave it alone, I try to learn as much as possible about it, so that knowledge, respect, and love can all grow together.” (2002)*

# Astonishingly, Katz says we should relate to nature as we do to a work of art

- *“We can use the art object/nature analogy again . . . If I respect a work of art, I show this respect by my mere appreciation, by learning about the artwork . . . I do not attempt to change the work of art . . . I do not attempt to improve it . . . Any intervention in the artwork itself will change its quality and value. My proper respectful role is to leave the physical object alone.”* (2002)
- For Katz, appropriate respect for both art & nature is to appreciate and leave them alone



# Jordan is right that a healthy relationship with nature

- “*Must engage all our abilities. . . These include our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual capacities*” (1994)
- It must be a “*working relationship*” including “*ecological interaction*” (1994)
- Preserving wildland that we study, love, and leave alone shouldn’t be the **only** dimension of a healthy human relationship with nature

# 4. Critique of preservation's tendency toward human/nature apartheid

- Stanley Kane: Preservationists must avoid the idea “that nature can be fully itself and thus have full value only when left undisturbed by humans” (1994)
- John Visvader: “We need to understand both the ‘natural’ and the ‘wild’ in such a way that we can imagine giving more to the world around us than the gift of our mere absence.” (1995)

## 5. Preservation lacks a positive vision for human's place in nature

- Preservationism toys with primitivism
- On this view, benign human participation in nature requires a hunter-gatherer lifestyle
- For community with nature, preservationism suggests we give up what makes for human flourishing (e.g., culture, technology, civilization)

# Restoration's positive vision

- Jordan's positive role for humans in nature is to restore nature and this does not require repudiating the achievements of civilization
- Restoration as re-inhabitation of nature w/o giving up “what we have learned on our way to the moon” (Loren Eiseley).



# Again Jordan's valid critique of is turned to excess

- He thinks we can re-inhabit nature without giving up “*the accouterments of civilization*”
  - Need not give up our accessories, equipment, furnishings
- But there will be no healthy human-nature community without consumption reduction and abandoning our environmentally-unfriendly technologies and ways of life.

# Katz thinks it is dangerous to articulate a positive vision of humans' role in nature

- Given the extent of human domination of the earth today, Katz is right that promoting a positive vision of humans in nature could be dangerous
- Right now, we need to step back, clean up our mess, and leave nature alone
- But our **theory** must allow for a human/nature relationship beyond the model of art appreciation that Katz embraces

# PERILS OF RESTORATION PARADIGM

- 1. It is grandiose and hubristic
- 2. Insufficiently appreciative of wildness
- 3. Misconceives restoration as a net-benefit to nature
- 4. Its alleged positive vision of human/nature relation rests on a prior destructive human/nature relation

# 1. Restoration paradigm tends to be grandiose and hubristic

- One noted restorationist sees those who restore as “parents” of nature
- Restoration committed to idea that “nature needs us” in some fundamental way

# Steve Packard's parents analogy

- *"It's an honor to be among the first to have a nurturing relationship with wild nature . . . If we are dependent on nature, what's so terrible about nature being dependent on us too . . . In some ways nature was our parents and now we're its parents. Now it depends on us"* (1990)
- *"Like a good parent, we humans need to protect an unsteady being from certain insults to its health and help some life go forward on its own."* (1993)



# Holmes Rolston's response

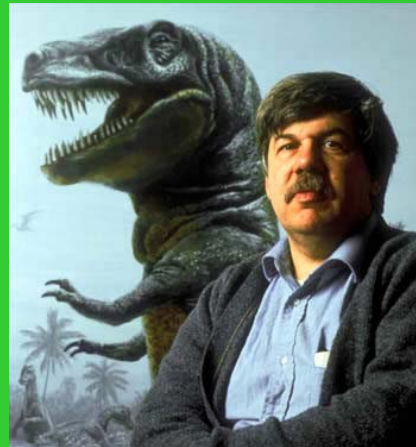
- *“The parent-child analogy is misleading. Parents cease to operate as parents when they are dependent on us. Though, owing to the inevitable decline of individuals, parents will become dependent on their children, we do not want to cultivate those dependencies. Our parents are failing when these are required. Nature is not some failing parent that now needs to become dependent on us.”*



Conserving Natural Value (1994)

# S. J. Gould on nature needing us

- *“Such views are rooted in the old sin of pride and exaggerated self-importance. We are one among millions of species, stewards of nothing. By what argument could we, arising just a geological microsecond ago, become responsible for the affairs of a world 4.5 billion years old, teeming with life that has been evolving and diversifying for at least three-quarters of that immense span? We are virtually powerless over the earth at our planet's own geological time scale. Our nuclear arsenals yield but one ten-thousandth the power of the asteroid that might have triggered the Cretaceous mass extinction. Yet the earth survived that larger shock (which) paved the road for the evolution of large mammals, including humans. We can surely destroy ourselves, and take many other species with us, but we can barely dent bacterial diversity and will surely not remove many million species of insects and mites. On geological scales, our planet will take good care of itself. Our planet simply waits.”* Natural History (1990)



## 2. Restorationism insufficiently appreciative of wildness

- “*Restoration will become principal outdoor activity of next century and the result will be the conversion of nature . . . (including national parks and wilderness!) from . . . “environment” into habitat for human beings*” (Jordan, 1994)
- Restorationists see no problem with “*leaving a distinctively human mark on the landscape*” (1994)
- As long as we are helping to restore degraded nature, **nothing is off limits**
- This ignores the value of having some earthen biotic nature free from human control



# Jordan's garden analogy

- **Ideal is nature as a human garden**
- *“Whether we wish to admit it or not, the world really is a garden, and invites and even requires our constant participation and habituation”* (1986)
- *“Restoration is that form of gardening concerned specifically with gardening, maintenance, and reconstitution of wild nature and is the key to a healthy relationship with it”* (1994)
- **Respect for nature as other is not compatible with seeing nature as a human garden**

# Jordan retracts garden metaphor?

- *“Restoration is not...domestication. It does . . . involve manipulation and is a form of agriculture, but it is agriculture in reverse. If the gardener takes charge of the landscape the restorationist does the opposite . . . restoration amounts to a deliberate attempt to liberate the landscape from management”* (2000)
  - Restoration as “re-wilding” rather than gardening
- *“Since restoration is an active process--in fact, a kind of gardening . . .”* (2003, p. 3)

### 3. Restoration is misconceived as a net-benefit to nature

- **Jordan sees restoration as a human gift to nature**
- *“Restoration is . . . our gift back to nature. The restored ecosystem is something that we offer nature in return for what nature has given us . . . It represents our best gift.”*  
(2000)

# But degrading and then restoring nature is not to benefit it

- It is not to “give back” or to engage in “mutual exchange”
- Instead, **restoration is restitution** for past harm and **cleaning up of our mess**
- When a batterer gives his victim first aid, it is not a “gift” or net-benefit
- When an oil “spill” soaks beaches, cleaning it up is not a gift or net-benefit to nature

# Individuals can (perhaps) benefit nature by restoration, humanity as a whole cannot

- Groups of humans who restore a nature that they didn't degrade can (perhaps) be seen as giving to nature
- But when humans as a group restore a nature they have degraded, it is restitution or cleaning up a mess and not a gift or net-benefit

A photograph showing the aftermath of a forest fire. The foreground is filled with charred, blackened tree trunks and debris. In the background, a city with lights is visible through a hazy, smoke-filled atmosphere. The text is overlaid in red on the image.

4. Restoration's supposed positive vision of the human/nature relation rests on a prior destructive relationship



# Jordan advocates restoration as:

- A “re-entry” of humans into nature
- A paradigm for a “healthy” human relationship to nature
- A model for human “community” with nature
- A “new communion with nature”

# Restoration is not healthy community membership

- Restoration involves an attempt to **undo** a harm
- Thus the restoration paradigm suggests the proper role for humans in nature is to first degrade nature, then fix it
- This is not a positive vision of humanity's role in nature

Humans need to find a type of participatory relationship with nature that doesn't presuppose degrading nature to begin with

# Human flourishing need not feed on wholesale nature destruction

- I'm rejecting the idea that culture, civilization, and technology (what makes us human) necessarily destroys nature
- If this were true, then perhaps restoration--or Katz's human/nature apartheid--would be the best we could do in our relation to nature
- This assumption (that humanity necessarily degrades nature) seems shared by both Jordan and Katz

# Healthy human relation with nature

A row of wind turbines in a green field under a blue sky. The turbines are white with three blades each, and they are spaced out across the field. The sky is a clear, bright blue with a few wispy clouds. The ground is a vibrant green, suggesting a healthy, natural environment.

- Small, appropriate scale of human activity
  - So we need not be ashamed of unfair, overconsumption of nature
  - So that much wild nature flourishes
- Use environmentally friendly technologies that minimize harm to nature
- Restoration would seldom be required as nature could typically heal itself from our harmful uses

# Restoration plays only a minor role in a health human/nature relation

- Restoration as our paradigmatic relationship with nature only makes sense given the current abusive human treatment of nature
- Profligate, destructive, dirty fossil-fuel energy policies that scar the land and coat it with oil do require restoration
- An appropriate human presence on the planet would not (at least typically)



# Conclusion

- While much can be learned from the movement to restore nature--particularly how to avoid the pitfalls of pure preservationism--restoration does not provide a paradigm for the ideal human relationship with nature