Is Talk Cheap? Environmental Philosophy and Environmental Policy

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ABSTRACT

In the first part of this paper I survey some of the main arguments used by environmental philosophers since the 1970s in their attempts to formulate an ecological ethics grounded in a nonanthropocentric perspective. This means we begin from the standpoint of the non-human creatures, organisms, objects of the natural world (animals, plants, soils, rocks, waters, air). A crucial notion is that of the "intrinsic value" of natural organisms and objects: intrinsic value can mean something like Kant's notion of being an end-in-oneself, but here we must extend beyond the limits imposed by the term "rational" in Kant's ethical imperative that we regard other rational beings as ends-in-themselves and not as means-to-an-end or use-objects of humans. A key issue arises: *must* the tree have its own intrinsic value, and not one "given" it by humans—must it perhaps possess a sort of "subjectivity"—in order to warrant "moral considerability"? Another problem is that of distributing intrinsic value too broadly on the one hand—is it not "ethical" for me to kill a mosquito that is sucking my blood, or to kill even plants in order to eat them?—while on the other hand not distributing it broadly enough to encompass that which is finally at stake: entire species (or the entire earth) rather than individuals. That is, if the value or "interest" of the individual resides in serving the species or ecosystem, how would we define the interest or intrinsic value of an entire species (genus, planet)? In the second part of the paper I argue that to have a clear theoretical framework (or set of ethical principles) is, contrary to the claim of environmental pragmatists, itself the most fundamental sort of praxis: it is vital that we have thought through these issues and come to a certain understanding, for this will inevitably engage us in practical action.

KEY WORDS

environmental philosophy
autopoietic
biocentrism
intrinsic value-in-nature discourse
nonanthropocentric environmental ethic
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Introduction

In one of the most ancient and venerable sources of Chinese philosophy, the *Analects*, a disciple asks Confucius what he would do first were he to become the prime minister of the State of Wei (Hall and Ames 1987). Without question, Confucius replies, first I would rectify names. His disciple was puzzled by this saying; and for a long time so was I. But no more, for I am coming to appreciate the power of names, and of discourse, more generally, in the formation of environmental policy.

The correct answer to Juliet's question, "What's in a name?" in Shakespeare's play, is "Really quite a lot." Consider various names for women—"chicks," "babes," "broads," "ladies." The feminist movement has made us keenly aware that what we call someone or something—what we name him, her, or it—is important. A name frames, colors, and makes someone or something available for certain kinds of uses . . . or abuses. Even the name "lady" is freighted with so much baggage that it is not worn comfortably by many women. A major effort of feminist politics has been the rectification of names for women, and more generally, the rectification of gender discourse.

Self-styled Pragmatist environmental philosophers have complained that environmental philosophy has been bogged down in ivory-tower theorizing to little practical effect. Here I argue that theoretical environmental philosophy has had and is having a profound, albeit indirect, practical effect on environmental policy. It has done so by creating a new discourse that environmental activists and environmental professionals have adopted and put to good use. At the heart of

this new discourse is the concept of "intrinsic value" in nature. I sketch the history of this concept and its associated discourse(s), and indicate how it is impacting environmental policy in very practical ways.

Environmental Philosophy More Theoretical Than Applied

Environmental philosophy has been less an "applied" subdiscipline of philosophy than some of the other applied subdisciplines with which it is often lumped—biomedical ethics, business ethics, and engineering ethics, for example. Environmental philosophy has indeed been more involved with reconstructing ethical theory itself than with applying standard, off-the-rack ethical theories to real-world environmental problems.

In large part this is because standard ethical theory has been so resolutely—even militantly—anthropocentric that it has seemed inadequate to deal with today's environmental problems. In scope and magnitude, the contemporary human transformation of the environment is unprecedented. Gradually, the impact of human activities on nonhuman nature has become ubiquitous in scope and unrelenting in intensity, so much so that by the mid-twentieth century the existence of an environmental *crisis* was widely acknowledged. And the contemporary environmental crisis seems morally charged. For example, the current orgy of human-caused species extinction(s) seems wrong—morally wrong. And not just because the anthropogenic extinction of many species might adversely affect human interests or human rights. Most first-generation environmental philosophers, therefore, took the task of environmental ethics to be constructing a nonanthropocentric theory of ethics that would somehow morally enfranchise nonhuman natural entities and nature as a whole—directly, not merely indirectly or "secondarily" (inasmuch as what human beings do in and to nature affects human interests and human rights).

This was the burden of the first academic paper in the field, "Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?", by Australian philosopher Richard Routley, presented to the Fifteenth World Congress of Philosophy in Varna, Bulgaria in 1973 (Sylvan 1993). A simi-

lar task was set by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (1973) in his paper, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-range Ecology Movements: A Summary." In the first paper on environmental ethics by an American philosopher, Holmes Rolston III (1975) argued that the central task of environmental philosophy is to develop a "primary," not a "secondary," "ecological ethic." Animal rights theorist Tom Regan (1982) reiterated Rolston's understanding of the enterprise—that a proper environmental ethic was "an ethic *of* the environment," not an "ethic for the *use* of the environment," which he called a mere "management ethic."

The Kantian Concept of Intrinsic Value

Central to the theoretical challenge of developing a direct, primary ethic *of* the environment is the problem of intrinsic value in nature. Although the early twentieth-century English philosopher G. E. Moore (1903) wrote much about intrinsic value, Immanuel Kant's modern classical concept of intrinsic value and the way it functioned in his ethics most influenced the thinking of contemporary environmental philosophers (Kant 1959 [1785]). Central to Kant's ethic is the precept that each person be treated as an end in him-or herself, not merely as a means. Indeed, the second formulation of Kant's categorical imperative is this: "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or that of another, always an end and never as a means only" (39). Kant justifies—or "grounds"—this precept by claiming that each person has intrinsic value. That claim in turn is justified by locating in each person an intrinsic value-conferring property, which Kant identified as reason. Thus, rational beings, according to Kant, have intrinsic value, and should therefore be treated as ends in themselves and never as means only.

This Kantian approach to ethics appears at first glance to be unpromising for developing a *nonanthropocentric* environmental ethic, as Routley, Naess, Rolston, and Regan so unambiguously set forth the task. Why? Because Kant's intrinsic value-conferring property, reason or rationality, had long been regarded as a hallmark of human nature.

At the dawn of Western philosophy, Aristotle declared that reason or rationality was the "differentia" that distinguished "man," as a species, from the other animals. *Anthropos* is the uniquely "rational animal," according to Aristotle. Thus, Kant's approach to ethics appears to be a brief for anthropocentrism, and to foreclose the possibility of nonanthropocentrism. Indeed, Kant goes out of his way to exclude nonhuman natural entities and nature as a whole from ethical enfranchisement: "Beings whose existence does not depend on our will but on nature, if they are not rational beings, have only relative worth as means and are therefore called 'things'; on the other hand, rational beings are designated 'persons' because their nature indicates that they are ends in themselves, i. e. things which may not be used as a means" (46). For Kant, human beings are ends; beings whose existence depends on nature are means; or, in the formulation of the First Critique, natural objects are subject to the mechanical laws of nature, whereas human persons (the autonomous egos of the Second Critique) are free from this sort of causality.

Extending the Kantian Concept of Intrinsic Value to (Some) Animals

But look again. In the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant himself is quite careful to avoid speciesism—analogous to racism and sexism—the *unjustified* or *ungrounded* moral entitlement of one's own kind and the exclusion of other kinds. Not being human, but being *rational* is that in virtue of which a human being has intrinsic value. Kant consistently holds open the possibility that there may be other-than-human rational beings. He never specifically identifies who such non-human rational beings may be. Some passages suggest Kant might be thinking of God and the "heavenly host"; others that he might be thinking of rational beings on other planets that inhabit very different bodies and therefore have very different desires and inclinations than do human beings. Thus he seems to hold open the possibility that there may be non-human rational beings within terrestrial nature. Within this orthodox Kantian moral climate much ethical significance was recently

attached to proving that chimpanzees and gorillas could master rudimentary language skills, and could, *via* American Sign Language or some other surrogate for spoken language, express themselves creatively (Savage-Rumbaugh 1998). For Descartes (1950 [1637]) had insisted that the ability to use language creatively—not merely in a rote, mechanical way, as he believed parrots used it—was an indication of rationality.

Proving that chimpanzees and gorillas are minimally rational does undermine anthropocentrism, but only slightly. It certainly does not take us very far in the direction of an expansive environmental ethic—however much it may help ethically rehabilitate our primate relatives and spare them the indignities and outrages of the zoo trade and biomedical research. Kant's conceptual distinction between humanity and rationality was, however, also exploited theoretically in another way, which proved to be more powerful and transformative. Not all human beings are minimally rational. The so-called "marginal cases" are not (Regan 1979). Infants, the severely mentally handicapped, and the abjectly senile are the usual suspects. They are thus in the same boat with all the other "[b]eings whose existence . . . depend[s] on nature . . . i.e., things which may be used merely as a means," to quote Kant once more. Thus if we equitably applied Kant's ethical theory, we could justifiably perform the same painful and destructive biomedical experiments on unwanted non-rational infants that we inflict on non-rational nonhuman animals; we could open hunting season on the severely mentally handicapped, make pet food out of the abjectly senile, extract stem cells from discarded embryos. (Note that this last case is more likely to be considered ethically warranted, given the more nearly "non-human" nature of the object used and the great benefits this research can bring to rational but not completely healthy humans.)

Such abhorrent implications (perhaps not counting the example of stem cell research) of Kant's moral philosophy provided nonanthropocentric theorists with an opportunity to propose retaining the form of Kant's moral argument—which has, after all, been so compelling in Western ethical thought—but revising its specific conceptual contents, so as to include the marginal cases in the class of persons and rescue

them from the class of things. The ethical form or pattern that was retained is Kant's close linkage of moral ends, intrinsic value, and a value-conferring property. Thus to be a moral end, and not a means only, you must have intrinsic value, but making rationality the value-conferring property appears, in light of the "Argument from Marginal Cases," to be too restrictive. Various alternatives to rationality have been proposed, selected to justify the theorist's personal ethical agenda. Regan (1983), who was content to limit "moral considerability" to warm, furry animals, proposed being the "subject of a life" as the intrinsic value-conferring property. Subjects of a life have a sense of self, remember a personal past, entertain hopes and fears about the future—in sum, enjoy a subjective state of being, which can be better or worse from their own point of view. Peter Singer (1977), who wanted to extend "moral considerability" a bit more generously, proposed sentience, the capacity to experience pleasure and pain, as the intrinsic value-conferring property. That move reached a much wider spectrum of animals—just how wide is not completely clear—but presumably (though some scientists have suggested, *contra* Aristotle's classification in the *Psychology*, that plants may be sentient) it left out the entire plant kingdom.

Extending the Kantian Concept of Intrinsic Value to All Living Beings

To reach out and touch all living beings with moral considerability, several theorists proposed having *interests* as a plausible and defensible intrinsic value-conferring property (Goodpaster 1978, Johnson 1991, Taylor 1986). A living being—a tree for example—can have interests in the absence of consciousness. This basic idea was variously expressed. A living being has a good of its own, whether or not it is good for anything else. Unlike complexly functioning machines, such as automobiles, whose ends or functions are determined or assigned them by their human designers to serve human ends, living beings have ends, goals, or purposes—*teloi*, in a word—of their own. They are, in Paul Taylor's terminology, "teleological centers of life" (Taylor 1986).

In Warwick Fox's terms, these living beings are *autopoietic*—self-creating and self-renewing (Fox 1990). These formulations suggest Aristotle, whose plants have "nutritive" souls—their telos is life itself, survival—and so are the most "fundamental" living beings, even though they lack the sentient soul of animals and the rational soul of humans.

Problems with Biocentrism and Their Proposed Solutions

However, on the one hand this sort of biocentrism—as this modified or expanded Kantian approach to nonanthropocentric environmental ethics has come to be called—too broadly distributes intrinsic value. Granting each and every organism moral considerability makes ethical space too densely crowded, rendering our most routine and vital human actions ethically problematic. It may be possible to refrain from ill-usage of our fellow primates as objects of amusement and subjects of medical experimentation, with little human inconvenience. It may also be possible—and with only a little more mindfulness and inconvenience—to give up eating meat and using other products made from animals, our fellow sentient beings. But after all we have to eat something, kill mosquitoes and other annoying insects, rid ourselves and our domiciles of vermin, weed our flower gardens—all of which acts are morally questionable if every living being has intrinsic value and should be treated as an end in itself, not a means only.

On the other hand, biocentrism too narrowly distributes intrinsic value in nature because it does not provide moral considerability for what environmentalists most care about. Frankly, environmentalists do not much care about the welfare of each and every shrub, bug, and grub. We care, rather, about preserving *species* of organisms, *populations* within species, *genes* within populations—in a word we care about preserving biodiversity. We care about preserving communities of organisms and ecosystems. We also care about *air* and *water* quality, *soil* stability, and the integrity of Earth's stratospheric *ozone membrane*. None of these things appear to have interests, a good of their own, ends, purposes, or goals, and thus none has intrinsic value on this account.

Solutions to both biocentric distribution problems have been proposed. A solution to the too-broad distribution problem is to distribute intrinsic value unequally or differentially (Goodpaster 1978). Grant all organisms base-line or minimal intrinsic value. Thus, when our own interests are not at stake, we should leave them alone to pursue their own ends, to realize their own *teloi*, each in its own way. Additional intrinsic value is distributed to sentient organisms, yet more to subject-of-a-life organisms, and more still to rational organisms (Rolston 1988; this hierarchy is a variation on Aristotle's). Thus, because we human beings, as rational, sentient subjects of a life, have the most intrinsic value, we are entitled to defend it and cater to it by doing bad things to other organisms with less intrinsic value—but only if we conscientiously deem it to be necessary. That seems plausible enough, although rather conventional, leaving us human beings at the top of the moral pyramid where we have always been. The difference is that in traditional Western ethics the pyramid was low and squat. Nonhuman organisms were mere things, with no intrinsic value at all. They were thus available for any human use at all, however fatuous. Differential biocentrism extends the moral pyramid's height and mass, though still leaving human beings at the pinnacle.

A solution to biocentrism's too-narrow distribution problem is less plausible. Lawrence Johnson (1991) has seized upon somewhat dated minority views in evolutionary biology and ecology to argue that species and ecosystems have interests.[1] Some biologists, perhaps assuming this priority to individual over group, have argued that species are not collections of organisms capable of interbreeding but individuals that are protracted in space and time (Ghiselin 1974, Hull 1976). If so, we may convince ourselves they have interests, and therefore intrinsic value, and therefore moral considerability. And there is a long, albeit fading, tradition in ecology that conceives ecosystems to be superorganisms to which individual organisms are related as cells and species as organs (McIntosh 1985). And if so, again, we may believe they have interests, and therefore intrinsic value, and therefore moral considerability. But these are big ifs. Rolston (1988) takes us back to Darwin by arguing that the most fundamental end of most organisms is

to realize their genetic potential, to represent their species and to reproduce it. They have a good of their own—*which is their species*. Thus does Rolston try to convince us that species *per se* may plausibly be said to have intrinsic value. For organisms to flourish, even to live at all, they must live in an ecological context or habitat. Thus does Rolston try to justify finding intrinsic value in biotic communities and ecosystems.

The Subjectivist Account of Intrinsic Value in Nature

This mainstream line of argument in environmental ethics, which begins with a Kantian superstructure, works through animal liberation, and terminates in biocentrism, assumes that intrinsic value supervenes or piggybacks on some objective property. Thus intrinsic value, albeit supervenient, is itself an objective property in nature. Indeed, the adjective "intrinsic" seems logically to require that *intrinsic* value, if it exists at all, exist as an objective property. It is intrinsic to the being that has it. Kant himself appears to think that intrinsic value is something objective: "Such beings [rational beings] are not merely subjective ends whose existence as a result of our action has a worth for us, but are objective ends, i.e., beings whose existence in itself is an end" (46). But the idea that value—or worth—of any kind can be objective seems to fly in the face of a shibboleth of modern Western philosophy: René Descartes's division of the world into the *res extensa* and the *res cogitans*, the subjective and objective domains, respectively, and David Hume's ancillary distinction between fact and value. All value seems to be, from the most fundamentally "modern" point of view, subjective.

Nevertheless, some nonanthropocentric environmental philosophers have argued that a robust account of intrinsic value in nature can be provided even within the severe constraints of the allied object-subject/fact-value distinctions (Callicott 1999, O'Neill 1992, Routley and Routley 1980). From a modern point of view, "value" is first and foremost a verb. If so, "instrumental" and "intrinsic" may be regarded as adverbs, not adjectives. Thus one may value (verb transitive) some things instrument*ally*—our houses, cars, computers, clothes. Similarly, one may value (verb transitive) other things intrinsic*ally*—ourselves,

our spouses, children, and other relatives. If we have learned our religion and moral philosophy well, we may intrinsically value all other human beings. Indeed, it is logically possible to value intrinsically anything under the sun—an old worn out shoe, for example. But most of us value things intrinsically when we perceive them to be part of a community to which we also belong, because we are evolved to do so.

"Perceive" here is the key word, for perception can be trained and redirected. Much of the persuasive environmental literature aims to train and redirect our perception of nature such that we see it as the wider community in which all our other communities are embedded. Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* is an outstanding example. In the Foreword, Leopoldwrites, "We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect" (viii). Most of the remainder of the book is devoted to persuading us that ecology "enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively the land" (204). When they take this perspective, people will have "love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value . . . [and b]y value I mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense"—intrinsic value, in other words (223).

The Pragmatist Critique of Theoretical Environmental Philosophy

As this brief summary will indicate—and it is necessarily brief, sketchy, and incomplete, given the voluminous literature on subject—mainstream environmental philosophy has been preoccupied with a very abstruse and arcane theoretical project. A growing cadre of environmental philosophers, identifying themselves as Pragmatists of one kind or another, has begun to protest against this preoccupation with theory, especially the theoretical problem of intrinsic value in nature (Light and Katz 1996, Norton 1991). They argue that it makes no difference to environmental practice and policy whether we think of nature as having intrinsic value or only instrumental value. Whether we value nature as a means to human ends or an end in itself, we still value

it and therefore will save it. Because the concept of intrinsic value in nature makes no difference to environmental practice and policy, debate about it is a waste of time and intellectual capital that could better be spent on something more efficacious. Further, lay people cannot understand the jargon-ridden, abstract discourse of theoretical environmental philosophy. If they do get an inkling of what it is about, they will be alienated from it, because most lay people are uncritically anthropocentric. Worse, nonanthropocentrism and the concept of intrinsic value in nature is divisive, setting environmental philosophers at odds with one another, occasioning endless, unbecoming bickering between shallow and deep theorists, and, among the deep, between subjectivists and objectivists.

Instead, the Pragmatist contingently contends, environmental philosophers could better spend their time and intellectual capital helping lay people clarify their actual environmental values—as opposed to speculating about some newfangled value which they would then try to impose on lay people—and helping lay people sort out what to do in the context of specific problems or issues (Light and Katz 1996). Often we may find that conflicting values support the same policy—as, for example, when those who value waterfowl for hunting and those who find aesthetic pleasure in watching waterfowl can support waterfowl habitat preservation and restoration policies—and philosophers can help "ordinary" people figure that out. This is characterized as a more "bottom-up," rather than "top-down" approach to environmental philosophy. Begin with something specific and local—a scheme to develop a forested landscape or to dam a stream and create a lake, or a plan to rehabilitate an abandoned mine site or to reintroduce an extirpated predator. The role of environmental philosophers in environmental policy and decision-making processes is to bring the tools of conceptual analysis, values clarification, and, yes, ethical theory, to bear on the problem—but only to the extent that theory is familiar (and thus conventional), easily understandable, and illuminating, and to the extent that the problem itself determines what theories are useful to its solution.

The Practical Efficacy of Theoretical Environmental Philosophy

I have no quarrel with the bottom-up approach to environmental philosophy. I myself was a recipient of a three-year grant from the binational Great Lakes Fishery Commission to work with an ichthyologist and an aquatic community ecologist to re-envision fishery management policy in the Great Lakes for the new millennium. My role was precisely to clarify such fuzzy conservation concepts as biological integrity, ecosystem health, ecosystem management, ecological restoration, ecological rehabilitation, ecological sustainability, sustainable development, and adaptive management; and to examine the values that have driven, drive, and will drive fishery management in the Great Lakes in the past, present, and future (Callicott et al. 1999). I do have a quarrel, however, with the representation of the bottom-up, Pragmatic approach as a competitive alternative to theoretical environmental philosophy and to the invidious comparison that environmental Pragmatists make between the two, virtually insisting that theorists should stop their pointless and pernicious theorizing (Norton 1995, Minteer 1998). I believe that the two—theory and practice—should be complementary, not competitive. Further, I think that theoretical environmental philosophy is powerfully pragmatic; that theory *does* make a difference to practice.

What difference? First, it stretches credibility to think that all Earth's myriad species, for example, are in some way useful to human beings (Ehrenfeld 1976, 1988). Many may represent unexplored potential new pharmaceuticals, foods, fibers, and fuels. But many more may not (Ehrenfeld 1976). Many species that have no actual or potential resource value are critical agents in ecological processes and/or perform vital ecological functions or "services." But many more do not (Ehrenfeld 1988). Many non-resource, non-ecological-service-provider species are, nevertheless, objects of aesthetic wonder and/or epistemic curiosity to the small percentage of the human population that is aesthetically cultured and scientifically educated. But such amenity values

that endangered non-resource, non-ecological-service-provider species have for a small human minority afford them little protection in a world increasingly governed by market economics and majority-rule politics. In short, conservation policy based on anthropocentrism alone—however broadened to include potential as well as actual resources, ecosystem services, and the aesthetic, epistemic, and spiritual uses of nature by present and future people—is less robust and inclusive than conservation policy based on the intrinsic value of nature (Ehrenfeld 1976, 1988).

Second, more systemically and more powerfully, broad recognition of the intrinsic value of nature would shift the burden of proof from conservators of nature to exploiters of nature (Fox 1993). As things presently stand, conservationists must prove that an economic cost-benefit analysis unequivocally indicates that a wetland, say, has greater value as an amenity than it has as a site for a proposed shopping mall. But if the intrinsic value of wetlands were broadly recognized, then developers would have to prove that the value to the human community of the shopping mall was so great as to trump the intrinsic value of the wetland. The concept of intrinsic value in nature functions politically much like the concept of human property rights. A person not wishing to sell a piece of property at any price has the right to refuse any offer to buy it. That right, however, may be trumped if benefits to the public rise beyond a certain threshold. If, for example, the recalcitrant owner's property stands in the way of an urban light-rail train track, then the property may be "condemned," and the owner paid fair market value for it, whether he or she is willing to sell it or not. Other human rights—to liberty, even to life—may be over-ridden by considerations of public utility. But in all such cases, the burden of proof for doing so rests not with the rights holder, but with those who would over-ride human rights. And the utilitarian threshold for over-riding human rights is pitched very high.

The Pragmatic Efficacy of the Rights Discourse

Mention of human rights, leads to my third and last point about

the pragmatic power and practical difference of theoretical environmental philosophy and its preoccupation with the concept of intrinsic value in nature. Human beings have shoes, teeth, kidneys, thoughts, and rights. Human shoes and teeth are out there for anyone to see. Human kidneys may be observed during surgery or autopsy. We are privy only to our own thoughts and infer the thoughts of others from what they do, what they say, and what they write. However open to view or hidden away, human shoes, teeth, kidneys, and thoughts are all things of this world. But "human rights" is a name for nothing; it is but an idea—a fiction—created by Western moral philosophers (Nickel 1992). Theoretical moral philosophers created, more generally, a rights discourse in the West (Gewirth 1992).

When it was fresh and new, other moral philosophers tried to silence that discourse, for various reasons. For example, in the eighteenth century Jeremy Bentham infamously dismissed the idea that human beings have rights as "nonsense on stilts" (Gewirth 1992). But the human-rights discourse survived its political and philosophical naysayers. It was institutionalized in the West by the adoption of the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the Constitution of the United States, in 1789. It was globalized by the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 (Brownlie 1981). Since then, human-rights discourse has had enormous pragmatic effect worldwide as an instrument of criticism and political reform—of criticism of everything from "female circumcision" in parts of Muslim Africa to the Tienamen Square massacre in China, and reform of everything from the status of African Americans in the United States to that of brides in India.

The Pragmatic Efficacy of the Intrinsic-Value-in-Nature Discourse

Pragmatist philosophers now carp and cavil against the concept of intrinsic value in nature as still more nonsense on stilts (Light and Katz 1996). Bryan Norton (1995), for one, has carried on a virtual jehad against the idea. But environmental activists—for example, Dave

Foreman, founder of Earth First!, the most radical group of environmental activists in the United States—have appreciated its practical efficacy. A while ago, Foreman (1983) wrote, "Too often, philosophers are rendered impotent by their inability to act without analyzing everything to absurd detail. To act, to trust your instincts, to go with the flow of natural forces, *is* an underlying philosophy. Talk is cheap. Action is dear." Later, Foreman (1991) changed his tune. He identified four forces that are shaping the conservation movement at the dawn of the new millennium. They are, and I quote, first "academic philosophy," second, "conservation biology," third, "independent local groups," and fourth, "Earth First!." That's right, "academic philosophy" heads the list. This is some of what Foreman has to say about it:

> During the 1970s, philosophy professors in Europe, North America, and Australia started looking at environmental ethics as a worthy focus for discussion and exploration. . . . By 1980, enough interest had coalesced for an academic journal called *Environmental Ethics* to appear. . . . An international network of specialists in environmental ethics developed, leading to one of the more vigorous debates in modern philosophy. At first, little of this activity in the ivory towers drew the notice of working conservationists, but by the end of the '80s, few conservation group staff members or volunteer activists were unaware of the Deep Ecology-Shallow Environmentalism distinction or of the general discussion about ethics and ecology. At the heart of the discussion was the question of whether other species possessed intrinsic value or had value solely because of their use to humans [and] . . . what, if any, ethical obligations humans had to nature or other species. (8)

Notice that for the discourse of intrinsic value and, more generally, environmental ethics to have practical effect, it was not necessary for "working conservationists" to follow the ins and outs of the "big blow in the ivory towers." Such philosophical niceties as what property

justifies or grounds the intrinsic value of nature, which natural entities possess intrinsic value and which do not, and whether intrinsic value is an objectively existing supervenient property or is subjectively attributed, was not of the least importance. All that was important was that working conservationists were aware of the anthropocentric-nonanthro-pocentric distinction and the fact that there was a "general discussion about ethics and ecology" going on among environmental philosophers, at the heart of which "was the question of whether other species possessed intrinsic value or had value solely because of their use to humans." Note the parallel with human-rights discourse. Few human rights advocates and activists are conversant with the debate among moral philosophers about whether human rights are natural, God-given, or the wholly artificial product of a "social contract." It is the general idea under philosophical discussion that fires up the imaginations of ordinary citizens, morally inspires them, and reorients their perception of the world—the social world in the case of human rights, the natural world in the case of nonanthropocentric environmental ethics.

The intrinsic-value-in-nature discourse soon spread from "conservation group staff members and volunteer activists" to professional natural resources managers. For example, in my work for the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, I found "intrinsic value"—and this was the term being used—attributed to the fishes of Lake Superior in a management plan produced by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. In a recent review of the philosophical debate about intrinsic value in nature, Christopher Preston (1998) points out the various domains of discourse that the concept of intrinsic value in nature has now penetrated. In addition to that of environmental activists and government-agency environmental professionals, it crops up in the discourse of the new field of ecocriticism—in discussions of nature poets, such as William Wordsworth, Robinson Jeffers, and Gary Snyder, and of nature writers, such as Edward Abby, Annie Dillard, and Barry Lopez. According to Preston (1998), the concept of intrinsic value in nature is "latent" in some U. S. environmental laws—the Wilderness Act of 1964, the 1973 Endangered Species Act, for example—and in some

international declarations and treaties, such as the 1982 World Charter for Nature and the Global Biodiversity Treaty, signed by 160 countries (not including the United States) at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

The Earth Charter: A Universal Declaration of Intrinsic Value in Nature

Preston concludes that "[t]here is plenty of evidence to suggest that belief in intrinsic value in nature is playing an increasingly prominent role in the formation of environmental attitudes *and policies* worldwide." (411, emphasis added). An example not mentioned by Preston is worth noting. After more than a decade of worldwide "consultations" with thousands of people representing millions of constituents in hundreds of interest groups and political-identity groups, the Earth Charter Commission issued a final draft of an "Earth Charter" in March, 2000. The idea of an Earth Charter was first conceived during preparations for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment Development (a.k.a. the Earth Summit). Afterward the Commission was formed to draft a document that would be circulated throughout the world for comment and revision, finally to be submitted to the United Nations for adoption by the General Assembly in 2002, on the tenth anniversary of the Earth Summit. The very first principle of the Earth Charter reads: "1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity. a. Recognize that all beings are interdependent and *every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings*" (Earth Charter Commission 2000, emphasis added). The *phrase* "intrinsic value" does not appear in the final draft of the Charter—although it did in preliminary drafts. The *concept* remains, however, in the statement that "every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings."

I think that if the Earth Charter is eventually adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, the result may well be comparable to the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the same body in 1948. The U. N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights was not a binding law or international treaty. But it did put the concept of

human rights at play on the world stage. In effect, it globally institutionalized the discourse of human rights. Similarly, the Earth Charter may institutionalize and globalize the discourse of environmental ethics with its most potent concept of the intrinsic value of nature. In comparison with this achievement of theoretical environmental philosophers—the creation and dissemination of such a transformative discourse—the program of bottom-up environmental ethics recommended by Pragmatists appears quite modest and unambitious. Certainly, the energy and intellectual capital of theoretical environmental philosophy should not be redirected into such yeoman (and yeowoman) work; on the contrary it should be redoubled.

We sometimes forget, I think, that we live, move, and have our human being in a world of words, as well as in a physical world beyond words. For all its importance—which above all environmental philosophy affirms and celebrates—that world beyond human words is only accessible through the portal of human discourse. In conclusion, therefore, we must agree with Confucius that the first order of business in any policy arena is to rectify names, so that our policies and practices are framed in terms of the most efficacious and transformative discourse.

NOTES

[1] These are minority views because, while we at first may think Darwin's natural selection implies that the "interest" of the whole (human, ant or maple tree) species is survival, on closer reflection we realize that, while the individual's *telos* may well be the survival (and advancement) of the species, there is no clear goal "for the sake of which" (Aristotle) the whole species itself survives and grows stronger, other than pure domination. But is this not the ultimate "interest"? In the case of classical Marxism—where again the larger social consciousness is what is ultimately at stake—we readily assume that the improved lot of the whole working class is an obviously "moral" end-in-itself, and here we have not mere Darwinian or Schopenhauerian "survival" but Hegelian "spiritual re-integration." Yet is the ultimate

"interest of the group" here not again simply a form of social domination? A Nietzschean might see it in terms of a finally arbitrary interplay of forces or "wills."

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