

Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics

Anthony Weston

I Introduction

"Pragmatism" sounds like just what environmental ethics is against: shortsighted, human-centered instrumentalism. In popular usage that connotation is certainly common. *Philosophical* pragmatism, however, offers a theory of values which is by no means committed to that crude anthropocentrism, or indeed to any anthropocentrism at all. True, pragmatism rejects the mean-ends distinction, and consequently rejects the notion of fixed, final ends objectively grounding the entire field of human striving. True, pragmatism takes valuing to be a certain kind of desiring, and possibly only human beings desire in this way. But neither of these starting points rules out a genuine environmental ethic. I argue that the truth is closer to the reverse: only these starting points may make a workable environmental ethic possible.

One charge of anthropocentrism should not detain us.¹ Pragmatism is a form of subjectivism – it makes valuing an activity of subjects, possibly only of human subjects – but subjectivism is not necessarily anthropocentric. Even if only human beings value in this sense, it does not follow that only human beings *have* value; it does not follow that human beings must be the sole or final objects of valuation. Subjectivism does not imply, so to say, *subject-centrism*; our actual values can be much more complex and world-directed.

Pragmatism insists most centrally on the *inter-relatedness* of our values. The notion of fixed ends is replaced by a picture of values dynamically interdependent with other values and with beliefs, choices, and exemplars: pragmatism offers, metaphorically at least, a kind of "ecology" of values. Values so conceived are resilient under stress, because, when put to question, a value can draw upon those other values, beliefs, etc. which hold it in place in the larger system. At the same time, though, every value is open to critical challenge and change, because each value is also *at stake* precisely with those related values, beliefs, etc. which on other occasions reinforce it. We are thus left with a plurality of concrete values, in which many different kinds of value, and many different sources of value, can be recognized as serious and deep without requiring further reduction to some single all end in itself. And there is every reason to think that respect for other life forms and concern for natural environments are among those values. The problem is not to devise still more imaginative or exotic justifications for environmental values. We do not need to *ground* these values, pragmatists would say, but rather to situate them in their supporting contexts and to adjudicate their conflicts with others – a subtle enough difference at first glance, perhaps, but in fact a radical shift in philosophical perspective.

can be intrinsically good; his argument turns on the claim that only experiences can be "worth having even if [they] exist quite alone."¹⁰ Here Moore invokes a fundamentally Cartesian outlook. Consciousness is aloof from, not implicated in, the failures and ambiguities of actual objects and states of affairs in the world. Descartes argued that while my beliefs may or may not correspond to something in the world, I am sure at least that I have them. Perhaps Moore is arguing that while my acts too, in the world, may be incomplete, damaging, or uncertain, at least my conscious enjoyment of them, taken by itself, is solid and unquestionable. Just as Descartes' way of setting up the problem of knowledge made consciousness the natural and necessary standard-bearer against skepticism, so the demand that intrinsic values be self-sufficient may make consciousness the natural and necessary standard-bearer of the intrinsic. Only a commitment to a philosophical "paradigm" of this sort, I think, can explain the strikingly *unargued* insistence, even by such careful writers as W. K. Frankena, that "[no]thing can have intrinsic value except the activities, experiences, and lives of conscious, sentient beings."¹¹ Frankena just "*cannot see*" that "we ought morally to consider unconscious animals, plants, rocks, etc."¹²

(2) Philosophical tradition also demands, at least by implication, that intrinsic values be *abstract*. Intrinsic values are, after all, special: not everything can be intrinsically valuable. But the distinction between special ends and ordinary means, perhaps innocent enough at first, sets in motion increasingly radical demands. Everyday values are integrated as means under fewer and somewhat more general ends. On the next tier these still proximate ends become means themselves, to be unified in turn under still fewer and more general ends. Already this is a kind of "slippery slope" – upward, as it were. The supercession of each proximate end seems to deprive it of any independent value at all: now they are only means to the ends on a still higher tier. But these ends too may be superseded. Nothing will stop this regress, we say, except the most general, not-to-be-superseded ends in themselves: traditionally, values like "happiness" or respect for persons. Having reached this point, moreover, there is a familiar and strong impulse towards erecting a *single* end on the first and highest level. Traditional value theory tends towards a kind of monism. We are

not inclined to leave two or five values at the top of this pyramid when we might abstract down to one: on the most general level we want unity. Respect for persons might be reinterpreted as another source of happiness; happiness might be reinterpreted, as in Aristotle or Rawls, as valuable insofar as it represents the self-actualization of autonomous persons; but in any case, as Kenneth Goodpaster puts it, "one has the impression that it just *goes without saying* . . . that there must be some unified account of our considered moral judgments and principles," some sort of "common denominator."¹³

This monism too, moreover, may not be so neutral in practice. Conscious experience is supposed to be a single, unified sort of thing, abstract and self-sufficient enough, given Cartesian presuppositions, to be a bearer of intrinsic value. Adding a second sort of thing as another bearer of intrinsic value would destroy this tight unity. Thus, the implicit demand to reduce intrinsic values to a single common denominator may incline us once again towards the anthropocentric-sentientist end of the range of possible environmental ethics. Goodpaster reminds us, for instance, that many philosophers have been tempted to underwrite environmental values by extension from familiar "interest" or "dignity" ethics, respectively Humean or Kantian. Both are monistic models, tied at least historically to human beings as exemplars, and therefore run the risk of "constraining our moral sensitivity to the size of our self-wrought paradigms," just as they gain plausibility from the very same appeal.¹⁴

On the speculative side, some metaphysical consciousness monisms have become attractive. Some environmental ethicists want to attribute conscious experience even to the seemingly inanimate world: Po-Keung Ip, for example, uses a panpsychic Taoism to vindicate the intrinsic value of nature; Jay McDaniel uses a Whiteheadian reading of quantum mechanics.¹⁵ Christopher Stone suggests that we regard the whole planet as a conscious entity.¹⁶ Nature itself is thus animated, and all of us can enter the Kingdom of Ends together. At this extreme, then, a monism of intrinsic values is perhaps compatible with a powerful environmental ethic after all. The cost, however, is a radical revision of our metaphysics – in itself not unattractive, perhaps, but in the process we must also reaffirm, rather than escape, the absolute ethical centrality of sentience.

(3) Intrinsic values demand *special justification*. Given their supposed self-sufficiency, they cannot be justified by reference to other values. Given their abstractness, they are too special, too philosophically fragile, to exist unproblematically in the world. But merely to assert them is insufficient: that would make them arbitrary, or condemn us to speechlessness about them, and so would cast our whole system of values adrift. Justification, we say instead, must take a special form: a "grounding" of intrinsic values is called for. Value as such must be derived, ontologically, from something else. Thus, intrinsic values have been construed as God's commands, as a priori truths about a special moral world revealed by intuition, as deliverances of Pure Reason, as aspirations fundamental to "human nature," and so forth. It is not surprising, then, that when Regan tries to ground his "inherent values," he feels driven to an ontology of "nonnatural properties" – despite the irony of appealing to "nonnatural" properties precisely in order to vindicate the value of *nature*! Some such ontology seems necessary. David Ehrenfeld holds that only the religious tradition will do: only a transcendental perspective can transfigure nature into "the present expression of a continuing historical process of immense antiquity and majesty."¹⁷

Many philosophers, however, no longer accept any of the traditional ontologies of values. Once again the result is to make some form of anthropocentrism or sentientism seem the only live option. Human concerns can always be counted upon to motivate, and the intrinsic value of conscious experience is often accepted without a fight. Thus, the temptation is to eschew the traditional ontology and to try to "build out" from these readily available anthropocentric starting points. Bryan Norton, for instance, proposes what he calls "weak anthropocentrism," a view which countenances not only occurrent human desires but also "ideals," like living in harmony with nature, which represent patterns of *considered* desire. Norton explicitly "avoids attributing intrinsic value to nature" because of the "questionable ontological commitment" that attribution would involve.¹⁸ "Strong" anthropocentrists are often similarly motivated. Some utilitarians argue that cost-benefit analysis can accommodate environmental values more effectively than they have so far.¹⁹ Here dubious ontological claims are avoided because only human interests are considered: utilitarianism is the epitome of an ontologically

unadventurous theory of values. Mark Sagoff holds that we may value in nature expressions of things we value intrinsically in our own lives: freedom, nobility, etc.,²⁰ and, in a similar way, Thomas Hill, Jr. argues that the best moral attitudes towards persons – humility, self-acceptance, gratitude – are mirrored and promoted by more respectful environmental values.²¹ Both Sagoff and Hill, however, are still "building out" from human-centered value systems, from expressions or personal qualities which we value in our own and other *human* lives.²²

Regan has argued effectively that no strong anthropocentrism can vindicate environmental values to the extent that our convictions demand.²³ Sagoff, Hill and others may well disagree, but all the same they often convey a sense that they consider even their own approaches somewhat "second best." Hill writes at one point that "even if there is no convincing way to show that [environmentally] destructive acts are wrong . . . we may find that the willingness to indulge in them reflects an absence of human traits that we admire and regard as morally important."²⁴ *Even if* . . . we *may* find: the suggestion seems to be that modified anthropocentrism is the best we can do, though definitely not the best we might wish. Regan, meanwhile, according to Pluhar, draws the opposite conclusion from the same premise: Regan, she says, "seems to find it preferable to make the commitment to dubious property instances and thus salvage the possibility of the kind of ethical justification he wants. The possibility is remote, but he may reason that it is better than nothing."²⁵ So "better than nothing" is the bottom line on both sides. We are in a sorry state indeed.

Only occasionally are there hints of anything truly different. Some of these are attempts to formulate a new language for values in nature. Holmes Rolston's essay "Values Gone Wild," for instance, is striking in this regard for its plays on "source" and "resource," "neighbor," etc.²⁶ Later I will suggest that Rolston's promising start too is partially undercut by his attempts to meet the demands of intrinsic value: what *is* promising, I hold, is precisely the part that has worked free of those shackles. So far I am only trying to show how confining those shackles are. In short, not only has environmental ethics taken over from philosophical ethics an extremely specific and demanding notion of intrinsic value, rooted in various ways in Cartesian metaphysics and in time-honored philosoph-

ical temptations to
tion; those very
constraints on an
values in nature.
pocentric enviro
possible within t
values. In itself,
objection to the
ethics finally is
whether that tra

III Against

Moore argues t
own sake" or "
to *understand* th
something else
mental value w
we speak of m
able to conceiv
implicated in t
Moore reads
equivalent to
"good" in the

This ration
reason. We ca
instrumental v
non-intrinsic
themselves w
which must b
day's hike in
either by the i
the woods or l
themselves; ins
woods may be
same may be t
Appreciation r
partly because
others; but gre
make us bette
and so on. The
expression of l
refuge for wild
turn be explai
human-centere

Someone ma
these must stil
If X is valuabl
we might seem
is "passed on"

values. Mark Sagoff nature expressions of ly in our own lives: and, in a similar way, it the best moral attainability, self-acceptance, id promoted by more values.²¹ Both Sagoff "building out" from ms, from expressions we value in our own

ely that no strong articulate environmental convictions demand.²³

well disagree, but all a sense that they conapproaches somewhat t one point that "even y to show that [envirare wrong . . . we may idulge in them reflects s that we admire and int."²⁴ *Even if* . . . we ms to be that modified st we can do, though ight wish. Regan, thar, draws the opposie premise: Regan, she eferable to make the roperty instances and of the kind of ethical possibility is remote, etter than nothing."²⁵ is the bottom line on y state indeed.

ere hints of anything se are attempts to forlues in nature. Holmes e Wild," for instance, its plays on "source" ;" etc.²⁶ Later I will ising start too is partst to meet the demands promising, I hold, is worked free of those r trying to show how . In short, not only has ver from philosophical and demanding notion various ways in Carteie-honored philosoph-

ical temptations to abstraction and special justification; those very roots in turn put extraordinary constraints on any attempt to demonstrate intrinsic values in nature. At the deepest level, non-anthropocentric environmental ethics may simply be impossible within the inherited framework of intrinsic values. In itself, of course, this is not necessarily an objection to the tradition: may be environmental ethics finally *is* impossible. But it is time to ask whether that tradition has any compelling defense.

III Against Intrinsic Value

Moore argues that some notion of "valuable for its own sake" or "valuable in itself" is required simply to *understand* the notion of "valuable for the sake of something else," the everyday notion of instrumental value which we usually take for granted. If we speak of means, then logically we must also be able to conceive of ends, since an end seems to be implicated in the very concept of a means. Thus Moore reads the phrase "good as a means" as equivalent to "a means to good," where the "good" in the second case seems to be intrinsic.²⁷

This rationale fails, however, for a simple reason. We can also understand the notion of instrumental value by reference to further, but non-intrinsic values. Values may refer beyond themselves without ever necessitating a value which must be self-explanatory. The value of a day's hike in the woods need not be explained either by the intrinsic value of my appreciation of the woods or by the intrinsic value of the woods themselves; instead, both the appreciation and the woods may be valuable for further reasons, the same may be true of *those* reasons, and so forth. Appreciation may be valued, as Hill points out, partly because it can lead to greater sensitivity to others; but greater sensitivity to others may in turn make us better watchers of animals and storms, and so on. The woods may be valued not only as an expression of freedom and nobility, but also as a refuge for wildlife, and both of these values may in turn be explained by still other, not necessarily human-centered values.

Someone may respond that explanations such as these must still have stopping points somewhere. If X is valuable because it leads to or enhances Y, we might seem to be required to say that X's value is "passed on" from Y. Y's value in turn may be

passed on from Z. But – the argument goes – there must be some origin to the value which is thus "passed on." Like a bucket of water in a fire chain, it must have started in some reservoir which is not merely another bucket. Monroe Beardsley likens this argument to the first cause argument for the existence of God: "... the existence of any instrumental value [is supposed to] prove the existence of some intrinsic value just as the occurrence of any event is said to prove the existence of a First Cause."²⁸

Beardsley's analogy, however, suggests an initial objection. The "first value" argument may beg the very question it is trying to answer. Just as the first cause argument must assume that the chain of causes it invokes cannot be infinite, so the "first value" argument assumes that the long process of tracing means back to ends must have a final stopping point. But actually this is just what it was supposed to *show*.

Most importantly, however, there are many ways of not having a stopping point. We need not think of an endless series of means each necessitating the next like a long line of falling dominoes. It is more appropriate to think in quite different terms. Consider a more holistic picture conception according to which values are connected in a weblike way, so that any value can be justified by referring to those "adjacent" to it. On this model there is no ultimate reference or stopping point simply because the series of justifications is ultimately, in a sense, circular: to justify or to explain a value is to reveal its organic place among our others. These justifications need not wind their way only in a single direction or even towards a single type of value. If sometimes I value the mountain air because in it I feel (and *am*) healthy, other times I value health because it enables me to reach the mountains. If sometimes I value the melancholy glory of the autumn because it mirrors the closure of my own year, other times I value the rhythms of my yearly schedule because they mirror the glories of the seasons. The web image also emphasizes the *multiple* "adjacencies" of most values. To explain why I climb mountains may take hours; Henry Beston took a whole book to chart the riches of a year spent living alone on Cape Cod. By extension we may think of multiple circularities and feedback loops, multiple arcs returning to completion, so that the summation of those arcs is a rough map of one's whole system of values. To explain why I climb mountains may take hours, but it is not an

endless task: although the story has no final stopping point or ultimate appeal, it is *complete* when I have articulated the manifold connections between mountain climbing and the other values, beliefs, etc. which make up my self.

Conceiving values in this holistic way undercuts the very center of the traditional notion of intrinsic value. Self-sufficiency, in the first place, is just what we should *not* want in our values. Beardsley argues that the notion of "intrinsic value" is almost a *contradiction* precisely because it insists on cutting values off from their relations with others in order to consider them "just in themselves." Following Richard Brandt's suggestion that the statement "X is desirable" means something like "desiring X is justified," Beardsley argues:

What "desirable" adds to "desired" is this claim to justifiability. But the only way this claim can be made good is by considering X in the wider context of other things, in relation to a segment of life or of many lives. Thus the term "intrinsic desirability" pulls in two directions: the noun tells us to look farther afield, the adjective tells us to pay no attention to anything but X itself.²⁹

What would it actually be like, after all, to value a conscious experience for itself, "in absolute isolation"? Clearly it could qualify only in so far as it approximates the Cartesian self-sufficiency of dreams or visions: it could not matter whether the experience is connected to anything else in the world. But it is not obvious that this self-sufficiency makes an experience good at all, let alone good intrinsically – and the reasons are precisely the considerations that the self-sufficiency criterion requires us to rule out. What can exist and attract in isolation from everything else may be, for just that reason, *bad*: like the dream world of the drug user, it seduces us away from the complexity of our lives, substitutes solipsism for sociality, divides certain parts of our lives from the rest. We should prefer a conception of values which ties them to their contexts and insists not on their separability but on their relatedness and interdependence.

Beardsley himself has a somewhat different line of response to the "first value" argument. It is not so much a challenge to the alleged self-sufficiency of intrinsic values as a challenge to their abstractness. He begins by recalling Hume's response to

the first cause argument. In ordinary life, Hume points out, we are not only familiar with specific causal relations, but are entirely capable of dealing with them concretely. The ultimate nature of causality, by contrast, is neither knowable nor important: it is "merely speculative," as Hume put it, both in the sense that it is endlessly debatable and in the sense that it is irrelevant to practical purposes. Beardsley makes just this argument with respect to intrinsic values. "We have a good deal of sound knowledge about instrumental values," he writes, "but we are in considerable doubt about intrinsic values."³⁰ In ordinary life we are not only familiar with specific values, but are eminently capable of dealing with them concretely. We know that it is better to be healthy than to be sick, better to live amidst beauty than monotony or ugliness, better to walk in a virgin forest than along the median strip of Interstate 84, and so on. But we do not know whether these things are good because they maximize our net hedonic quality, or good because they cultivate a good will, or what. So far from being the absolutely central project of any philosophy of values, the search for an ultimate end seems "merely speculative." It is better to think of values more concretely, in all their richness and plurality.

Besides, why *should* there be something which all values have in common? It is more plausible to deny that there *is* any final end from which all the others flow and which plays end to all the others' means. We have instead an irreducibly pluralistic system of desires. Some are straightforwardly biological, others culturally rooted, others more personal, and many are mixtures of all three. If anything we are doomed to hopelessly *conflicting* desires. Neither our biological predispositions nor our cultural heritage are even self-consistent, let alone fully compatible with the other.

These last points, however, may lead us to a third and final argument for intrinsic values. It may be urged that, in fact, intrinsic values *can* be concrete, plural, and possibly even inconsistent. This is Holmes Rolston's view, and a version of it has been held even by some pragmatists, such as C. I. Lewis. There are times, Rolston or Lewis would say, when we apprehend value concretely and directly, without having to look farther afield or into the future in order to recognize it. Lewis echoes Moore by comparing this recognition to the way we see redness or hear shrillness.³¹ Rolston speaks of the intrinsic value of "point experiences,"

like the warmth of
fleeting and plural as
Rolston's intrinsic value
then, and they need no
"special" justification.
worthwhile even if it does
mind or animal-watching
ance: the experience, a
considered even apart
simply good "for what

Undeniably, Lewis a
real kind of experience
kind of experience sho
ence of what we migh
Dewey argued, howev
diacy of enjoyment to
value' is a leap for w
When we do endorse
and non-inferential v
do not usually make a
so a *fortiori* do not r
value. Instead, that er
the effect that no ju
there is no conflict of
eration and choice."³²
activities – doing the
are sometimes appre
non-referential way.
a virus or a tornado,
beautiful. *Arresting* is
sponse to them prec
reference in which va

When values do
choice is required,
and defense. But to
ston's sense, now off
disconnect objects ar
in order to value the
themselves," what t
thing else is pushed c
the beauty of the tor
in time. Rolston insis
be put in context, like
sometimes ambiguous
when contextualized
that the attribution
sense, carries no spec
thousand other "poin
in upon us from ever
have always pressed
will and should be de
been determined, by

it. In ordinary life, Hume only familiar with specific entirely capable of dealing the ultimate nature of caus-her knowable nor import-alative," as Hume put it, is endlessly debatable and relevant to practical pur-just this argument with es. "We have a good deal out instrumental values," considerable doubt about dinary life we are not only alues, but are eminently h them concretely. We o be healthy than to be st beauty than monotony lk in a virgin forest than f Interstate 84, and so on. ther these things are good ur net hedonic quality, or ate a good will, or what. solutely central project of , the search for an ultim-eculative." It is better to cretely, in all their rich-

ere be something which n? It is more plausible to al end from which all the ays end to all the others' an irreducibly pluralistic re straightforwardly bio-rooted, others more per-ixtures of all three. If to hopelessly *conflicting* gical predispositions nor even self-consistent, let th the other.

ver, may lead us to a third intrinsic values. It may be ic values *can* be concrete, en inconsistent. This is and a version of it has ne pragmatists, such as times, Rolston or Lewis prehend value concretely ving to look farther afield der to recognize it. Lewis ving this recognition to the hear shrillness.³¹ Rolston ue of "point experiences,"

like the warmth of the spring sun, calling it "as fleeting and plural as any other kind of value."³² Rolston's intrinsic values need not be abstract, then, and they need no justification at all, let alone "special" justification. A day's hike in the woods is worthwhile even if it does not contribute to peace of mind or animal-watching ability or job performance: the experience, as well as the woods itself considered even apart from my experience, is simply good "for what it is in itself."³³

Undeniably, Lewis and Rolston are pointing to a real kind of experience; the question is what this kind of experience shows. It is, at least, an experience of what we might call *immediate* value. John Dewey argued, however, that "to pass from immediacy of enjoyment to something called 'intrinsic value' is a leap for which there is no ground."³⁴ When we do endorse something in an immediate and non-inferential way, according to Dewey, we do not usually make a judgment of value at all, and so *a fortiori* do not make a judgment of intrinsic value. Instead, that endorsement is a "statement to the effect that no judgment is required, because there is no conflict of values, no occasion for deliberation and choice."³⁵ Even obviously instrumental activities – doing the dishes, driving the highways – are sometimes appreciated in this immediate and non-referential way. Even something that destroys, a virus or a tornado, can sometimes be arrestingly beautiful. *Arresting* is the right word, too: our response to them precisely *disconnects* the frame of reference in which value questions even arise.

When values do become problematic, when choice is required, then they need articulation and defense. But to call them "intrinsic," in Rolston's sense, now offers no help. Since we have to disconnect objects and actions from their contexts in order to value them just "for what they are in themselves," what they are in relation to everything else is pushed out of focus. If I lose myself in the beauty of the tornado, I may not reach shelter in time. Rolston insists that immediate values must be put in context, like any others, and that they are sometimes ambiguous or even downright bad when contextualized. The upshot, however, is that the attribution of intrinsic value, in his sense, carries no special force in the real world. A thousand other "point experiences" of values press in upon us from every side, just as ordinary values have always pressed in upon us, and what we *do* will and should be determined, just as it has always been determined, by the balances and synergies

and trade-offs between them. By all means let us remember that this is a world lavish with its moments of beauty and preciousness – but let us honor those moments without cutting them off from the practical living of our lives.

Earlier I called into question the traditional demands for self-sufficiency and abstractness in intrinsic values. Here, finally, the task of justification too is reconceived. It is not the task of "grounding" values: what Rolston's defense of the notion of intrinsic values may finally illustrate, in fact, is the way in which the project of "grounding" natural values (or, perhaps, any values) finally cuts itself off from the real-life task of assessment and choice. For assessment and choice we must learn, again, to *relate* values. Any adequate theory of valuation must recognize that valuation involves desires with a complex internal structure, desires interlinked, and mutually dependent with a large number of other desires, beliefs, exemplars and choices.³⁶ Love, for example, interlinks with a wide range of desires and beliefs, from the tenderness of "being with" to sexual desires, from one's complex understanding of the other person to the culture's images and exemplars of love, and so on. Justification draws on these interdependencies. We justify a value by articulating the supporting role it plays with respect to other values, which in turn play a supporting role with respect to it, and by referring to the beliefs which make it natural, which it in turn makes natural by reaffirming those choices and models which link it to the living of our lives. Precisely this is Beard-sley's "wider context of things."

Interdependent values are not closed to criticism: it may actually be this sort of interdependence, indeed, which makes the most effective criticism *possible*. Criticism becomes an attempt to alter certain desires by altering something in the constellation of other desires, beliefs, choices, etc. to which they are linked.³⁷ Some of the beliefs in question may be false, desires artificial or shallow, and so forth. Norton is right to point out that "felt preferences" exploitative of nature can often be criticized on the basis of "considered preferences." Too often we are simply thoughtless, or not thoughtful enough. But the power of this sort of criticism goes far beyond the dialectic of "ideals": only Norton's wish to set up shop on the edge of the concept of intrinsic value, I think, leads him to conceive considered preferences on the model of ideals, thus making them seem far more marginal than they are.³⁸ As Pluhar writes:

It is amazing how much prejudice and ignorance fuel ethical disputes, not to mention bad reasoning. . . . How much lack of impartiality and empathy underlie common attitudes towards animals. . . . ? How much greed (a prime source of partiality), ignorance, and muddled thinking fuel common attitudes about ecosystems and natural objects?

As she points out, visiting a meat factory makes many vegetarians! Although Pluhar, oddly, regards this pragmatic sort of criticism as an alternative way of defending Regan's "inherent values," she offers no argument that the values which might emerge from this procedure are in any sense "inherent" or intrinsic.⁴⁰ I suspect that no such arguments can be found. It is time to abandon the old preoccupation with intrinsic values entirely: let practical criticism be practical.

Not even radical criticism is excluded. The culture to which we owe so many of our explicit desires and their interlinkings also includes an attic full of latent ideals, inconsistent perhaps with its main tendencies, but still there waiting to be drawn out. God may have given us dominion over land and sea, but He also gave us St Francis; against the swashbuckling exploitation of the Industrial Revolution we have the romantic poets, landscape painting, Rousseau, Emerson, Thoreau; against factory farms we have the still compelling image of the solitary farmer close to the soil. The wide-ranging recent debates about Christian and Judaic attitudes towards nature underscore this fundamental dissonance.⁴¹ It is a mistake to try to find *the* Christian (or *the* American, etc.) attitude towards nature: there are many. Our traditions, I want to suggest (I have tried to argue this general point elsewhere⁴²), contain their dialectical opposites within themselves. Even our biologically rooted desires are far from monolithic and static. Sometimes criticism simply needs the time and the patience to draw these latent elements out.

IV Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics

The real power of the pragmatic approach lies in what it does *not* say, in what it has removed the need to say. Thus my concern here is emphatically

not to devise new arguments for environmental values, but instead to show that the familiar ones are laboring under needless constraints. Still, this may be a modest, if unexotic, bit of progress, and I expect that it will be controversial all the same. I think that if values are conceived along the lines just sketched, then the case we can already make for environmental values – and in quite simple terms – is far stronger than most environmental ethicists themselves seem to believe.

We know that the experience of nature can awaken respect and concern for it. We know indeed that these feelings can become deep and synergistic desires in some lives, and we have before us exemplars of such lives in Muir, Thoreau, Leopold and others. Most of us are not so single-minded, but we too know how essential a return to nature can be, how Thoreau felt returning to Walden Pond from town, and why Yeats yearned for the bee-loud glade. While there are varied motives behind the recent boom in backpacking, cross-country skiing, canoeing, camping, and the like, at least part of the cause is surely a growing appreciation of nature, not just as another frame for our exercise and relaxation, but for its own unique voices, from the silence of the winter woods to the roar of waterfalls in spring.

These feelings are essential starting points for a pragmatic defense of environmental values. They are *not* "second best," "weak" anthropocentric substitutes for the intrinsic values philosophers want but cannot find. They do not need a philosophical "grounding." The questions that arise for us are of quite a different sort. Again, we need to know how to articulate, to ourselves and to others, the *relation* of these values to other parts of our system of desires, to other things that are important, and to the solution of concrete problems. For ourselves we want to understand and strengthen these values; in others we want to nourish and extend them. Nor, finally, need we start by trying to assimilate environmental values to our other values. Even our respect and concern for each other may be of quite a different type, and have entirely different sources, from our respect and concern for the environment.

The articulation of these values is not the province of philosophy alone. Poetry and biography are just as vital. Think of Wordsworth:

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy

Of elevated thoughts,
Of something far more
Whose dwelling is the
And the round ocean
Therefore let the
Shine on thee in thy
And let the misty mo
To blow against thee

We must not read this a
of pantheism, in need
tion. Maybe Wordswo
ician, but the possible
what makes us ache to
worth offers a way to
experience which for o
stricter formulation. It
kind of *portrait*. Likew
in *Walden* is not Thor
phizing, but the way i
own person, how a l
evening, between the
or how to look at a la

A lake is the lan
feature. It is eart
the beholder mea
nature. The fluv
are the slender ey
the wooded hills a
hanging brows.⁴⁴

Nietzsche suggests m
phers are too clumsy t
exaggerate, but all t
philosophy has too l
what it cannot itself
the demand to "grou
matism also begins to
we articulate them in
stemically oriented w

Still, on the whole
ments fare well in tern
I am advancing. Inde
when measured again
than against the set
actually trying to an
Rolston's "Values G
with a critique of
"resource." The ide
source," he argues, li
is selfish," becomes si

Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air . . .

Therefore let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;

And let the misty mountain winds be free
To blow against thee. . . .⁴³

We must not read this as an incomplete statement of pantheism, in need of philosophical clarification. Maybe Wordsworth was a closet metaphysician, but the possible linkage to Spinoza is not what makes us ache to feel those winds. Wordsworth offers a way to begin to describe a kind of experience which for our purposes may not need a stricter formulation. It is not a "grounding": it is a kind of *portrait*. Likewise, what is finally important in *Walden* is not Thoreau's misanthropic philosophizing, but the way in which he shows us, in his own person, how a human being can meet the evening, between the squirrels and the shadows, or how to look at a lake:

A lake is the landscape's most . . . expressive feature. It is earth's eye, looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature. The fluviatile trees next to the shore are the slender eyelashes which fringe it, and the wooded hills and cliffs around are its overhanging brows.⁴⁴

Nietzsche suggests more than once that philosophers are too clumsy to handle real values. He may exaggerate, but all the same we do know that philosophy has too long failed to take seriously what it cannot itself fully articulate. By rejecting the demand to "ground" these values, then, pragmatism also begins to undercut the demand that we articulate them in philosophy's peculiar, epistemically oriented way.

Still, on the whole, many philosophical arguments fare well in terms of the new set of questions I am advancing. Indeed many of them fare *better* when measured against this new set of questions than against the set of questions that they are actually trying to answer. Let us first return to Rolston's "Values Gone Wild." Rolston begins with a critique of the idea of nature as a "resource." The idea that "everything is a resource," he argues, like the idea that "everybody is selfish," becomes simply trivial at the extremes,

"eating up everything, as if humans had no other operating mode *vis-à-vis* wilderness." In fact, we must enter wilderness "on its own terms" – not, or not primarily, as a means to "high quality experience." In this way, he argues, "one is not so much looking to *resources* as to *sources*, seeking relationships in an elemental stream of being with transcending integrities."⁴⁵ At this point, however, Rolston goes on to suggest that nature is intrinsically valuable because it is a source, in this sense, of whatever (else) we intrinsically value. This seems to me to add nothing: it only *weakens* the evocative force of the notion of "sourcehood." Although "elemental . . . transcending integrities" make a certain ecosystemic sense, trying to make their *value* transcendental either introduces an extremely problematic ontology, as I argued in part II, or represents only one way of talking, as I argued in part III, with no special force in actual moral thinking. "Sourcehood" is a perfectly understandable and powerful model of value in its own right: why force it into the mold of intrinsic values?

Consider one other example. Rolston writes of "sympathetically turning to value what does not stand directly in our lineage or underpinning" – our "kin" and "neighbors" in the animal world.⁴⁶ This too is genuinely perceptive: we do have a latent sense of community with animals which close acquaintance may bring out. But here too Rolston tries to wring intrinsic values out of facts which are better left alone. He argues, for instance, that the similarity between our reactions and those of animals suggests that we should take their reactions to express imperatives – values – as well, presumably including intrinsic values. Why these imperatives also bear on *us*, however, is not clear, and the claim that they do bear on us involves analogic arguments problematic in both philosophy of mind and moral theory. Once again Rolston's concrete notions, here of "kinship" and of being "neighbors," capture the values at stake much more freshly and directly than the philosophically problematic analogies necessary to make them over into intrinsic values. Moreover, as Rolston also points out, even within the animate world the notion of kinship eventually stretches beyond the breaking point: certainly we have little kinship with spiders. If another kind of value must be invoked for such "aliens," then it is not clear why this should not be so even for "neighbors." There is no need to fit all values into a single model.

Even more standard philosophical arguments – or at least their basic intentions – fit naturally into this framework. Recall Sagoff's argument that we may value in nature expressions of things that we value intrinsically in our lives: freedom, nobility, etc. Critics have pointed out that this cannot demonstrate the intrinsic value of nature itself.⁴⁷ Pragmatists, however, want to know simply how this value relates to others and can form an organic part of our lives. This is exactly what Sagoff helps to show us, locating it partly in the orbit of the desire for freedom. Or again, the persistent inclination to attribute "rights" directly to nature might now be reapproached and understood. In part, certainly, that attribution is a straightforward political attempt to state environmental values with enough force that others will take them seriously. But it is also an attempt to articulate a specific and familiar attitude towards nature. Alone in the woods we find ourselves feeling a sense of gratefulness, of "awe," finally almost of intrusion, a feeling which probably has its closest parallel in those responses to other *people* which make us want to attribute *them* rights. But how closely these feelings are actually parallel remains an open question. Here we first need a careful phenomenology. This may be true even of human rights: real respect for others comes only through the concrete experience and finally "awe" of the other. It is the conditions and nature of this feeling which we really need to understand. Reversing the usual deduction entirely, we might even take rights talk itself as a first and rather crude attempt at just such a phenomenology – but surely we can do better.

Let me conclude by returning to the level of practical problems in environmental ethics. Why, for instance, should we value wilderness? What sort of justification can we give for keeping exploitable land and resources in their natural state? Not surprisingly, it is necessary to begin with a reorientation. Notice that this question is already posed in abstraction from any specific situation. This may itself give rise to absurdities. If we answer that wilderness indeed has intrinsic value, then presumably we are required to go to any lengths to support as much of it as possible, and wherever possible, at least consistent with other intrinsic values. But too many other things of equal or greater importance in the *situation* will not be captured by a hierarchical scheme of intrinsic values. Of course, there are other ways out,

perhaps invoking intrinsic principles of such generality that they can be used to justify anything. The response I am urging, however, is the abandonment of these very ways of posing the question. The important questions for pragmatism are the ones posed by specific situations, and while the answers across different situations will probably bear a strong family resemblance, they will not always be the same.

Why should we protect the new Alaskan national parks, for example? Now the answers are much easier: because the new parks are both exceptionally wild and exceptionally fragile; because the non-preservationist pressures in at least this case are exceptionally unworthy, tied largely to the exploitation of energy resources to which there are any number of more intelligent alternatives; perhaps also because their protection is still possible. These arguments do indeed seem to dodge the original question. They do not say why wilderness as such should be protected. On the other hand, one certainly does not have to be an anthropocentrist to doubt whether it *should* be protected "as such." This is why the *exceptional* nature of the Alaskan wilderness makes that particular case so powerful. These "practical" arguments are precisely the kinds offered by the Sierra Club, the Nature Conservancy, and most of the other environmentally oriented organizations. Are these arguments offered merely for lack of better (philosophical?) ones? Or might those organizations actually have a more reasonable position after all?

"What about those people, though, who simply could not care less about wilderness? What about the many cases in which such values simply cannot be assumed? Tame rivers are much nicer than wild ones if one owns a motorboat; exploitation in Alaska might lower our fuel bills and make America more self-sufficient in some vital resources; and so on." Let me respond in several ways. First, even these cases may not be real cases of "could not care less." Nearly everyone recognizes *some* value in nature; think of how often natural scenes turn up on wall calendars and church bulletins. Even motorboaters like to see woods. Wilderness values may just seem to them less significant than other values at stake in the particular situation. Common ground remains. If we begin by treating others as absolutists, we run the risk of turning them into just what we fear. But this is only a caricature, and we can instead approach them from a standpoint of complex mutuality. Then,

though, if some shared values are upon, the real issue is not the alternatives, and this is a real issue on both sides, and also real. We must have to go everywhere.

The pragmatic approach swears the search for absolute values will convince absolute values are important. But if this is a defect of pragmatism. No other arguments to offer ethical ethics would not be. The presence is that pragmatism knockdown arguments ourselves with defenses in other ways. It is a search for a proof of itself is almost always possible. We were finally to discover would not be the result. We are in search of such nature, since our values differ so markedly of nature through exploitation mistakes and mishaps, and, if we were to. What guarantees that to accept the fact that even our most thoughtful deeply different, products of the ideal world. It embraces a wide-open the prerequisite of intelligence, freedom we have yet to achieve and open-endedness struggle for our own to the values and search for intrinsic shadowboxing for fight.

Acknowledgments

"Beyond Intrinsic Values Ethics" first appeared in *Environmental Ethics* 4 (Winter 1985). I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer and to an anonymous editor for extensive comments.

principles of such generated to justify anything. However, the abandonment of posing the questions for pragmatism are situations, and while the situations will probably be a semblance, they will not

the new Alaskan national parks are both exceptionally fragile; because the non-Indian at least this case are tied largely to the exploitation; to which there are any alternative; perhaps protection is still possible. Indeed seem to dodge the question not say why wilderness is not. On the other hand, one can be an anthropocentrist to be protected "as such." The natural nature of the Alaskan particular case so powerful. Arguments are precisely the Sierra Club, the Nature Conservancy, the other environmentally these arguments offered (philosophical?) ones? Or do we actually have a more

all? People, though, who simply do not see wilderness? What about such values simply cannot be as nice as wild motorboat; exploitation in fuel bills and make America in some vital resources; and indeed in several ways. First, they are not real cases of "could not" everyone recognizes some of how often natural scenes are in newspapers and church bulletins. It is like to see woods. Wilderness is not to them less significant than it is in the particular situation. It remains. If we begin by treating wilderness as a list, we run the risk of turning wilderness into what we fear. But this is only a way we can instead approach them in a spirit of complex mutuality. Then,

though, if some shared values can indeed be agreed upon, the real issue shifts to the question of alternatives, and this is a recognizably factual issue on both sides, and also negotiable. Motorboats don't have to go everywhere.

The pragmatic approach defended here forswears the search for knockdown arguments that will convince absolutely everyone that natural values are important. We cannot defeat the occasional extremist who sees no value at all in nature. But if this is a defect, it is certainly not unique to pragmatism. No other approach has knockdown arguments to offer either; otherwise, environmental ethics would not be a *problem*. The real difference is that pragmatists are not looking for knockdown arguments; we propose to concern ourselves with defending environmental values in other ways. It is striking, actually, that the search for a proof of the intrinsic value of nature is almost always *post hoc*. Even if someone were finally to discover a knockdown proof, it would not be the reason that most of us who are in search of such a proof do in fact value nature, since our present accounts of natural values differ so markedly. We learned the values of nature through experience and effort, through mistakes and mishaps, through poetry and stargazing, and, if we were lucky, a few inspired friends. What guarantees that there is a shortcut? It is wiser to accept the fact that many of our contemporaries, even our most thoughtful contemporaries, hold deeply different, probably irreconcilable, visions of the ideal world.⁴⁸ Pragmatism, indeed, celebrates a wide-open and diverse culture; it is the prerequisite of all the central Deweyan virtues: intelligence, freedom, autonomy, growth. What we have yet to accept is its inconclusiveness and open-endedness, its demand that we struggle for our own values without being closed to the values and the hopes of others. The search for intrinsic values substitutes a kind of shadowboxing for what must always be a good fight.

Acknowledgments

"Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics" first appeared in *Environmental Ethics* Vol. 7, No. 4 (Winter 1985). I am indebted to Holmes Rolston, III, and to an anonymous reviewer for *Environmental Ethics* for extensive comments on earlier versions of this essay.

It has also benefited greatly from a colloquium discussion at the Vassar College Department of Philosophy and from several careful readings by Jennifer Church.

Notes

- 1 The confusion of subjectivism with "subject-centrism" is dissected, though not in these terms, by Richard and Val Routley in "Against the Inevitability of Human Chauvinism," in K. E. Goodpaster and K. M. Sayre, eds, *Ethics and the Problems of the 21st Century* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), pp. 42-7.
- 2 For an extensive list, see David Ehrenfeld, *The Arrogance of Humanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), Chap. 5; or Holmes Rolston, III, "Valuing Wildlands," *Environmental Ethics* 7 (1985): 24-30.
- 3 I am equating intrinsic values with ends in themselves, instrumental values with means to ends. For present purposes I think that subtle distinctions between these concepts can be ignored.
- 4 See W. K. Frankena, "Ethics and the Environment," in Goodpaster and Sayre, *Ethics*, pp. 5-6 and pp. 18-19; and J. Baird Callicott, "Non-anthropocentric Value Theory and Environmental Ethics," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1984), pp. 299-309.
- 5 Routley and Routley, "Against the Inevitability," pp. 36-62.
- 6 Tom Regan, "The Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 3 (1981): 30-4. Frankena, C. I. Lewis, and others use *inherent value* to refer to objects or actions the contemplation of which leads to intrinsically valuable experience. Regan, however, clearly means by *inherent* what Frankena and Lewis mean by *intrinsic*. "If an object is inherently good," he tells us, "its value must inhere in the object itself" (p. 30). Its value does not depend upon experience at all.
- 7 Evelyn Pluhar, "The Justification of an Environmental Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 5 (1983): 55-8.
- 8 G. E. Moore, *Philosophical Studies* (London: Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1922), p. 260.
- 9 G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), p. 187.
- 10 G. E. Moore, "Is Goodness a Quality?" in *Philosophical Papers* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1959), p. 95.
- 11 Frankena, "Ethics and the Environment," p. 17. Pluhar makes some sharp comments on this claim in "The Justification of an Environmental Ethic," p. 54.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 15. My emphasis.
- 13 K. E. Goodpaster, "From Egoism to Environmentalism," in Goodpaster and Sayre, *Ethics*, p. 25 and

- p. 34, his emphasis. Strictly speaking the claim here is only about ethics in the Humean tradition, but he soon allows that the Kantian tradition has still stronger monistic tendencies.
- 14 Ibid., p. 32.
 - 15 Po-Keung Ip, "Taoism and the Foundations of Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 5 (1983): 335–44, and Jay McDaniel, "Physical Matter as Creative and Sentient," *Environmental Ethics* 5 (1983): 291–318.
 - 16 Christopher Stone, *Should Trees Have Standing?* (Los Altos: William Kaufmann, 1974), pp. 52–3.
 - 17 Ehrenfeld, *Arrogance of Humanism*, p. 208.
 - 18 Bryan Norton, "Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism," *Environmental Ethics* 6 (1984): 131, 136, 138.
 - 19 J. V. Krutilla and A. C. Fisher, *The Economics of Natural Environments* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1975).
 - 20 Mark Sagoff, "On Preserving the Natural Environment," *Yale Law Journal* 84 (1974): 205–67; reprinted in Richard Wasserstrom, *Today's Moral Problems* (New York: Macmillan, 1979).
 - 21 Thomas E. Hill, Jr., "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments," *Environmental Ethics* 5 (1983): 211–24.
 - 22 See Hill, "Ideals," p. 233, or p. 220: "It may be that, given the sort of beings we are, we would never learn humility *before persons* without developing the general capacity to cherish... many [other] things for their own sakes" (my emphasis). Sagoff speaks of our obligation to nature as finally an obligation "to our national values, to our history, and, therefore, to ourselves" (Wasserstrom, *Today's Moral Problems*, p. 620).
 - 23 Regan, "Nature and Possibility," pp. 24–30.
 - 24 Hill, "Ideals," p. 215.
 - 25 Pluhar, "Justification," p. 58.
 - 26 Holmes Rolston, III, "Values Gone Wild," *Inquiry* 26 (1983): 181–207.
 - 27 Moore, *Principia Ethica*, p. 24.
 - 28 Monroe Beardsley, "Intrinsic Value," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 26 (1965): 6. The critique offered here is indebted to Beardsley's fine article.
 - 29 Ibid., p. 13.
 - 30 Ibid., p. 7.
 - 31 C. I. Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1946), pp. 374–5.
 - 32 Rolston was generous enough to comment extensively on an earlier draft of this paper, and I am quoting from his comments. Obviously he should not be held to these exact words, though I think his position here is a natural completion of what he has said in print. See Rolston, "Values Gone Wild" and Holmes Rolston, III, "Are Values in Nature Objective or Subjective?" *Environmental Ethics* 4 (1982): 125–52; reprinted in Robert Elliot and Arran Gare, eds, *Environmental Philosophy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 1983), pp. 135–65.
 - 33 Rolston, "Are Values in Nature Objective or Subjective?" in Elliot and Gare, *Environmental Philosophy*, p. 158.
 - 34 John Dewey, *Theory of Valuation* (Chicago: International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, 1939), 2:41.
 - 35 Beardsley, "Intrinsic Value," p. 16.
 - 36 See Anthony Weston, "Toward the Reconstruction of Subjectivism: Love as a Paradigm of Values," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 18 (1984): 181–94.
 - 37 Ibid. and R. B. Brandt, *Theory of the Good and the Right* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), part I.
 - 38 Norton ends up arguing that having ideals need not presuppose the intrinsic value of the things or states of affairs idealized: see Norton, "Weak Anthropocentrism," p. 137.
 - 39 Pluhar, "Justification," p. 60.
 - 40 Ibid., p. 58. This curious inference also mars J. Baird Callicott's otherwise fine survey: see Callicott, "Non-anthropocentric Value Theory," p. 305.
 - 41 See Robin Attfield, "Western Traditions and Environmental Ethics," in Elliot and Gare, *Environmental Philosophy*, pp. 201–30.
 - 42 See Anthony Weston, "Subjectivism and the Question of Social Criticism," *Metaphilosophy* 16 (1985): 57–65.
 - 43 William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," lines 93–8 and 134–7.
 - 44 H. D. Thoreau, *Walden* (New York: Signet, 1960), p. 128.
 - 45 Rolston, "Values Gone Wild," pp. 181–3.
 - 46 Ibid., pp. 188, 191.
 - 47 For instance, Louis Lombardi, "Inherent Worth, Respect, and Rights," *Environmental Ethics* 5 (1983): 260.
 - 48 A particularly striking example is Steven S. Schwarzschild, "The Unnatural Jew," *Environmental Ethics* 6 (1984): 347–62.

I Introduction

In a recent paper in *Environmental Ethics*, Bryan Norton offers an environmental philosophy that avoids sterile abstract case-study approaches. A growing number of environmental philosophers are becoming dissatisfied with traditional environmental philosophy as the paradigm in the field. Accordingly, Norton has begun to outline a practical environmental ethics by proposing a new attempt to shift the focus to more practical conventional values at play in specific environmental policy. Norton's work, along with that of Weston and Andrew Light, represents the leading edge of contributions to this pragmatic environmental ethics.²

One of the clearest contributions to this work is the notion that environmental ethics and environmental problems changes must occur – metaphysical – change in the appraisal of the role of environmental policy deliberation and the new environmental philosophy. Such reconstructions present a challenge to the traditional pro-