

ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHIES
SERIES

Edited by Andrew Brennan

Philosophy, in its broadest sense, is an effort to get clear on the problems which puzzle us. Our responsibility for and attitude to the environment is one such problem which is now the subject of intense debate. Theorists and policy analysts often discuss environmental issues in the context of a more general understanding of what human beings are and how they are related to each other and to the rest of the world. So economists may argue that humans are basically consumers sending signals to each other by means of the market, while deep ecologists maintain that humans and other animals are knots in a larger web of biospheric relations.

This series examines the theories that lie behind different accounts of our environmental problems and their solution. It includes accounts of holism, feminism, green political themes, and the other structures of ideas in terms of which people have tried to make sense of our environmental predicaments. The emphasis is on clarity, combined with a critical approach to the material under study.

Most of the authors are professional philosophers, and each has written a jargon-free, non-technical account of their topic. The books will interest readers from a variety of backgrounds, including philosophers, geographers, policy makers, and all who care for our planet.

Also available in this series

ECOLOGY, POLICY AND POLITICS

John O'Neill

THE SPIRIT OF THE SOIL

Agriculture and environmental ethics

Paul B. Thompson

ECOLOGICAL FEMINISM

Edited by

Karen J. Warren

WHY POSTERITY MATTERS

Avner de-Shalit

ENVIRONMENTAL
PRAGMATISM

Edited by Andrew Light and Eric Katz



London and New York

1996

PRAGMATISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL THOUGHT

Kelly A. Parker

“Pragmatism” here refers to a school of philosophical thought – American pragmatism – and not to that shortsighted, allegedly “practical-minded” attitude towards the world that is a major obstacle to environmentally responsible behavior in our time.¹ The insight behind “environmental pragmatism” is that American pragmatism is a philosophy of environments. Although the founders of pragmatism rarely had occasion to write explicitly on what we would today call environmental concerns, the fundamental insights of environmental philosophy are implicit in their work. The observations that the human sphere is embedded at every point in the broader natural sphere, that each inevitably affects the other in ways that are often impossible to predict, and that values emerge in the ongoing transactions between humans and environments, for example, are all central concepts for the pragmatists – as for many contemporary philosophers of environment.

Part 1 of this essay outlines the main features of American pragmatism. So that readers new to pragmatism may more readily situate its main tenets with respect to other philosophical approaches, the major points are here presented as critical responses to familiar positions in epistemology, metaphysics, and value theory. Part 2 situates pragmatism with respect to some of the major issues in current ecophilosophy. Here, too, the presentation is largely a critical response to prevailing views. It must be stressed, however, that pragmatism is a *constructive* philosophical approach: the purpose of criticism, after all, is to open the way for new insight. Part 2 particularly stresses the question of a metaphysical grounding for environmental ethics, an area of environmental philosophy where pragmatism may have the most to offer.

1 PRAGMATISM

Pragmatism emerged as a school of thought around the beginning of this century.² The major early pragmatists were Charles S. Peirce, William James, Josiah Royce, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead. We might also include Alfred North Whitehead and George Santayana as “honorary” pragmatists who rejected the label, but some of whose views bear close affinity to pragmatism.

Although the pragmatists’ views are certainly diverse when it comes to particulars, some characteristic themes appear throughout their writings. First, all agree in their rejection of foundationalist epistemology. There are no innate beliefs, intuitions or other indubitable “givens” upon which our knowledge is built, or in terms of which the truth or meaning of concepts can be analyzed. To say that a belief is true, according to James, is to say that the belief succeeds in making sense of the world and is not contradicted in experience.³ Peirce’s version of pragmatism asserts that the meaning of an idea consists entirely in the effects that the idea could in principle have in subsequent thought and experience.⁴ We have no absolutely *indubitable* beliefs; only a stock of importantly *undoubted* ones. We have no absolutely clear, immutable concepts; we do have many concepts that are sufficiently clear and stable to let us make pretty good sense of experience. Experience, however, can at any time expose our settled beliefs as false, or reveal an unsatisfactory vagueness or confusion in our concepts. Knowing is thus an open-ended quest for greater certainty in our understanding; if we forget that our understanding is fallible, the philosophical quest for wisdom may devolve into a pathological crusade for absolute certainty.

The most interesting aspect of pragmatist epistemology for ecophilosophers is its rejection of the dualistic “spectator theory” of knowledge and its companion, the simple “correspondence theory” of truth. To object to James’ definition (as many have) because it does not make truth consist in the conformity of a belief in the knower’s mind to the objective state of things in the external world, is to miss what the pragmatists have to say about the nature of mind, the world and the activity of knowing.

It often comes across, even in the hands of those friendly to pragmatism, that pragmatism is *only* a theory of truth. This is as correct, and as incomplete, as saying that democracy is *only* a theory of political sovereignty. In both cases, the theories have significant practical implications. It is in tracing out these implications that we can begin to see ourselves and our world in a new light.

The founders of pragmatism recognized the philosophical implications of evolutionary theory. The characteristics and activities of any organism are always understood in light of the organism’s relations to its environments. The human capacities of thinking and knowing are no exception. Consciousness, reason, imagination, language and sign use (*mind*, in short) are seen as natural adaptations that help the human organism to get along in the world.

The world we inhabit is the world *as known*. Its fabric is woven of a plurality of phenomena which can be functionally distinguished into two general types – though we fall into paradox and confusion if this *functional* distinction is uncritically taken as a *metaphysical* one. The world of experience deals harshly with absolute distinctions, at whatever level they are made. On the one hand, however, we can identify the matrix of conceptual constructs, both tacit and theoretical, that bring order to raw experience. On the other hand, we find the “stuff” of chaotic, unassimilated raw experience. The world we live in is surrounded by a fringe of the unknown, an ineffable but insistent existential reality that is larger than ourselves and our settled knowledge.⁵ It is on this fringe, and in those parts of our knowledge that occasionally become unsettled, that the transformative activity of knowing goes on.

Mind is not apart *from* the world; it is a part *of* the world. “Knowing the world” is not a detached activity. It is, rather, a mutual transaction between the organism and its surroundings. In this transaction an uncertain, doubtful, indeterminate situation is reconstructed so as to make more sense, to be more intelligible.⁶ The process of reconstruction transforms *both* the knowing subject *and* the known object. T. S. Eliot described his poetry as “a raid on the inarticulate.”⁷ The phrase aptly characterizes any mode of knowing, and it is crucial to note that, in a raid, *both* sides are liable to be affected in unforeseen ways. In creating a poetic vision, developing a scientific theory, or articulating a conception of ethics, we *literally* transform both ourselves and the world as it previously stood. Subjects and objects are not absolute entities; knower and known are inextricably twined together from the beginning. Subjects and objects are nexus of relations in an ever-shifting universe of complex relationships. The venerable distinction between subject and object is thus a convenience of speech that does not bear up under metaphysical scrutiny. It names an important but objectively vague distinction between two poles in a primordially continuous field of experience.⁸ Any reconciliation between self and world in the act of knowing is

tentative and fallible. To say that knowledge is *true* means only that the reconciliation is satisfactory. To say that it is *absolutely* true means that it will never stand in need of readjustment – something we can perhaps accomplish, but can never judge with certainty to be the case. Experience may shock us into doubt tomorrow.

Clearly, this epistemology involves a fundamental critique of traditional metaphysics, but the pragmatists' attitude towards metaphysical speculation was ambivalent. Peirce reportedly opened one lecture at the Johns Hopkins University with a wholesale denunciation of metaphysics as mere moonshine unworthy of attention. He ended the same lecture by urging his students to establish a metaphysical club where these crucial issues could be discussed. The story nicely illustrates what I take to be the pragmatists' typical attitude: traditional accounts of reality are so misleading as to be best ignored, but all the same, we *need* a sound metaphysics. As Peirce observed, those who resolve not to engage in metaphysical speculation do not thereby avoid metaphysics – they only condemn themselves to seeing the world through the filter of whatever “crude and uncriticized metaphysics” they have picked up along the way.⁹

Peirce and Royce enthusiastically embraced the project of articulating a metaphysics; James and Dewey were often reluctant to use the word except in a pejorative sense. Whether they called it metaphysics or not, though, the pragmatists were all concerned to develop an analysis of reality that *both* makes sense of experience *and* does not overstep the bounds of knowledge legitimately derived from experience. (Peirce and James frequently cite Hegel as a philosopher whose speculative system was a spectacular failure in both respects.) The value of metaphysical thought depends upon its making only justifiable assumptions and on following a methodology that allows for correction of its assertions.

Immanuel Kant provided the starting point for pragmatic metaphysics. The noumenal world, the world as it is in itself independent of the ordering categories of the mind, is by definition incapable of entering into knowledge or experience. To a pragmatist, the concept of a world, entity or property existing apart from the ordering influence of mind is strictly *meaningless*. To speak of the world at all is thus to speak of what Kant called the phenomenal world. To be real is to be capable of entering into experience; a thing's effects, its relations to other phenomena, are thus *all* there is to be known about the thing. The early pragmatists accordingly dropped talk of forms, essences and substances, and set about developing a

new metaphysics born of experience. Their resulting views tend to cut across such standard philosophical dichotomies as “idealism vs. realism.”

While it is wrong to suggest that there is a “consensus metaphysics” among the pragmatists (and recognizing that “neo-pragmatists” such as Richard Rorty would maintain that it is a mistake to talk about metaphysics at all), we can identify some characteristic themes in pragmatic thought about the world. There is an irreducible *pluralism* in the world we encounter. There is the idea (supported by contemporary physics) that *indeterminacy* and *chance* are real features of the world. *Change*, *development*, and *novelty* are everywhere the rule. The pragmatists also attend to certain common – perhaps even universal – *structures* and *relations* that appear throughout our experience. Pragmatism, then, sees *reality* as process and development, and sees *beings* as relationally defined centers of meaning rather than as singular entities that simply stand alongside one another in the world. It emphasizes not substantial beings, but interrelations, connectedness, transactions and entanglements as constitutive of reality. All of this is based on rigorous attention to what is actually there in experience, and not on what this or that philosophy suggests we should find. This commitment to experience itself as the primary authority in speculative matters led James to call his philosophy “radical empiricism.”¹⁰

The pragmatists proposed reforms of epistemology and metaphysics that turn Enlightenment thought inside out. The implications of pragmatic thought about value are no less revolutionary. The central emphases on experience, and on the experimental approach to establishing our knowledge and practices, make for a value theory that highlights the aesthetic dimension, sees ethics as a process of continual mediation of conflict in an ever-changing world and lays the groundwork for a social and political philosophy that places democratic and humanitarian concerns at the center of social arrangements.

All value emerges in experience. The question of ethics – “What is good?” – ultimately brings us back to concrete questions about what is experienced as good in the interaction of the organism with its environment. The inquiry does not *end* with the individual's affective experience, of course, but it recognizes this as the only possible birthplace of value. In determining the aesthetic significance of experience, pragmatists maintain a Jamesian radical empiricism: nothing is introduced that is *not* experienced, but due consideration

must be afforded to all that *is* experienced.¹¹ The first question about value, then, is not "What ought we to desire?" but "What do people in fact desire, and why?" The answers are many and complex, and are not fully reducible, for example, to the categories of a utilitarian pleasure-pain calculus.

In aesthetics, as in metaphysics, the sheer pluralism that appears in lived experience gives us pause. The valued elements are there, and not just in private consciousness. Satisfactions arise in the semi-private, semi-public domain that is the organism-in-environment, and as such they have significance not only for the being that apprehends them but also for the environment itself and for all those other beings that inhabit it. The diversity and tangibility of aesthetic values, though, must give rise to conflict as soon as more than one valuing organism inhabits an environment.¹²

Thus arises the need for ethics, a systematic understanding of the relations that ought to obtain among various values, a theory of what is right. Based as it is on the view that value arises in a dynamic, infinitely complex system of organisms-in-environments, it is a basic tenet of pragmatic ethics that the rightness of an action is largely system-dependent. The Enlightenment dream of a universally valid ethical theory may appear plausible at first glance because many morally problematic situations do resemble one another so closely. The pragmatist, however, attends to difference and change as well as to similarity and constancy. As the world evolves, and as human thought and activities change along with it, new kinds of ethically problematic situations inevitably emerge. To cope, we need to develop new ways of comprehending what is right. No list of virtues, no list of rights and duties, no table of laws, no account of the good should be expected to serve in every possible situation that we confront. Attempts to set down the "final word" on what is right have a disturbing tendency to show up as incomplete, ambiguous or quaintly archaic in the next generation. Pragmatism maintains that no set of ethical concepts can be the absolute foundation for evaluating the rightness of our actions. We know from past experience that some ethical concepts work better than others in given situations, but our past experience is the only thing we have as an ethical "foundation." As Anthony Weston puts it, ethics is an endeavor more like creatively making our way through a swamp than it is like erecting a pyramid on a bedrock foundation.¹³ After many trips through the swamp, we arrive at the means that serve best. Tomorrow we may have to readjust, though, because it is the nature both of swamps and

of the world of values to shift continually beneath us. The aim of ethics is not perfect rightness, then, since there is no absolute standard for reference, but rather creative mediation of conflicting claims to value, aimed at making life on the planet relatively better than it is.

At the social and political level, this perspective implies that the individual person is of inestimable importance. All individuals are, *prima facie*, worthy of equal consideration. Since it is impossible to comprehend any individual except in a context of relations, however, the individual is always to be seen as an integral part of many communities. Social, political and cultural institutions are there to provide for the needs of individuals. I have elsewhere put this point in terms of providing for the *adequacy* of life and, beyond this, for the *significance* of life.¹⁴ That is, social arrangements need to be constantly re-evaluated and reconstructed to ensure that minimal requirements of the organisms-in-environment are met. Beyond this, *growth* ought to be encouraged. "Growth" here is not reducible to "material growth." To equate the two leads to unfortunate conclusions – for example, that per capita Gross Domestic Product measures well-being, which is ultimately a suicidal concept for a society to embrace. Growth might better be understood in terms of increasing the aesthetic richness of experience, of expanding the available means of finding satisfaction in life.¹⁵ Contrary to what the telecommunications industry tells us, this might well mean *recycling* one's television set rather than upgrading the cable service.

Or it may mean getting involved in the public sphere, which brings us to the other side of pragmatic social and political philosophy. Social institutions constantly need reform. Their direction can legitimately be set only by the people they serve. For the pragmatists, "participatory democracy" is a political expression of the metaphysical idea that reality *is* involvement and transformation. Because the public consists of a vast plurality of people and things valued, and because the world is changing at every moment, the ways and means of best providing for the individual and common good have to be experimentally determined. The experimenters, the political scientists who serve on a vast, ongoing "ways and means committee," should be the people themselves. Innovation is always needed in governance, and innovation typically arises at the level of one or a few people trying to resolve a particular problem, to reconstruct their corner of reality. Pragmatism (especially in Dewey's writings) emphasizes the necessity of these many diverse individuals,

actively coming together in the public sphere, to present their demands, offer their insights, and hammer out their differences.¹⁶ *That* is an activity suitable for humans, and it can be an intensely rewarding mode of being. Ultimately, that society works best which makes best use of the diverse intelligence and experience of its citizens.

2 PRAGMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

The early pragmatists were visionary thinkers, often ahead of their time. They are our contemporaries in many respects. Nonetheless, they naturally wrote for their own time. They addressed the problems and promises the world faced near the beginning of the twentieth century. Even John Dewey, who lived until 1952, was unable fully to envision the environmental crises we face near the beginning of the twenty-first century. The classical American pragmatists provide us with a powerful set of basic philosophical ideas. When it comes to applying these insights to contemporary issues of “the environment,” though, to developing the details of legitimate environmental philosophy, we enter new territory. The only thing for us to do is to begin. What follows is only a beginning, a broad attempt to interpret and reconstruct our understanding of some major issues in current environmental philosophy, by showing how they appear in the light of pragmatism. My positions on these issues are here stated and explained only briefly. The work of constructing detailed arguments for these positions and judging their merits for environmental philosophy lies ahead, in the ongoing examination of fundamental concepts, problems, and approaches in our field. The remainder of this essay comprises a brief survey of the matters I take to be most germane to an exploration of “environmental pragmatism.” These matters are (1) the concept of *environment*, (2) the place of environmental ethics in philosophical inquiry and (3) the social and political dimensions of environmental ethics. Under (4) I propose pragmatic contributions to the current debates over (a) moral pluralism, (b) anthropocentrism and (c) the intrinsic value of nature.

(1) For the pragmatist, the environment is above all *not* something “out there,” somehow separate from us, standing ready to be used up or preserved as we deem necessary. As the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty said, “Our own body is in the world as the

heart is in the organism”.¹⁷ We cannot talk about environment without talking about *experience*, the most basic term in pragmatism. All that we or any being can feel, know, value, or believe in, from the most concrete fact (“I am cold”) to the most abstract or transcendental idea (“Justice,” “God”), has its meaning, first of all, in some aspect of an immediately felt *here and now*. Environment, in the most basic sense, is the field where experience occurs, where my life and the lives of others arise and take place.

Experience, again, is not merely subjective. It has its “subjective” side, but experience as such is just another name for *the manifestation of what is*. What *is* is the ongoing series of transactions between organisms and their environments. The quality of experience – whether life is rich or sterile, chaotic or orderly, harsh or pleasant – is determined at least as much by the quality of the environment involved as by what the organism brings to the encounter. Environment is as much a part of each of us as we are parts of the environment, and moreover, each of us *is* a part of the environment – a part of experience – with which other beings have to contend.

In asserting the fundamental relatedness among organisms and environments, pragmatism commits us to treating all environments with equal seriousness. Urban and rural; wilderness, park and city; ocean and prairie; housing project, hospital and mountain trail – all are places where experience unfolds. The world, in this view, is a continuum of various environments. Endangered environments perhaps rightly occupy our attention first, but environmental philosophy and ecological science are at bottom attempts to understand *all* the environments we inhabit.

Attention to the whole continuum of environments allows us to put into perspective what is truly valuable about each. The environments we inhabit directly affect the kinds of lives that we and others can live. There is an unfortunate tendency to draw crassly instrumentalist conclusions from this line of thought. I want to caution against this tendency. If environment “funds” experience, this reasoning might go, then let us use technology to turn the whole world into an easily manageable, convenient stock of environments that conduce to pleasant human experiences. This *Theme Park: Earth* line of thinking neglects our inherent limitations as finite parts of the world, and sets us up for disaster. Repeated attempts to dominate nature (e.g., our damming the Nile and its damning us right back, or our tragicomic efforts to “tame” the atom) should have begun to teach us something about the limits of human intelligence. Such attempts to dominate

nature assume that no part of the environment in question is beyond the field of settled experience. We can indeed exert remarkable control over parts of the experienced world, remaking it to suit our purposes. This may be appropriate, if our purposes make sense in the first place. (I know of no reason to object to the prudent use of natural gas to heat our homes, for example.) But the very idea that the environment funds experience involves the notion that there is an ineffable aspect of the world. It is indeed arrogant to think that we can master nature; it is moreover delusional and ultimately self-negating. If we have our being in the ongoing encounter with environment, then to will that the environment become a fully settled, predictable thing, a mere instrumental resource in which there can *be* no further novelty, is to will that we undergo no further growth in experience. The attempt to dominate nature completely is thus an attempt to annihilate the ultimate source of our growth, and hence to annihilate ourselves.

What we must try to do is not to master the natural world, but to cultivate meaningful lives within various environments. We are exceedingly efficient at altering and destroying parts of the earth, but are for the most part inept at living well on it. To exercise our power wisely would require that we genuinely understand the sources of value in the world and in ourselves. Environmental philosophy must begin with close attention to the quality of experience that arises (or could arise) from inhabiting various environments.¹⁸ We need to ask what is valuable in experiences, what features of environments they are associated with, and what ways of inhabiting environments are most appropriate. All the while we must retain respect for the wild and ineffable aspect of the world. We need to ask once more the aesthetic questions of what is good, and how goodness comes to be in *our* world – a world importantly different from that of Kant, of James or of John Muir – before we can go much further in implementing an ethics of environment.

(2) Pragmatism sees philosophical ethics as an *ongoing* attempt to determine what is good, and what actions are right. The sudden emergence of a new area of ethical inquiry is a signal that something has changed at a very deep level of our collective life. Experience has thrown us a whole new set of problems in recent years, resulting in a batch of new intellectual industries. Environmental ethics is one among several new disciplines that have emerged, first to *extend*, and then to *transform* settled ways of thinking about value.

Medical ethics, business ethics and feminist/feminine ethics are other developments similar in this way to the emergence of environmental ethics. In each of these areas, traditional theories were first applied to new problematics. The new problematics soon outstripped the available conceptual resources, showing the inadequacies of such received theoretical orientations as utilitarianism, contractualism and deontological ethics. Extension of concepts shaded over into the development of new concepts, new theoretical frameworks. The tendency of environmentalists to rely on ecological metaphors in their thinking has led some to embrace an ethic that recognizes the centrality of relations. This ethic, like that of pragmatism, recognizes the intrinsic value, within and for the system, of all the things related. Much work in feminist and feminine ethics also focuses on relations. A number of writers have noted that the notion of an “ethic of care” appears to be a promising direction for environmental ethics to pursue, and the literature on “ecofeminism” is growing steadily.¹⁹ From the pragmatic perspective, this emerging ethic of relationships appears to be ontologically more sound than traditional ethical theories.

(3) Environmental ethics has also been associated with innovative public policy-making procedures, new applications of the legal system, and grass-roots activism. These ways of putting environmental awareness into action have come a long way in the past few decades, but of course there is a long way yet to go. The aim in all these areas, according to the pragmatic view, is to keep experimenting with ways to restructure our social institutions so that the public has a real voice in determining the kind of environments we inhabit. Pragmatism, as noted before, sees individuals as the source of genuine insight into what is needed, and accordingly tries to maximize participation in governing. Pragmatism is, in this respect as in others, closely allied with the ideals of the social ecology movement.²⁰

(4) I now want to turn to three debates that currently loom large in environmental ethics. These are the debates over moral pluralism, anthropocentrism and the intrinsic value of the natural world. What pragmatism suggests about each of these debates is perhaps controversial. I hope the controversy will suggest some alternative ways to think about these focal issues.

(a) Moral pluralism can be defined as the view that no single moral principle, or over-arching theory of what is right, can be

appropriately applied in all ethically problematic situations. Pragmatism recognizes that there are genuine differences among moral situations, because there are many kinds of entities and possible relations among them. These situations involve a significant variety of values, and hence of kinds of conflict to be resolved. J. Baird Callicott has objected to moral pluralism on the grounds that changing among traditional ethical frameworks involves changing metaphysical assumptions.²¹ We cannot in good faith be Kantians in the morning and Leopoldians in the afternoon. Peter Wenz has identified this game, which Callicott calls “metaphysical musical chairs,” as an implication of what he calls *extreme moral pluralism*.²² To shift metaphysical systems at will indeed does suggest shallow commitment to basic beliefs, if not a profound mental instability.

Pragmatism points towards what Wenz calls *moderate moral pluralism*. The movement among moral principles is here grounded in a single metaphysical view that acknowledges irreducible pluralism in the world – some ethically significant situations are simply different from others, since they involve differing goods and kinds of entity. Hence we find ourselves appealing to a variety of principles as we deal with various situations. If we embrace moderate moral pluralism, environmental ethicists inherit the serious task of sorting out what considerations have priority when conflicting principles can be applied in a given situation. Two benchmarks may help in this task: with its emphasis on the quality of the experienced world, pragmatism suggests that the *sustainability* and *diversity* of experiences made possible by a course of action should be promoted wherever possible.²³ Both are crucial not only for the land ethic, as Aldo Leopold noted, but for *any* ethic.

(b) The debate over anthropocentrism is especially tendentious. The question concerns the primary locus of value. Anthropocentrism maintains that value is *of or for* human beings. Biocentrism maintains that all forms of life, as such, are valuable. Ecocentrism emphasizes the value of ecological systems as a whole, including natural processes, relationships and non-living parts of the environment. An aspect of this debate concerns whether value attaches to individual entities or whether value must be seen holistically.

The pragmatist would ask why we should be expected to pledge allegiance to any of these flags *a priori*, and exclude the others. Genuine value emerges at all of these focal levels. Indeed there will be conflicts because of this, but the occurrence of such moral conflict is not peculiar to this approach. Antigone found that “family values”

can tragically conflict with the values of the state; today’s CEO likewise finds that business values conflict with the value of an endangered owl’s habitat. *Denying* that one or the other sphere is worthy of consideration may appear to prevent potential moral conflict from arising, but only at the risk of serious moral blindness. Blind anthropocentrism has deplorable consequences for the non-human world, but a blindly misanthropic *ecocentrism* is no less deplorable.

Again, pluralism is a fact encountered in experience. Value arises in a variety of relationships among differing parts of the experienced world. Each situation must be appraised on its own distinct terms. As before, the twin values of sustainability and diversity provide reference points. Sometimes we rightly focus on the sustainability of the whole system; sometimes on the unique value of an individual. Sometimes the individual or the system is human and sometimes it is not. From this perspective, environmental ethics can be seen as continuous with other areas of ethics, a distinct but integral part of value inquiry in general.

I have spoken of the experience of organisms-in-environments as centrally important. Pragmatism is “anthropocentric” (or better, “anthropometric”)²⁴ in one respect: the *human* organism is inevitably the one that discusses value. This is so because human experience, the human perspective on value, is the only thing we *know* as humans. Many other entities indeed have experience and do value things. Again, this is not to say that human whim is the measure of all things, only that humans are in fact the measurers. This must be a factor in all our deliberations about environmental issues. We can and should speak on the others’ behalf when appropriate, but we cannot speak from their experience. We can in some sense *hear* their voices, but we cannot speak *in* their voices. I see no way out of our own distinctively human bodies. In this sense, the human yardstick of experience becomes, by default, the measure of all things. Although the debate over environmental issues is thus limited to human participants, this is not inappropriate – after all, the debate centers almost exclusively on human threats to the world. Wolves, spotted owls, and old-growth forests are unable to enter the ethics debate except through their human spokespersons, and that is perhaps regrettable. Far better that they should speak for themselves! Lacking this, they do at least *have* spokespersons – and these spokespersons, their advocates, need to communicate their concerns only to other humans. To do this in anthropic value categories is not shameful. It is, after all, the only way to go.

(c) The last point I want to touch upon is one that many take to be *the* most important issue in environmental ethics. It is often repeated that the viability of environmental ethics depends on establishing the intrinsic value of the non-human world. (Perhaps I should use the term "inherent value." I'll deal with that momentarily.) The main concern is that as long as the non-human world is seen as a stock of resources having only instrumental value, there can be no genuine "environmental ethic." To be morally considerable in a strong sense, the non-human world must be more than useful. It must be valuable in its own right.

Pragmatism cuts this Gordian knot by denying that instrumental value and intrinsic value are ever mutually exclusive. The being of any existent thing, human or non-human, is constituted in its relations with other things in a context of meaningful connections. Thus anything that is good is *both* instrumentally valuable (it affects some goods beyond itself) *and* intrinsically valuable (it is good for what it is, a significant entity essential to the constitution of these relations). We can indeed distinguish the two kinds of value, but nothing can ever be instrumentally valuable without at the same time possessing intrinsic value. Thus even the "last man" on earth, in Richard Routley's classic scenario, would be doing something morally wrong in wantonly destroying parts of the natural world.²⁵ He would be annihilating intrinsically good parts of the field of experience. He would be needlessly damaging not just those supposedly discrete things, but intrinsically good parts of himself and of all other beings potentially or actually in the experiential web.

People may mean something else by "intrinsic value," however. Callicott reserves the term "intrinsic value" for the goodness of something *independent of any consciousness that might value it*.²⁶ This is sometimes called the "inherent value" or "inherent worth" of natural objects. Now, pragmatism would point out that where there is and could in principle be no valuing agent, there is no conceivable experience – and hence no aesthetic or moral value at all. In a universe of mere objects absent a valuing consciousness, things may have *being* but not *value*. Perhaps intrinsic/inherent value is the contemporary equivalent of the medieval concept of "ontological goodness" – then in so far as it exists, everything is good in God's eyes. Or perhaps whatever is, is good for some non-human consciousness other than God. (These latter two cases conform to what Callicott identifies as *inherent value*.) I respect both of these possibilities, but as a human philosopher I cannot, and need not, comprehend them from the

inside. If there were no human agent there would after all be no possibility (and no *need*) for the kind of environmental ethic we seek. I do not know what it is like to be God, nor do I know what it is like to be a bat. The concept of intrinsic/inherent value is thus either meaningless, or else it reduces to the value of something that enters into ecological relations that do not *immediately* affect any human agent. All that *is*, however, does eventually, *mediately*, affect some human agent. Its value can thus be cognized by humans, and its moral considerability can be acknowledged and respected. The lesson here, that we are connected at all points to our environments, and they to us, is the Alpha and the Omega of pragmatic thought about the environment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

An earlier version of this essay was presented at the annual meeting of the International Society of Environmental Ethics in Atlanta, GA, December 1993. I particularly wish to thank Eric Katz, Andrew Light, Stephen Rowe and Beth Singer for their assistance – any flaws that remain are certainly not for want of suggestions on their part.

NOTES

- 1 This attitude is apparently an outgrowth of another American-bred way of thinking, which John Dewey identified in 1929 as "the business mind." John Dewey, *Individualism, Old and New, The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 5, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), pp. 61, 69.
- 2 James named the movement "pragmatism" in an 1898 address, and there credited C. S. Peirce with introducing the central insight in an 1878 article. The published version of James' address appears as "The Pragmatic Method," *Essays in Philosophy, The Works of William James*, gen. ed. Frederick H. Burkhardt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 123–139. (References to the Harvard edition of James' writings are subsequently cited by *Volume Title, Works* (publication date).) Peirce's "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," to which James was referring, appears in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 5, ed. Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss and Arthur Burks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931–1958), 5.388. (References to Peirce's *Collected Papers* cite volume and paragraph numbers: CP 5.388 indicates volume 5, paragraph 388.)
- 3 See especially "Lecture VI" in *Pragmatism, Works* (1975) and the sequel to *Pragmatism, James' The Meaning of Truth, Works* (1975).
- 4 See CP 5.1–13 and CP 5.438 for Peirce's differences with James concerning the pragmatic method.

- 5 William James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism, Works* (1976), pp. 21–44. The point of this pivotal essay is to argue that the common distinction between "subjective" and "objective" aspects of experience is merely functional, rather than being a given metaphysical fact.
- 6 See Dewey's account of "inquiry" in these terms. John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 12, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University, 1986), p. 108.
- 7 T. S. Eliot, "East Coker," *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), p. 189.
- 8 On the notion of vagueness as an objective feature of the world, see Peirce's discussion of vagueness and generality, CP 5.505.
- 9 CP 1.129.
- 10 For James' account of radical empiricism, see "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism, Works* (1976), pp. 21–44.
- 11 That this method is similar to European phenomenology has not gone unnoticed. See, for example, the studies in James Edie, *William James and Phenomenology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987). It is worth noting that in 1902, independently of Edmund Husserl, Peirce named his version of this method "phenomenology" (CP 5.121).
- 12 James provides a similar account of the genesis of value and ethical conflict in Section II of "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy, Works* (1979), pp. 141–162.
- 13 Anthony Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 7 (Winter 1985): 321–339 and "Unfair to Swamps: A Reply to Katz," *Environmental Ethics* 10 (Fall 1988): 285–288 (included with Eric Katz's article and response in this volume).
- 14 I discuss the notions of adequacy and significance in "The Values of a Habitat," *Environmental Ethics* 12 (Winter 1990): 353–368.
- 15 I present a more detailed exploration of these two concepts of growth in "Economics, Sustainable Growth, and Community," *Environmental Values* 2 (Autumn 1993): 233–245.
- 16 Dewey's ideal of participatory democracy is best presented in *The Public and Its Problems, The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 2, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988).
- 17 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1962), p. 203.
- 18 Anthony Weston has proposed one approach to accomplishing this in "Before Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 14 (Winter 1992): 321–338 (included in this volume).
- 19 On ecofeminism, see Karen J. Warren, "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism," *Environmental Ethics* 12 (Summer 1990): 125–146, and Christine J. Cuomo, "Unravelling the Problems in Ecofeminism," *Environmental Ethics* 14 (Winter 1992): 351–363.

- 20 Those wishing to explore this connection may wish to start with a reading of Murray Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology: Essays on Dialectical Materialism* (Toronto: Black Rose Books, 1990).
- 21 J. Baird Callicott, "The Case against Moral Pluralism," *Environmental Ethics* 12 (Summer 1990): 99–124.
- 22 Peter Wenz, "Minimal, Moderate, and Extreme Moral Pluralism," *Environmental Ethics* 15 (Spring 1993): 61–74.
- 23 This point is developed more fully in Parker, "Economics, Sustainable Growth, and Community", op. cit.
- 24 The term "anthropometric" (literally "human-measured") is discussed in Alan E. Wittbecker, "Deep Anthropology: Ecology and Human Order," *Environmental Ethics* 8 (Fall 1986): 261–270.
- 25 Richard Routley, "Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?" *Proceedings of the Fifteenth World Congress of Philosophy* (Sophia, 1973), 1: 205–210.
- 26 J. Baird Callicott, "Intrinsic Value, Quantum Theory, and Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 7 (Fall 1985): 262.