WHAT IS ETHICS WITHOUT JUSTICE? REFRAMING ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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The field of environmental ethics has been in discussion and debate the past 40 years over how to best expand the circle of moral consideration away from a privileged human perspective to encompass the rest of the non-human world in order to change minds and social practices to address environmental degradation and destruction. One of the main methods is devoted to arguing for the intrinsic value of non-human lives and places as the means to do this.

I argue that this method of environmental ethics because it, at best, is a lazy framework for moral deliberation that ignores the entangled sociopolitical and environmental complexity of a situation by reducing the answer to a single set of predetermined values and interests which (re)produces and reinforces social and environmental injustice. An environmental pragmatist approach geared towards addressing environmental injustice is a better way of addressing both environmental degradation and social inequalities.

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INTRODUCTION

To explore, enjoy and protect the planet. To practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out those objectives.

- Sierra Club mission statement

No compromise in the defense of Mother Earth!

- Earth First! slogan

…in Wildness is the preservation of the world.

- Henry David Thoreau, "Walking"

In God's wildness lies the hope of the world - the great fresh unblighted, unredeemed wilderness. The galling harness of civilization drops off, and wounds heal ere we are aware.

- John Muir[1]

It seems like every environmental studies class I take tries to make everything about race. It's like, if I wanted to hear this I would take another ethnic studies class.

- anonymous University of Oregon student on Yik Yak

Bad Environmental Ethics and Unethical Environmentalism

The first four quotes above are fairly famous. Most people who are versed in American environmental history and literature or who are nature enthusiasts and activists will be able to recognize them or know other works from the authors and would most likely identify with their sentiments in some way or another. The last quote, however, is

[1] John Muir, *John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir*. Edited by Linnie Marsh Wolfe. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 317.

fairly less famous. It was shared by a University of Oregon undergraduate student about an environmental studies course through the social media app Yik Yak. Upon an initial reading it seems like a rather innocuous statement. It seems to voice a desire for a more clear and distinct division between different pressing problems in different fields of study; the environment and then society.

We all know that the environment is in crisis and we must learn about it in order to save it. And we all know that there are social and political tensions in this country that need to be addressed in order to commit to the historic American vow of freedom and justice for all. Each deserves its own separate and focused academic space in order to examine these issues that appear to happen in different places and for different reasons. We all know what nature is – mountains, forests, deserts, and oceans, national parks, preserves, and monuments, the air, water, animals and plants, the climate – and the issue is that humans are sullying it out of greed, lack of foresight, and, or because of, lack of connection to it. And we all know that social tensions are complicated by histories, institutions, people, and power that affect how homes, health, lives, livelihoods, culture, and laws are created and organized.

This description may seem like a rather crude characterization; a forced distinction almost. This sentiment shared by a student who is attempting to learn what she or he can do to better help the environment, however, in many ways reveals a deep-seated and highly problematic philosophical and political position in how academia, policy, and the popular environmental narrative approach how to correct the relation between humans and the non-human world. The position is this: if the environmental crisis stems from a set of anthropocentric beliefs, values, and practices, an environmental ethic that is

supposed to correct this must turn towards a value theory that does not privilege the human perspective. It demands a theory that takes humans out of the deliberation process in order to counterbalance a history of human bias. This sentiment is not just a one-off thought shared by a student, an opinion voiced by a young and aspiring environmentalist who has an uncomplicated conception of the human-environment relation. In a very problematic way it is a standard idea voiced and reinforced by many environmental studies programs and students as well as by budding environmental activists, veteran activists, influential environmental groups, environmental lawyers, environmental protection laws, and professional environmental philosophers.

This position, of course, seems very well warranted. Commonplace worldwide are cases of increasingly contaminated sources of water and air pollution. Hundred-year floods, droughts, and storms occur every few years. New and unique cancers due to exposure to new and unique chemicals are becoming routine. Ecosystems are increasingly breaking down while animal and plant species are increasingly becoming endangered with many going extinct. And there are almost daily reminders of the retreat and melting of ancient glaciers and continuously rising sea levels. As such, it should take little convincing to establish that there is a serious problem with how humans relate to non-human lives and non-human places; there is a very serious problem with how most humans interact with their environments.

There are, of course, people who deny that environmental degradation and destruction is happening. For the most part, however, the scientific and political debate has to do with how and why this is all happening to the environment, who is responsible for addressing the problems, and how to address them. Coupled with the fact that there is

also a very serious problem with how humans interact with other humans complicates the common environmental discourse in that it is not just “the environment” that is being harmed. What takes more than a little convincing are the ways in which these problems of how humans relate are intertwined. What will take even more convincing for many is how certain attempts to address environmental problems completely disregard, if not make worse, social and political problems.

Creating an Environmental Ethic

There are at least two parallel projects that attempt to engage with how and why this is all happening to the environment, who is responsible for addressing the problems, and how to address them. While both have roots in an American environmental narrative that speaks of Nature, Wilderness, and Wildness and share many of the narrative’s intellectual, social, and political commitments, their methods differ quite a bit. One is the contemporary environmental movement composed of formal governmental and non-governmental institutions and informal collective ideas of how to change society to reflect and embody better environmental values. Both the mainstream and radical versions of the movement seek cultural change with their legal and illegal actions. The other is the professional academic field of environmental ethics that uses conceptual analysis and philosophical debate to more clearly define the problem and reasons for action.

The professional academic field of environmental ethics responds to these environmental crises in the best way it knows how. The project of the field for the past several decades has been to discuss, debate, and navigate between competing moral theories in order to find out which is best able to identify the source of the problem(s) and

then which theory and practice are best able to correct the problem(s). Eric Katz describes the field as consisting of two main approaches. One is a conventional approach that seeks to find "'environmentally appropriate' ethical principles in the direct application of traditional ethical theories – such as utilitarianism, Kantianism, rights theory, or contractarianism…"[2] A more critical approach would "offer a radical reinterpretation or critique of the dominant philosophical ideas of the modern age" in order to garner the "expansion of ethical thought beyond the limits of the human community to include the direct moral consideration of the natural world."[3]

I seek to follow the latter approach; "a critique of the dominant philosophical ideas of the modern age". The conventional approach has been at work for the past forty years. For far too long, however, it has been doing ideal theory. The field is stuck on a conceptual merry-go-round. Most of its contributors have the privilege of treating the project less like a dire and immediate task and more like a puzzle. And while those who follow the conventional path work through and slowly piece together the puzzle only to tear it apart time and again when the edges do not match up, they forget that while the field waits and debates in order to get the ideas right, the world goes on with people living their lives in and through the material consequences of environmental (and social) degradation.

I would like to focus my attention on one value theory and framework for deliberation in debate within the conventional approach: the intrinsic value of non-human lives and places. While there are many conventional approaches as listed above by Katz, I

[2] Eric Katz, *Nature as Subject: Human Obligation ad Natural Community*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997), XV.

[3] ibid

will spend time on this one for two reasons. First, within the field and its debates, the concept of intrinsic value holds strong conceptual currency in being able to purportedly navigate the anthropocentrism/subjectivity problem that concerns most conventional ethicists. In other words, they seek a value theory and framework that does not end up acquiescing or appealing to human interests in order to navigate environmental problems. They seek an objective framework independent of human interests and desires. Second, it is the value theory that seems to have the most transferability and holds the most currency outside the formal field, namely, in the missions of environmental groups, both mainstream and radical, and how it has made its way into environmental policy and legislation.

In fact, I mean to show that when the concept is put to work in policy and legislation, not only does it ignore pre-existing social and political issues that cause, if not constitute, environmental issues, it exacerbates the underlying issues perpetuating and reinforcing sociopolitical problems. Rather than the concept being a critical approach to environmental ethics, it is in fact a conventional approach that, instead of helping ameliorate the environmental and social tensions, actually sidesteps the real problem of moral deliberation at best, and at worst, only adds to existing social injustice when put to work. Rather than leaving a void in the field, however, I will also present an alternative that actively works to not sacrifice the health, lives, and livelihoods of the already environmentally and socially vulnerable for the sake of protecting an independent and distinct state of Nature. I will propose a method that recognizes the complexity of a situation and does not reduce problem-framing and solutions to a single set of supposedly unquestionable values. It will take as primary that issues of environmental degradation

and destruction are also issues of social injustice and that in order to properly address a socio-environmental issue, all factors must be given a place in the deliberation process.

Mapping the Trail

This thesis will explore with these ideas and their consequences over the course of six chapters. This opening chapter has introduced the scope of the discussion – the intertwined and contentious intellectual, social, and political history shared between environmentalism, environmental ethics, and environmental justice and their consequences. It has also spelled out the two main arguments I will make over the course of the paper. First, that intrinsic value, as it is most commonly appealed to in environmentalist discourse, environmental policy, and in the professional philosophical debate should be abandoned because it is at best a lazy foundation for/method of moral deliberation that does not actually address the pressing environmental and social problems. And because of its lazy moral deliberation, it is at worst and in practice a means of exacerbating and reinforcing environmental and social problems.

Second, in order to address socio-environmental problems without ignoring or reinforcing social inequities, the field of environmental ethics should redirect its efforts towards the methods of Environmental Pragmatism, specifically the work of Ben Minteer and what he calls the "public interest" and the role it must play in order to democratically address socio-environmental problems. To buttress the Environmental Pragmatist project and temper concerns of anthropocentrism, I will introduce the work of Stacy Alaimo and her use of the concept of trans-corporeality in describing the material and bodily relation between humans, non-humans, and environments. I hold that doing so will reframe and redirect environmental ethics in a way that will contribute to achieving its mission

specifically by addressing environmental problems through engaging with social and environmental justice issues.

The first argument will be made through the course of chapters II, III, and IV. Chapter II is a brief sketch of the history and current state of the professional philosophical debate in environmental ethics and how it describes, appeals to, and uses the concept of intrinsic value. It ends with a brief discussion of the gap between the theory and practice of the concept. Chapter III and IV work complimentarily, the former providing an analysis and critique of intrinsic value to spell out how and why it fails as a foundation for/method of moral deliberation. Moreover, with the help of Val Plumwood's work on the mastery of nature and logics of oppression, I hope to point out that the concept, instead of doing the work its proponents purport it to do, actually (re)produces and reinforces harmful ontological and sociopolitical categories through binary power hierarchies. Chapter IV will examine an example where these oppressive hierarchies are materialized as social injustices through the operation of the concept in environmental policy and law: the application of the Endangered Species Act to the Sacramento River Delta Smelt.

Chapter V will be dedicated to presenting an alternative model and framework by spelling out how trans-corporeality can bolster and support Ben Minteer's focus on the "public interest" as a foundation for environmental ethics while also addressing how to grapple and temper concerns of anthropocentrism from those who champion strong non-anthropocentric positions. I call this confluence of Environmental Pragmatism's methods, Minteer's democratic reframing of environmental ethics, and Alaimo's framework of trans-corporeality "democratic naturalism". I will show how "democratic naturalism"

can succeed where intrinsic value theory fails. It recognizes and takes as central the sociopolitical power dynamics of environmental problems by making cases of environmental injustice its focal site of inquiry. The concluding chapter will revisit the main points of the argument and describe how my proposed method of “democratic naturalism” would be applied to the California Delta Smelt case and how it would address the situation.

CHAPTER II

AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTALISM, ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS, AND INTRINSIC VALUE

This chapter will provide a brief sketch of the history and complexity of the professional philosophical debate in environmental ethics, specifically the branch that favors non-anthropocentric value theories and how it appeals to, uses, and questions the concept of intrinsic value. As mentioned in the introduction, the professional academic field, and especially the non-anthropocentric value theory branch, has roots in the broader history of the American environmental narrative and imaginary created by and espoused through the American nature writing and literature from the past two centuries. While I will not argue for this connection in detail in this chapter or any other, what I do hope to work through, beginning with this chapter, is the gap between academic theorizing and effective application. In short, if the academic project of environmental ethics is the contemplative part of the process of environmental problem-solving, the mainstream and radical environmental movements are the application of the philosophical and social commitments.

I propose to highlight themes from the broader history of the American environmental narrative and imaginary and trace how they provide a foundation for the field of environmental ethics. What the field is debating are extensions of these themes, especially the work of non-anthropocentric value theorists who champion the argument for the intrinsic value of non-human lives and places. After an overview of the debate

concerning intrinsic value, I will offer a short discussion concerning the aforementioned gap between theory and practice and how to best address it.

Nature, Wildness, and Wilderness[4]

We have already heard from Henry David Thoreau and John Muir and their thoughts on the relation between Nature, Wilderness, Wildness, and human civilization. Thoreau and Muir are just two members of a long list of authors who have created, influenced, and informed concepts and practices of environmental philosophy, conservation, preservation, and environmentalism on sociocultural and legal levels. To revisit their quotes from the opening:

"…in Wildness is the preservation of the world."

- Henry David Thoreau, "Walking"

"In God's wildness lies the hope of the world - the great fresh unblighted, unredeemed wilderness. The galling harness of civilization drops off, and wounds heal ere we are aware."

- John Muir[5]

Muir echoes Thoreau's sentiment but with a bit more force in his analysis of the relation between Wildness/Wilderness and human civilization. There is something purifying about Wildness in Wilderness that preserves the world and heals whoever experiences it. God's power is what makes it "unblighted," an untainted source of hope for the world. These qualities of God's place and work are all in contrast to "civilization,"

[4] My use of "Wildness", "Wilderness", and "Nature" is in reference to how it has developed and used by the likes of Thoreau and Muir and many others. For a more detailed examination of the terms, please see Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* 5th edition. (New Haven, MA: Yale University Press, 2014).

[5] Muir, *John of the Mountains*, 317.

the realm of humans that is a “galling harness,” an infuriating weight that keeps humans from being what they should be.

There is some quality of the Wildness in the Wilderness of Nature that makes it special, an importance which should give it primacy over all other interests and endeavors. It is only through experiencing the Wildness of Nature in Wilderness that the hope of a world better than what “civilization” can provide can survive. And if one is familiar and versed in the work of these two authors and other nature writers of the same ilk (e.g. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Edward Abbey), the farther and more inaccessible the wilderness, the better. And given the special properties of Nature, humans must forgo their commercial and industrial ambitions and even self-interest when deciding how to interact with Nature. Anyone who wants to profit from Nature by seeing it and using it as a mere resource at human disposal has to be either shown how and why Nature has these qualities so that they can be revered and respected or forcefully stopped in their utilitarian efforts.

Environmental activist groups channeling Thoreau and Muir who embrace and extend the intellectual history of the American environmental imaginary into the present express their positions for sociopolitical change through legal actions such as legislative reform and legal suits. Examples of major legislation that has been passed in the United States that is meant to capture these ideas about nature and operationalize the mission of preserving the environment from purely human interests are the establishment of the National Parks and the National Park Service in 1916 with their mission to preserve natural landscapes and the Wilderness Act in 1964 meant to set aside tracts of land as “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man

himself is a visitor who does not remain."[6] These groups continue to lobby for additional legal teeth to these kinds of laws and greater and stronger environmental regulations in order to change public and private minds and practices.

Most major mainstream groups focus on these legal avenues to changing minds and practices (e.g. The Sierra Club[7], the Natural Resource Defense Council[8], and Earth Justice[9]). Some, however, have a history of less than legal actions such as tree spiking, dam exploding, and other "monkey wrenching" that are more radical, destructive, and physically harmful approaches to informing and changing the minds and lives of those who do not agree with their environmental values (e.g. EarthFirst![10], the Earth Liberation Front[11], and certain animal rights groups).

These avenues of environmental legislation and activism are just some of many expressions and extensions of an environmental history that speaks of Nature as having special properties and values; just one way of describing "why" the environment should be protected and "how." The other avenue of interest for this thesis is the professional philosophical field of environmental ethics and how it navigates the relation between humans and the non-human world.

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[6] 16 U.S. C. 1131-1136 (2)(c)

[7] slogan: "Explore, Enjoy, and Protect the Planet."

[8] slogan: "The Earth's Best Defense."

[9] slogan: "Because the Earth Needs a Good Lawyer."

[10] slogan: "No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth!"

[11] Ibid.

Exploring Environmental Ethics

Thoreau and Muir's poetic and romantic style of arguing for the special properties of Nature are hallmarks of the American environmental narrative. Aldo Leopold's nature writing and ecological observations, scientifically poetic in their own right, mark a different method of analysis, however, of how the human and non-human world fit together. *A Sand County Almanac*, his posthumously published collection of essays in 1948, closes with a chapter called the "Land Ethic." In it Leopold explores a method of thinking through how to expand the moral circle of consideration to the more-than-human community. In doing so, Leopold opened a new path for academic conceptual framework building and value theorizing on how to best address environmental problems.

Moving forward a few decades to the early 1980's with J. Baird Callicott and Donald Worster, the formal field of environmental ethics "emerged as a new subdiscipline of moral philosophy" taking shape as professional philosophers started sorting through different value and moral theories that can make better sense of the human-nature relation, each faction setting up different camps and picking their champion concepts.[12] The discussion within the field for the past several decades has been about how to best expand the circle of moral consideration away from a privileged human perspective – the diagnosed cause of the problem – to encompass parts or the rest of the non-human world. In short, how does one begin to temper, neutralize, and correct against anthropocentric bias in problem-framing, deliberation, and solutions in order to address environmental problems?

[12] J. Baird Callicott, "Non-Anthropocentric Value Theory and Environmental Ethics," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21, no. 4(October 1984): 299.

To revisit Katz's division of labor in the field, the conventional approach seeks to find "'environmentally appropriate' ethical principles in the direct application of traditional ethical theories – such as utilitarianism, Kantianism, rights theory, or contractarianism…"[13] while critical approaches would "offer a radical reinterpretation or critique of the dominant philosophical ideas of the modern age" in order to garner the "expansion of ethical thought beyond the limits of the human community to include the direct moral consideration of the natural world."[14] Callicott expressed the critical approach as exploration of "alternative moral and even metaphysical principles, forced upon philosophy by the magnitude and recalcitrance of these problems."[15]

As such, there are many different models and frameworks on either side of the aisle from which to choose on how to ascribe/allocate/discover/make value and how to calculate/compare/deliberate between competing values and interests. Examples of such value models are biocentrism, ecocentrism, and anthropocentrism. And for each value model, different frameworks of moral deliberation/calculation (e.g. talk of rights, intrinsic and relational value, utilitarianism, and Kantian deontology).[16] The champions of each argue for their position in the arena of professional academic journals,[17] books, and conferences, each pressing the other for clarity, validity, and philosophical rigor in order to see who is most conceptually coherent and morally stalwart.

[13] Katz, *Nature as Subject*, XV.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Callicott, "Non-Anthropocentric Value Theory and Environmental Ethics," 299.

[16] Donald Worster, "The Intrinsic Value of Nature," *Environmental Review: ER* 4, no. 1 (1980): 43-49.

[17] For example: *Environmental Ethics, Ethics and the Environment, Environmental Values.*

Non-Anthropocentrism

Callicott and Worster are examples of those who sit on the side championing what is to them the most morally stalwart position: non-anthropocentrism. Callicott defines anthropocentrism as a "a value theory (or axiology), by common consensus, [that] confers intrinsic value on human beings and regards all other things, including other forms of life, as being only instrumentally valuable, i.e. valuable only to the extent that they are means or instruments which may serve human beings."[18] Non-anthropocentrism, then, "would confer intrinsic value on some non-human beings."[19]

For Callicott, anthropocentric value theories and forms of moral deliberation reduce environmental ethics to an industry of mere utilitarian calculations privileging purely economic interests justifying industrialism; a drive that has become self-destructive, an outworn ideology, that must be abandoned upon facing its consequences and calls for the need to adopt "radically different moral values."[20] Since humans are the cause of the problem, the human position cannot be trusted to frame and address environmental problems and solutions. The goal is to negate, or at least abate, the dangers of anthropocentrism that taint moral deliberation with selfish human interest.

Others who champion non-anthropocentric value theory look towards notions of the intrinsic value of non-human lives and places as a "radically different moral value" theory to argue for and justify that the moral considerations and rights found in and ascribed to humans ought to be expanded to non-human lives and places in order to address ever-mounting environmental problems. Given the mostly analytic tradition of

[18] Callicott, "Non-Anthropocentric Value Theory and Environmental Ethics," 299.

[19] Ibid

[20] ibid; Worster, "The Intrinsic Value of Nature," 46.

the field, and the history of the discipline in general, champions of this position must grapple with long-standing debates of epistemology, ontology, ethics, and meta-ethics as they argue for the moral status of Nature. This means that even within the non-anthropocentric side of the field there is still debate of how exactly the metaphysical and ontological claims extended into moral claims and then how these moral claims can and should be put into practice.

"The Varieties of Intrinsic Value"

In its most basic form, the claim and argument is that "nature has intrinsic value which gives rise to obligations both to preserve it and restore it."[21] It is both a metaphysical/ontological claim and a moral claim. The ontological claim is that the fundamental structure of reality is made up of objects that have properties that objectively justify and validate their continued existence. The moral claim is a consequence of the former: if an entity is objectively justified and validated to exist, it necessarily creates an obligation for others to protect and perpetuate the existence of said entity. The debate within this camp of the field has been the negotiation of the intricate details describing how and why it is the case that non-human lives and places have intrinsic value.

John O'Neill provides a survey of the different ways intrinsic value has been defined and argued for.[22] He published the article "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value" almost 25 years ago. Over the course of the past two decades, the philosophical landscape surveyed by O'Neill has been added to by others seeking to defend and critique the ways in which the concept is defined and operationalized. Using O'Neill's survey as an outline,

[21] Robert Elliot, "Intrinsic Value, Environmental Obligation and Naturalness," *The Monist* 75, no. 2 (April 1992): 138.

[22] John O'Neill, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value," *The Monist* 75, no. 2 (April 1992): 119-137.

I will summarize the concept's different forms and point to authors who have articulated different iterations. Then I will share but a couple of the metaphilosophical and pragmatic concerns about the concept's effectiveness as a basis for environmental ethics on the grounds of lack of conceptual coherency and validity through the rejection of its very existence in certain forms and calling it "a mistake" to have as the centerpiece of the field.[23]

To begin, O'Neill identifies at least three different ways the term "intrinsic value" is used in the literature, each a stronger ontological claim, and more mysterious epistemological claim, than the previous; as moral realism increases, epistemological access to it decreases. The hope is that the stronger the ontological claim, the stronger the moral obligation. In its weakest form, it is used as a synonym for non-purely instrumental value (i.e. against anthropocentric valuations dependent on relation properties)[24]; in a stronger form, it is the value an object has in virtue of "intrinsic properties" (in the Moorean sense that the properties of an object makes it the case that it "ought to exist for its own sake; [or] is good in itself" independent of its relational properties [25]); or its

[23] Toby Svoboda, "Why there is No Evidence for the Intrinsic Value of Non-Humans," *Ethics and the Environment* 16, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 25-36; Tom Regan, "Does Environmental Ethics Rest on a Mistake?" *The Monist* 75, no. 2 (April 1992): 161-182; Anthony Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics." In *Environmental Pragmatism*, edited by Andrew Light & Eric Katz (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 285-306.

[24] Eugene Hargrove, "Weak Anthropocentric Intrinsic Value," *The Monist* 75, no. 2 (April 1992): 183-207. Hargrove goes on to argue that using "instrumental" and "anthropocentric" to be synonymous is incorrect and leads to a confused and cluttered debate; anthropocentrism need not be instrumentalist. Moreover, complete non-anthropocentrism from humans is not possible so it is much more useful to grapple with what "anthropocentrism" means instead of "intrinsic value".

[25] Elliot, "Intrinsic Value, Environmental Obligation and Naturalness," 138. Elliot goes on to defend this second use in arguing that "wild nature has intrinsic value, in part, virtue of its naturalness."

strongest form as a synonym for "objective value" (i.e. value that an object possess due to properties beyond analysis which exist independently of any valuations of valuers).[26]

O'Neill states that any good environmental ethic must commit to at least the first, thus ruling out any form of anthropocentric utilitarianism.[27] To be able to hold a "defensible ethical position about the environment," however, one also has to commit to one of the two stronger senses of the concept.[28] While not very clear about his use of "defensible," I interpret O'Neill to mean "to have moral force in action." The aim of his paper is meant to decide which of the latter two senses are best to do this. This decision has to do with, at least according to O'Neill, the different uses of "intrinsic properties" within the second and third use of the term and to what extent realist and objectivist positions can be held before it turns into hand-waving .[29]

In the course of doing this, he notes how many formulations of the argument for the intrinsic value of non-human lives and places either fail or are mischaracterized due to conflating different senses of terms being used within the same line of reasoning.[30] And in addition to noting the problems with how terms are defined and used in the field, O'Neill also reviews other disagreements having to do with how the argument for the validity of the concept stands up to historical philosophical debates having to do with the

[26] O'Neill, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value," 119-120.

[27] O'Neill, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value," 120.

[28] Ibid.

[29] O'Neill, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value," 123-128.

[30] O'Neill, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value," 124. For example, more recently in terms of the latter two uses, Ben Bradley has elucidated some confusion between these two descriptions of intrinsic value, value, and properties in order to clear up a misunderstanding between Moorean and Kantian moral frameworks that seem to be at odds with each other. See Bradley, "Two Concepts of Intrinsic Value," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 9, no. 2 (April 2006): 111-130.

relationship between intrinsic and secondary/extrinsic/ relational properties[31] and the meta-ethical and epistemological debate between objectivist and subjectivist positions (i.e. strong versus weak objectivity). [32]

His summary of the field, and process of deciding between the second and third sense of the term, ends with him, interestingly enough, advocating an Aristotelian notion of flourishing from within the second sense of the term but also appealing to the strong objectivity of the third sense of the term through talk of biological goods and ends: "the best human life is one that includes an awareness of and practical concern with the goods of entities in the non-human world."[33] Morality demands that humans recognize and respect the goods for their own sake for non-human lives and places. He admits that this approach might seem "a depressingly familiar one" in that he has "taken a long journey into objective value only to arrive back at a narrowly anthropocentric ethic."[34]

It seems that O'Neill concludes that a defensible position must be one that appeals to the third sense of the term for the moral force and obligation but has to concede that "the most promising general strategy would be to appeal to the claim that a good human

[31] Shelly Kagan, Wlodek Rabinowicz and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen, and Robert Elliot argue for some kind of "conditional view" of intrinsic value being dependent on or grounded in extrinsic and instrumental value as a non-anthropocentric position. Ben Bradley, however, rejects such moves on grounds of conceptual consistency and champions a strong view of intrinsic value being independent of other properties. Kagan, "Rethinking Intrinsic Value," *The Journal of Ethics* 2, no. 4 (1998): 277-297; Rabinowicz, W. and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen, "A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and for its Own Sake," *Proceedings of the Aristotle Society* 10 (2000): 33-51; Elliot, "Instrumental Value in Nature as a Basis for the Intrinsic Value of Nature as a Whole," *Environmental Ethics* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 43-56; Bradley, "Is Intrinsic Value Conditional?" *Philosophical Studies: an International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 107, no. 1 (January 2002): 23-44.

[32] Jim Cheney, "Intrinsic Value in Environmental Ethics: Beyond Subjectivism and Objectivism," *The Monist* 75, no. 2 (1992): 227-235.

[33] O'Neill, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value," 133.

[34] O'Neill, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value," 132.

life requires a breadth of goods."[35] This "depressingly familiar" kind of conclusion leaves many champions of the concept with a bad anthropocentric taste in their mouth, still wanting an iteration of the concept and a moral position that does not admit of any anthropocentric influence, reasoning, or valuation.

Reflections on Intrinsic Value

As the aforementioned overview of the field highlights, the debate is still ongoing and actively seeking a strong form of the concept (i.e. a mind-independent intrinsic value) in order to create the desired moral obligation with the appropriate force necessary to move minds and bodies to action. Part of the debate is outright rejection any argument for this kind of strong intrinsic value (or for any kind of intrinsic value). For example, Toby Svoboda states that the position some environmental ethicists have that "some non-humans have intrinsic value as a mind-independent property is seriously flawed."[36] His reasoning is that humans lack any evidence for this position and are thus unjustified in holding it. This highlights the inverse relation between ontological strength and epistemic access.

His schematized argument is as follows:

1. If humans are justified in holding that some non-human natural entities have mind-independent intrinsic value, then humans possess evidence that some non-human natural entities have mind-independent intrinsic value.

2. Such evidence must come via a faculty of intuition or via an inference from the observable properties of non-human natural entities.

[35] O'Neill, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value," 133.

[36] "Why there is No Evidence for the Intrinsic Value of Non-Humans," *Ethics and the Environment* 16, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 25.

3. But this evidence cannot come via intuition, because humans lack such a faculty.

4. Nor can this evidence come via an inference from observable properties, because those properties could just as well exist in a world that lacked mind-independent intrinsic value.

5. So humans do not possess evidence that some non-human natural entities have mind-independent intrinsic value.

6. Thus humans are not justified in holding that some non-human natural entities have mind-independent intrinsic value.[37]

Svoboda does not reject outright all claims of the intrinsic value of non-human entities. It is the case, however, that he does not accept claims of mind-independent intrinsic value as an observable and intelligible property for humans. As spelled out by (2) and (3), for humans to be able to observe and experience such properties would require "epistemological access to the 'independent' and 'objective' world outside human experience."[38] O'Neill's appeal to biological goods and Eugene Hargrove's appeals to "wild naturalness,"[39] as proxies to infer an objective intrinsic property or as the objective intrinsic property itself, as mind-independent would have to answer to (2) and (3). If Svoboda has accurately spelled out the argument for a strong form of intrinsic value, however, it means that the standard by which intrinsic value is to be measured is, almost by definition, impossible.

[37] Svoboda, "Why there is No Evidence for the Intrinsic Value of Non-Humans," 25, 31-32.

[38] Norton in Svoboda, "Why there is No Evidence for the Intrinsic Value of Non-Humans," 28.

[39] "Weak Anthropocentric Intrinsic Value," *The Monist* 75, no. 2 (April 1992):183-207.

The ontological and moral power of a mind-independent and objective property, however, is what makes the strongest forms of intrinsic value such an alluring concept. Svoboda's diagnosis hinges on (3): epistemic humility concerning human faculties and experience. It would be a fair point to make against Svoboda that his presentation of intrinsic value is a bit of a caricature of how it is articulated by its champions, some of whom are cautious of how moral realist and objectivist positions are described and held.[40] That being said, Svoboda's point that an "objective" insight into the mind-independent world should not be necessary in order to embody and mobilize environmental problem-solving should still hold.[41] This highlights a tension between theory and practice. It challenges the proponents of the concept to not use intrinsic value as a metaphysical crutch or as "a pathetic bauble to brandish like a lucky charm in the face"[42] of real material and sociopolitical problems.

Following the Pragmatist tradition, Anthony Weston spells out three reasons why the concept of intrinsic value in general cannot play out on the metaphilosophical level. First is the demand for *self-sufficiency*. Weston points out that this definition of an intrinsic property depends upon a Cartesian substance ontology; atomistic and discrete entities, analyzing objects as they would be if they were in complete isolation from everything else in the world. This is a strong commitment to the Western Modern paradigm, the very paradigm that has facilitated the current state of environmental and

[40] Elliot, "Intrinsic Value, Environmental Obligation and Naturalness," 138, 139.

[41] Svoboda, "Why there is No Evidence for the Intrinsic Value of Non-Humans," 34.

[42] Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*. (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Co., 1991), 429, 430.

social affairs.[43] Moreover, ecologically speaking, no entity can exist in isolation; it makes little to no sense to analyze an entity in isolation if it is made in and through a relational ecological field.

Second, and similar to Svoboda's analysis, intrinsic value must be *abstract.* Intrinsic value, if it is to do the work it is purported to do, must be a special property that supersedes all other properties. According to Weston, it leads to a slippery uphill slope to a tier of value monism and value reductionism.[44] That is, after all, the allure of a strong notion of intrinsic value; a single and final value that supersedes all others and creates/forces moral obligation and action. To push this further, the third point follows what it would take to make sense of this kind of moral imperative: the property demands *specific justification*. Its justification must be grounded in an *a priori* principle, "God's command" or from "pure reason," for example. The irony in this move is that it appeals to a non-natural property "in order to vindicate the value of *nature*!"[45] Weston says that if these three are what is needed to make sense of intrinsic value, environmental ethics should want nothing to do with it. After all, it is a field that should be concerned with real lives and places on Earth and not focused on some conceptual plane. Weston is not alone in his concerns; several other authors from the environmental pragmatist camps voice similar metaphilosophical worries regarding the content and structure of intrinsic value.[46]

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[43] Anthony Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics." In *Environmental Pragmatism*, edited by Andrew Light & Eric Katz, 285-306. (NewYork, NY: Routledge, 1996), 288.

[44] Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics," 289.

[45] Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics," 290.

[46] L. Pippa Callanan, "Intrinsic Value for the Environmental Pragmatist," *Res Cogitans* 1, no. 1 (July 2010): 132-142; Andrew Light, "Materialists, Ontologists, and Environmental Pragmatists," *Social Theory and Practice* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 315-333; Eric Katz, *Nature as Subject: Human Obligation ad Natural Community*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997).

In a direct response to Svoboda, and to any, like Tom Regan and Weston, who suggest that it is a mistake to appeal to the concept and that the field should do away with all together, Lars Samuelsson defends intrinsic value, specifically a strong notion of mind-independent intrinsic value.[47] He agrees with O'Neill that intrinsic value, in some way, shape, or form must be appealed to in order to have a proper claim about environmental ethics.[48] Moreover, Samuelsson holds that those who criticize the concept are blind to the "reason-implying" power of intrinsic value. Once we realize that the "reason-implying" power of intrinsic value is what does the work, "it also becomes clear that it is the concept of a reason, rather than that of intrinsic value, that is most important to environmental ethics."[49] This is a new sense of the concept, not discussed by O'Neill. Samuelsson reminds us that "environmental ethics is first and foremost a practical discipline" and "should be primarily be concerned with" reasons for action, namely to take non-human lives and places into moral consideration in order to address pressing and urgent environmental problems; reason(s), not values, are what motivate moral questions concerning the environment and actions to address them.[50] So what reasons does the concept afford in order to put theory into practice?

The Concept in Theory and in Practice

As we have seen, the in-house disagreements are not just about theoretical structure and content. As Svoboda and Samuelsson highlight in different ways, appealing to the concept of intrinsic value, even in its strongest forms, still needs to find a way out

[47] "On the Possibility of Evidence for Intrinsic Value in Nature," *Ethics and the Environment* 18, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 101-114.

[48] "Reasons and Values in Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Values* 19, no. 4 (2010): 517-535.

[49] "Reasons and Values in Environmental Ethics," 518.

[50] "Reasons and Values in Environmental Ethics," 530.

of the ink and print of journal and book pages. There has been qualitative and quantitative work done on how the concept translates into practice in terms of how it influences those who commonly visit natural places and those who manage land and natural resources. The findings highlight that while participants voice adherence to the concept usually in its strongest form to justify their actions and decisions, there is a gap in their practices in the face of daily life concerns and limitations marked by limited resources: the economic capacity to commit before running out of money, time available to them given their jobs to press for changes in natural resource management, etc. [51]

This gap between how the concept is described and how it can be put into practice has not been missed by members of the field from any camps of the debate; no one is blind to it or in disagreement that it exists. One could say that the field of environmental ethics is a project dedicated to bridging this gap, each camp differing in its response as to why there is a gap and how to bridge it. As presented above, the non-anthropocentric intrinsic value theorists continue to champion their centerpiece as being the best means to span the gap between theory and practice. In terms of reasons for action, however, Frederick Ferré states that the field and the champions of intrinsic value offer a "rich ethical position, but one that lacks internal connections between principles relevant to the environment and principles relevant to human society."[52] Even Callicott agrees that "the best way to put environmental ethics into practice is to work to instill environmental

[51] Robin Attfield, "Existence Value and Intrinsic Value," *Ecological Economics* 24 (1998): 163-168; W.F. Butler and T.G. Acott, "An Inquiry Concerning the Acceptance of Intrinsic Value Theories of Nature," *Environmental Values* 16, no. 2 (May 2007): 149-168.

[52] "Persons in Nature: Towards an Applicable and Unified Environmental Ethics," *Ethics and the Environment* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 15.

values in society as the foundation for coercive environmental policies, regulations, and laws."[53]

What do the field and the champions of intrinsic value (in its many forms) seem to be missing in making it seemingly irrelevant to society? It is not a lack of philosophical rigor or analysis; the summary above is the most brief of overviews of an expansive and still-growing literature. Lawrence Vogel asked if this gap between theory and practice may have something to do with the metaphysical grounding of the field. Maybe its theoretical frameworks, valid and sound in the abstract, lack an adequate motivational force because of their almost purely theoretical character.[54]

Roger J. H. King offers as a diagnosis that this and other kinds of theoretical work in the field results in a "disembodied environmental discourse with diminished influence on citizens and policy makers."[55] In order to heed King's warning, I hope to show that non-anthropocentric intrinsic value theory lacks a critical lens on its own intellectual history and the material sociopolitical consequences of basing its arguments on pitting human society and nature against each other, their values and interests at odds with one another. The next two chapters will complimentarily analyze what keeps this kind of environmental ethics from doing what it has set out to do. In fact, what I hope to show is that that kind of environmental ethics produced by appeals to and operationalization of the concept of intrinsic value is anything but new or a radically different set of moral

[53] "How Environmental Ethical Theory May be put into Practice," *Ethics and the Environment* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 3. I would like to highlight Callicott's use of "coercive" here.

[54] "Does Environmental Ethics Need a Metaphysical Grounding?" *The Hastings Center Report* 25, no. 7 (1995): 30-39.

[55] "Narrative, Imagination, and the Search for Intelligibility in Environmental Ethics," *Ethics and the Environment* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 23.

values; it is actually a method for (re)producing and reinforcing systems for oppression and injustice.

CHAPTER III

THE ETHICAL TROUBLES WITH INTRINSIC VALUE

There are troubles with intrinsic value. The trouble is that the field of environmental ethics, as Samuelsson states, seeks to fulfill more than just an abstract philosophical duty; it is "first and foremost a practical discipline."[56] And while the champions of the concept are fully aware that there is a gap between their theorizing and practice, they keep doubling down on its centerpiece. We have seen what the arguments for the intrinsic value of non-human lives and places are supposed to do (i.e. create and/or prove moral obligation to preserve and protect them in the face of human interests) and how they are supposed to do so (i.e. appeal to some kind of intrinsic or special properties that provide reasons to fulfil said moral obligation). We have also seen the disagreement on what intrinsic value is and how it works and wholesale critiques that outright reject the concept. These have mostly been from within the field (and mostly from the analytic tradition). As the end of the previous chapter foreshadowed, the troubles cannot be settled through the same kind of continued and more rigorous conceptual analysis.

The central trouble for the concept is that there is a gap between the claim of moral obligation because of the intrinsic value of non-human lives and places and how it is supposed to change human minds and practices. I believe that a critical self-awareness concerning its intellectual history and a critical self-awareness concerning its material consequences in the everyday lives of people can help shed some light on why this gap exists for the field. Complementarily, what this chapter and the next will show are the ethical and material consequences of the legal embodiment and operationalization of the

[56] "Reasons and Values in Environmental Ethics," 530.

concept. It (re)produces and reinforces oppressive practices and perpetuates social injustice given 1) the concept's inadequate, and almost non-existent, framework for moral deliberation that 2) when used as a basis for problem-framing and problem-solving adds to existing, or potentially creates new, environmental and social problems. It exacerbates pre-existing problems by ignoring and/or reducing complex assemblages of issues to a single set of values and interests which negatively affects the health, lives, and livelihoods of people who are most vulnerable to environmental and social problems.

Before getting there, however, some groundwork must be done to build up to it. William Cronon's and Ramachandra Guha's analysis of what the concept of Wilderness, and the environmentalism built upon it, has done and Val Plumwood's analysis of Modernity's project of hierarchical categorization will be my foundation for spelling out the intellectual history and oppressive logic of intrinsic value that will always keep it from doing what its champions want it to do.

The Troubles with Wilderness

In 1995 William Cronon wrote about the trouble with Wilderness as a place and as a concept in academia and the environmentalist movement.[57] He traces the history of the concept from early European descriptions of the North American landscape, through Thoreau's proclamation that "in wildness is the preservation of the world," part of Muir's campaign for the Progressive Era's national parks into present conservation movements. At its core, Wilderness is a concept appealed to and used to refigure the human-nature relation by defining what it means to be natural (i.e. Wilderness as untrammeled and

[57] "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." In *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by William Cronon (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995), 69-90.

untainted places, independent of human influence and destruction) and what kind of places humans must visit in order to foster the right kind of relationship with the non-human world.

Cronon's claim is twofold. First, Wilderness is actually a product, a social construction, created to advance a very specific American historical narrative and reinforce a very specific power relation of who can and cannot appreciate and benefit from nature while spelling out the proper ways to experience nature. Second, this construct is internally incoherent and, moreover, philosophically, materially, and sociopolitically harmful in that "wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural."[58] As such, it is not only inadequate in correcting the human-nature relationship but also (re)produces a hierarchy of being and power where "too many other corners of the earth become less than natural and too many other people become less than human, thereby giving us permission not to care much about their suffering or their fate."[59]

What I hope to show is that the trouble with intrinsic value is the same kind of trouble William Cronon diagnosed concerning Wilderness: not only is it a problematic concept in its conceptual structure, but it also reinforces and (re)produces sociopolitical power structures that give permission to not care for the suffering or fate of others who are a part of the complex problem. Ramachandra Guha anticipated Cronon's analysis of Wilderness by pointing out how environmental ethics and "Radical American Environmentalism," despite its careful conceptual frameworks and claims of universality, are "firmly rooted in American environmental and cultural history" where the distinctions

[58] Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," 80.

[59] Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," 82, 83.

it debates are of little use when it comes to concerns of "equity and the integration of ecological concerns with livelihood and work."[60] Guha focuses on how environmental ethics and the American environmentalist narrative culture grounding it is, at best, inappropriate for the Third World, and, at worst, actually magnifies environmental and social problems when applied in the Third World. I will show in this chapter and the next how the concept of intrinsic value, when operationalized in environmental policy and action, magnifies the environmental and social problems where applied.

As Guha puts it, "By making the (largely spurious) anthropocentric-biocentric distinction central to the debate, [intrinsic value theorists] may have appropriated the moral high ground, but they are at the same time doing a serious disservice to American and global environmentalism."[61] What Guha and Cronon in concert yield is a critical awareness and realization of the history and consequences of concepts like Wilderness and Wildness. I hope to do the same with intrinsic value. While champions of non-anthropocentric intrinsic value in environmental ethics think they are doing something radically different in terms of environmental and moral philosophy, more refined and more rigorous, than mainstream environmentalism, they really are not and cannot with the concept.

A Modern Bequest of a Logic of Oppression

Beginning in the 16th century, the method by which the Western mind investigated, described, and explained the world began to change. Galilean observation, Baconian scientific method, Newtonian physics, Leibnizian logic, and Cartesian dualism,

[60] "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique," *Environmental Ethics*, 11 (Spring 1989): 71.

[61] "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique," 83.

are several of the founding concepts of Western Modern thought and are what Western culture use to see and make sense of the world. The roots of the concept of intrinsic value can be traced through this intellectual history. The basic outline goes as follows: the (hu)man is special in the world where the mind of the (hu)man is active in, but separate from, the material world; it is a mind whose transcendent consciousness grants an exceptional and triumphant status which endows the (hu)man with agential power in a mechanistic world; a world full of atomically discrete objects wherein the (hu)man actively imposes a will and purpose upon a passive and inert world. In this model and framework, humans, and only humans, have intrinsic value.

The Western Modern scientific paradigm has helped describe the world predictably with distinct causes and effects and identifiable concrete explanations. What it also has done, however, is monopolize the ways and means of knowing and making sense of the world. The Western Modern scientific paradigm became *the* way of knowing that for the past five centuries has dictated how people, places, and power are to be organized. This organizing is usually done by and in favor of a specific group at the expense of others by defining the categories and the hierarchy of the great chain of being with those who have been found to have intrinsic value at the top. Because if you control epistemological access to Nature and have the power to decide what the ontological constitution of it is, you also control the explanations and reasons for which bodies belong where, which bodies do what, and why those bodies (have) do it (i.e. you define the human and non-human, race, gender, sex, class, physicality, and everything else those entail).

Val Plumwood spells out both the intellectual framework and the process through which categories were created and perpetuated to justify and reinforce the oppression of 'other' bodies and places who/that did not, and still do not, fall into the narrative shared above, specifically women and people of color.[62] The core philosophical tenet of the Western Modern scientific paradigm can be traced to the Cartesian system of dualistic category analysis. Plumwood spells out the philosophical structure of dualisms as a "relationship of denied dependency [that] determines a certain kind of logical structure, in which the denial and the relation of domination/subordination shape the identity of both relata."[63] At the heart of this system is the human/nature distinction with all the other binaries predicated from the oppositional definitions at play between the foundational two definitions. The key to the power of the dualistic system is not just that it creates and oppositionally defines concepts, terms, people, and places. As Plumwood asserts, concepts, terms, people, and places are defined hierarchically, constructing an imbalanced power relation that favors a preselected/predefined few over others.[64]

What does all this have to do, however, with intrinsic value? As spelled out earlier, environmental ethics is attempting to correct a human-nature relation grounded in a binary system that separates the human and non-human world in order for the latter to be used instrumentally in favor of the former. Claims of the intrinsic value of non-human lives and places, in its many forms and iterations, are attempts at either granting equal moral standing to non-human lives, places, and interests so that they have equal moral consideration in moral deliberation or – with the stronger forms of intrinsic value, grant

[62] *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993).

[63] Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 41.

[64] Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 49.

greater moral standing to non-human lives, places, and interests than to human lives, places, and interests – in order to correct an imbalanced human-nature relation. The stronger form of the concept inverts the power relation the Western Modern scientific paradigm is built upon. As Weston's second critique points out in the previous chapter, this, at its base, is the allure of a strong sense of intrinsic value in environmental ethics (i.e. a single and final value that supersedes all others and creates/forces moral obligation and action).[65]

In correcting the relation in this manner, however, intrinsic value advocates are attempting to correct from within the binary system of defining and arranging lives, people, places, and power on a hierarchical gradient of importance. Plumwood warns that "escape from dualised relationships and dualised identity represents a particularly difficult problem, involving a sort of logical maze" difficulty to escape from with the tools of the binary system.[66] As such, it falls back into a logic that favors a specific predefined and predetermined interest above all else at great expense to others. Intrinsic value theory's very logical structure, then, bars it from being able to have a critical and nuanced perspective on a complex environmental problem. It remains trapped with the Western Modern system of hierarchically organized lives, places, and powers.

Harmful Moral Deliberation

The kind of moral deliberation this produces for environmental ethics is not new or radical. It is, at best, lazy. It is, of course, the case that many do not grant non-human lives, places, and interests moral standing. Simply shifting the power relation between humans and non-humans by lifting the latter up to a privileged standing only humans

[65] Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics," 289.

[66] Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 42.

once had, however, would make deliberation nothing more than a has-it-or-not system of moral deliberation. In terms of deliberation when it comes to making a decision about a pressing and urgent problem, to say everything has intrinsic value is equivalent to saying that nothing has intrinsic value. It would not actually help work through complex socio-environmental problems given the still absent hand-of-reason or hand-of-god pointing one direction over the other as Weston points out in his third critique.[67]

This distinguishing property is what the strong forms of intrinsic value offer. This, however, simply inverts the power relation by granting greater value to the non-human factors, but does nothing to change the logic. This kind of power inversion happens according to a predetermined and fixed idea of what it means to address environmental problems that continues to favor a select few lives and environments at the expense of many other lives and environments. As Cronon and Guha have described, this method of addressing problems reaffirms the imbalanced power relation between those advocating for this kind of ethic and those who have to live their daily lives from within the midst of socio-environmental problems.

As highlighted by Plumwood, the very structure and logic of the dualistic system is a feedback loop perpetually (re)creating and (re)affirming hierarchical ontological and epistemological positions that have always already been predetermined by a group with intentions of pushing specific ends given their position and often privileged perspective. It is a maze in which the logic of oppression is constantly (re)created. My application of Plumwood's work to intrinsic value is to say that the concept, in any of its forms, will end up in this maze, attempting to escape from within with the tools of the binary system. When it comes to the logical maze this model and framework (re)creates, Plumwood

[67] Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics," 290.

suggest a rather simple but difficult way out: leave the model and framework behind. As Bryan Norton puts it, "as we recognize that these limits are very real and raise moral questions that we have never asked before, we will realize how inadequate are the frameworks of terms and concepts bequeathed us by modernism."[68] The argument for the intrinsic value of non-human lives and places is a bequest from limiting Modern ways of thinking.

Even in the face of these kinds of problems, the concept is still put to work. In order to span the gap between theory and practice, however, the concept alone is not enough. It needs a vehicle through which to operationalize and materialize the work it is supposed to do, that is, create reasons to change minds and practices. Its weaker forms are not enough for the most ardent champions of the concept, philosophers and activists. The weaker forms that allow for subjectivism, relational value, and extrinsic dependence, in their eyes, turn into utilitarianism with no moral teeth or force to counteract anthropocentric values. The strongest form of intrinsic value – non-anthropocentric in its objectivist positions on mind-independent intrinsic properties – is seen as the way to correct environmental problems. The next chapter will investigate a concrete example of both a vehicle for this strongest form of intrinsic value and of how it (re)produces and reinforces social and environmental problems.

[68] "Epistemology and Environmental Values," *The Monist* 75, no. 2 (April 1992): 224.

CHAPTER IV

DELTA SMELT, WATER, AND INJUSTICE

A Clash of Ethics and Justice

The previous chapter set the conceptual groundwork needed to demonstrate how the use of intrinsic value as a basis for environmental ethics and environmental problem-solving fails when put into practice. It is a lazy framework for moral deliberation that reduces problem-framing down to a single prechosen value as the goal. It ignores how complex and interrelated social and environmental problems are. And when used as a basis for instilling non-anthropocentric environmental values via environmental protection laws and policies, intrinsic value theory actively (re)produces and reinforces a history, intellectual and material, of oppressive practices of social inequities and harm.

This chapter works in tandem with the previous chapter by presenting a concrete example of how this happens through policy and practice. It is an examination of how the United States Federal Endangered Species Act[69] and the state of California Endangered Species Act[70] are applied to the biological and ecological status of the Delta Smelt and its habitat in the Sacramento-San Joaquin estuary (known as the Delta). The investigation will begin by spelling out how the legislation in legal practice is a vehicle for a strong form of the argument for the intrinsic value of non-human lives and places. The rest of the chapter will describe how the law plays a part in ignoring and making worse existing social and political tensions.

Granted, the champions of intrinsic value in its many forms – from its weakest iterations admitting to subjectivism, relational value, and extrinsic dependence to the

[69] 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.

[70] CA FISH & G § 2050 - 2115.5

strongest claims stating that it is a completely objective and mind-independent property – have their opinions and reservations on how the concept is put to practice in law and policy. It would be their responsibility, however, to describe ways to best "instill environmental values in society as the foundation for coercive environmental policies, regulations, and laws" that do not do ignore and making worse existing social and political inequities that disproportionately affect the most socially, politically, and environmental vulnerable.[71] At least one thing is certain when using the intrinsic value theory as a foundation for environmental problem-solving through policies, regulations, and laws: these kinds of environmental values – preserving and protecting Wildness, Wilderness, and the strong intrinsic value of Nature – are certainly coercive. Lacking a critical self-awareness concerning its intellectual history and heritage and a critical self-awareness concerning its material consequences in the everyday lives of people and places have led the contemporary environmental movements and the professional academic field to be blind to which groups of people and communities are being most coerced.

The Concept at Work

The Endangered Species Act

Modeled after the California Endangered Species Act passed into law in 1970, the United States Endangered Species Act passed into law in 1973 because Congress found that "various species of fish, wildlife, and plants in the United States have been rendered extinct as a consequence of economic growth and development untempered by adequate

[71] Callicott, "How Environmental Ethical Theory May be put into Practice," 3.

concern and conservation."[72] The laws are meant "to provide a means whereby the ecosystems upon which endangered species and threatened species depend may be conserved [and] to provide a program for the conservation of such endangered species and threatened species."[73] For the past 40 years it has been one of the strongest laws in the United States and California appealed to and used to protect, conserve, and rehabilitate species and their habitats; it gives legal teeth to environmental concerns and values.

The environmental concerns stem from Congress finding that "species of fish, wildlife, and plants have been so depleted in numbers that they are in danger of or threatened with extinction."[74] Their extinction would be a loss because of the "esthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, and scientific value to the Nation and its people."[75] Not listed among these values are concerns for sociopolitical and socioeconomic impacts on non-industrial interests and stakeholders. The human interest is described monolithically lumping together all interests as being the same, namely "untempered" economic growth and development which is seen to be equally beneficial for all humans.

Moreover, while the US ESA and the CA ESA state several values that these endangered species have, when considered in court, judges usually state in their rulings that "Congress intended to halt and reverse the trend toward species extinction—*whatever the cost* [emphasis mine]. This kind of language reveals a conscious design to

[72] 16 U.S.C. 1531 (1)

[73] 16 U.S.C. 1531 (5)(b)

[74] 16 U.S.C. 1531 (2)

[75] 16 U.S.C. 1531 (3)

the legislation to give endangered species priority over the 'primary missions' of federal agencies."[76] Most, if not all, federal and state agencies who manage land have primary missions of multiple-use and/or wise-use citing esthetic, educational, historical, recreational, and scientific value among the values of the land.[77] The aforementioned court ruling, however, states that the primary mission of the ESA is to favor species preservation above all else at whatever the cost.

Environmental activist groups who appeal to the ESA in the courts frame their argument in defense of species and their habitats as that a certain species or habitat has moral value and legal rights to exist independent of how humans interact with non-human lives and places. Given this legal history, in practice through legal precedent the ESA embodies the strongest form of the concept of intrinsic value of non-human lives and places – their value is independent and above all other concerns and interests. In doing so, it is often the case that in its attempts to correct and rectify the human-nature relation in order to address environmental problems, intrinsic value, through the vehicle of the ESA, draws sharp ontological, moral, legal, and sociopolitical lines between the lives and places in question. This inversion of the power dynamic in the human-nature relation is supposed to correct a radically out-of-balance history of purely anthropocentric utilitarian use of natural resources. Doing it in this way, however, is a dangerous overcorrection.

It is an overcorrection that begins to do more harm than good when it goes into deliberation with a notion that any human interest or concern will taint the process. This

[76] 437 U.S. 153 (1)(b)

[77] Cultural value has been navigated differently as part of a long-standing negotiation between Native American autonomy, treaty rights, and cultural rights and the United States. It should be noted that disagreements and conflicts between the US ESA, and other state ESAs, are addressed through Secretarial Order 3206 "American Indian Tribal Rights, Federal-Tribal Trust Responsibilities, and the Endangered Species Act."

leads to the exclusion of any other human voice that is not advocating the protection of the species and its habitat at any cost. And when a group is left unheard, or forced to be unheard, in order to deliver on the promise of single-minded environmental protection, it exacerbates existing, and may create new, socio-environmental problems by reducing a complex situation to a single factor. And expecting a single factor to address a larger complex situation composed of an interconnected and interrelated web of issues leads to paralysis, hostility, and a failure to communicate experiences and perspectives in order to address the many issues affecting so many lives and places. Let us look into how this happens when a problem reaching back a hundred years and affecting millions of lives is put on the shoulders of a fish the size of your thumb.

Delta Smelt, Water, and the Central Valley; "Water Politics by another Name"

The California Delta Smelt was designated threatened and registered as such in accordance with the US ESA in the spring of 1993.[78] The following year it was determined to have a critical habitat under the US ESA and in 2010 the State of California listed it a critically endangered species under its ESA.[79] Each new designation adds political and material priority to protecting the Delta Smelt and their habitat. For over the past 20 years the federal Fish and Wildlife Service, the California Fish and Game Department, the California Central Valley farmers, and California Central Valley farmworkers and inhabitants have been in a tug of war, the State Water Resources Control Board being the rope. Driving through California on Interstate 5 and CA Highway 99 you see signs saying "Food grows where water flows," "Stop the Congress created Dustbowl," "No Water = No Jobs," and other signs naming the state and

[78] 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq., Federal Register 58 (42), 12854-12863.

[79] 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq., Federal Register, 59 (242), 65256-65279; CA FISH & G § 2050 - 2115.5

congressional representatives who should by blamed for the problem. Peter Alagona and the press tell the story as having three characters. There are the federal and state agencies who, by law, seek to protect and conserve the Delta Smelt, a native indicator species to the Sacramento and San Joaquin estuary delta by keeping millions and millions of gallons of Sierra Nevada snow melt from being pumped down south to Central Valley farmers and farmworkers who lose fields, profits, jobs, and food because of it. There are the farmers and farmworkers who see the withholding of water as a matter of human health, lives, and livelihoods being sacrificed for the sake of a tiny fish with no commercial benefit. And there are the environmental activists who see the Delta Smelt and its environment as a species and a habitat that is critically endangered because of the aforementioned lives and livelihoods.[80]

According to Alagona, the real matter at hand in the debate is the long-standing politics of how water is allocated in relation to how people are distributed throughout the state. Prior to the court rulings enforcing the ESA, about 70% of the water that flows through the Sacramento-San Joaquin river Delta is pumped south to and through the California Central Valley and as far south as Los Angeles serving almost thirty million people and five million acres of irrigated farmland.[81] Several water projects have distributed delta water to different parts of the state for agricultural, commercial, and residential use at the satisfaction and dissent of different regional interests. The dissent usually comes from the part of the state that will not benefit from the water conveyance

[80] Peter Alagona, "The Delta Smelt: Water Politics by another Name." In *After the Grizzly: Endangered Species and the Politics of Place in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 198-224; Charles Cooke, "For the sake of the smelt, California farmland lies fallow," *The National Review*, 27 January 2014; Allysia Finley, "Forget the Missing Rainfall, California. Where's the Delta Smelt?" *The Wall Street Journal*. 26 April 2015; Lisa Krieger, "California Drought: Delta smelt survey finds a single fish, heightening debate over water supply," *The Mercury News*, 15 April 2015.

[81] Alagona, "The Delta Smelt: Water Politics by another Name," 198-199.

from a specific project. This usually leads to sectionalist debates between the northern part of the state where the delta is and the more arid yet more densely populated southern part of the state.

In addition to this, the delta itself has a century-long history of being misused and polluted through short-sighted agricultural, industrial, and commercial practices. California also has an archaic and arcane system of water rights law making any and every reallocation of water in the state a tooth-and-nail legal battle. Compounding both of these is the increasing occurrence and degrees of drought and alarmingly patterned decreasing levels of snowpack in the Sierra Nevada. All contributing factors to the poor conditions of the delta where the smelt live, less availability of fresh water, and increased sociopolitical tensions about who has rights to the ever lessening amounts of water and who holds responsibility for addressing the entangled web of issues.[82]

The situation is already complex and complicated with outdated and ill-equipped water rights law, unsustainable agricultural practices, politically complex food subsidies that influence and affect said agricultural practices, sectionalist politics pitting regions of the state against each other, and increasing occurrence and severity of drought and decreasing snowpack. It is a situation that "reveals the challenges of environmental governance in a complicated federalist system where no single individual or organization possesses a majority of the political power."[83] All these issues have been shaping water and regional politics for a very long time and are in dire need of being addressed in themselves. The Delta Smelt issue, Alagona says, "provides an example of how, under the ESA, even uncharismatic species now shape debates about land use and natural

[82] Ibid.

[83] Alagona, "The Delta Smelt: Water Politics by another Name," 200.

resource management."[84] But it is not only that the Delta Smelt and the ESA have shaped the debate; it has reframed the debate putting the entire weight of and blame for the complex amalgam of factors and problems on a fish at the brink of its existence as if its existence is the cause of the problems facing the Delta and California.

This should be enough to highlight how intrinsic value, when used as a foundation for moral deliberation when it comes to environmental problems, reveals itself to be lazy in that it simply reduces a complex situation to a single interest that does not and cannot address the multiple causes and influences that have led to the problematic situation. When a strong form of intrinsic value of the Delta Smelt is operationalized via the legal rights granted to it through the ESA, it ignores the context. This is how intrinsic value is an ineffective foundation for environmental problem-framing and problem-solving.

To demonstrate the second part of my claim against the use of intrinsic value in environmental ethics – that it (re)produces and exacerbates preexisting social inequities and inequality – we must look at how the people who live and work in the Central Valley are negatively affected by the application of the concept via legal means. We have to look into what happens when intrinsic value and the environmental ethicists and environmental activists who champion it forget to think about how not all humans are equally responsible for environmental problems.

Injustice by another Name

The Central Valley of California is a vast swath of farmland in what is/should be a desert. For those who have had no other means of work, food, or water if not for the farmland created through the supply of northern water and the efforts of Bureau of Reclamation, however, the Central Valley has been the only home they have known or

[84] Ibid.

have been able to know. The Central Valley is a patchwork of rich and diverse communities representing changes in the agricultural and immigration history of the state. It traces the history of East Asian immigrants in the early 20th century because they were barred from almost all other work and places, Dust Bowl refugees from the Midwest in the 1930's, Mexican Braceros during World War II to bolster the United States' agricultural labor force, and the continued influx of immigrants from Latin-America over the past thirty years.[85] More to the point, most of these communities are populations that have been historically discriminated against, politically underrepresented, and socially underserviced. Those who make a life in the Central Valley are not unused to difficult times prompted by a plethora of socioeconomic problems. The availability of only temporary and seasonal jobs, a saturated labor market, low wages, poor schools, environmental health hazards, and substandard housing are amongst the worst in the state. And many of these problems follow the barometer of state agricultural and water policy.[86]

The court rulings in favor of the ESA and the Delta Smelt make all these preexisting sociopolitical and environmental health problems worse. By prioritizing the interests of the Delta Smelt above all other factors, the already limited natural and social resources of these communities are lessened, the weight of an already over-stressed and unaddressed complex system is passed down onto the groups and communities who already carry much of the social and environmental burden. Ever less available clean drinking water, fewer employment prospects, higher food prices, increased sociopolitical discrimination due to ethnic and migration exacerbated by economic and political

[85] Alagona, "The Delta Smelt: Water Politics by another Name," 220.

[86] ibid.

tensions are just some of the increased hardships the communities of the Central Valley have had to face in recent decades. In order to voice the concerns and interests of those who live and work in the Central Valley, many community groups and non-profits have banded together to speak collectively and lobby at the state and congressional level. Groups such as the Central California Environmental Justice Network and the Environmental Justice Coalition for Water work to highlight and fight against the continued underrepresentation and social hardships these communities face because of their history and how environmental protection laws are not only blind to the history but help perpetuate it.[87]

If Environmental Ethics is without Justice…

The Delta Smelt problem is framed by some as a matter of pushing it to the brink of extinction because of not respecting the intrinsic moral value of the species. The ESA as a legal and political vehicle for its value is supposed to fix this problem. Fixing this problem in this way, however, has caused, and will continue to cause, social, political, and economic distress. What has been shown is that the concept, when operationalized in this way, does not and cannot address the problem for it incorrectly frames the problem due to its method of reducing to a single value of interest and, in doing so, perpetuates existing problems. Let it be clear, I am not saying that the Delta Smelt should be allowed to go extinct. Nor am I calling for a complete dissolution of environmental protection laws and regulations. What is needed, however, in light of the conceptual and material shortcomings of the concept in theory and in practice, is a closer and critical examination

[87] If you would like to know more about these groups' missions and projects, please visit their websites here, respectively: http://ejcw.org/ and https://ccejn.wordpress.com/

of how environmental problems are being framed and to what end their solutions are being pursued.

To speak concretely, addressing this problem is not just a matter of turning off the pumps and maintaining an ecologically adequate supply of water for a biologically adequate population of Smelt in order for it to not go extinct. It would take a framework that recognizes the complex interconnection of problems having to do with a myriad of interconnected issues. In this case, it would have to grapple with the confluence of century-old water rights law; agricultural policy at the state and national level that deals with farm subsidies and influences food prices; immigration, labor, and public health policy that address the concerns and conditions of the people living in the Central Valley communities; industrial and commercial water use regulations throughout the state; and regional disputes concerning political clout and power.

As the ESA has been interpreted and enforced, it has become quite the legal and political vehicle for the strongest sense of intrinsic value. What has not come with it, however, is the moral and ethical work it is supposed to do. As operationalized by the ESA, it exacerbates and amplifies long-standing socio-environmental problems. I cannot go through every instance of where, when, and how the ESA has put the strong sense of intrinsic value to work and how it has failed in the ways I have been describing. I am willing to wager, however, that most follow suit in harmfully reducing down to a single value and interest which ignores how environmental problems do not and cannot exist outside of constitutive and causal entanglements of complex social, economic, and political problems.

By ignoring existing sociopolitical problems in its problem-solving efforts, the concept at work (re)produces them. In addition to this, because it ignores the existing sociopolitical problems that are simultaneously creating and created by environmental problems, it also does not actually address the environmental problem. In the case of the Delta Smelt, keeping more water in the Delta will not save the Smelt if the agricultural practices and its chemical pollutants in the Delta are not addressed as well. And addressing the harmful agricultural and chemical practices in Delta involves engaging with the social and political plight of the communities who have to suffer from them the most.

As mentioned, the philosophical champions of intrinsic value are sure to have their qualms with the ESA and how it puts the concept to work. Given what has been spelled out about the philosophical and material faults with the concept, however, how else can the concept be put to practical work to do the environmental problem-solving and the social mind and practice changing it is purported to do? Ideally, the concept, as Weston noted, would work by imposing an *a priori* principle of "God's command" to stop or as an interdiction from "pure reason" that, upon confronting them with the concept, would lead all those who are culprits of environmental degradation and harm to stop their actions and practices and change their mental and moral groundwork in order to further respect the intrinsic and moral value of non-human lives and places.[88] That, however, in any form of the concept, has yet to happen.

[88] Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics," 290.

As Tom Regan argues, it is a mistake to think that the concept of intrinsic value of non-human lives and places can do the work it is purported to do.[89] And it has been a mistake privileged with 40 years of attention afforded a lot of ink and paper without much real progress. So shy of having the power to rectify the complex situation by being able to reset the clock back to time zero and allow the situation to play out again anew with the benefit of hindsight, a better method of investigating and framing environmental problems is necessary if the field wants to avoid these kinds of consequences. What is needed is a model that is better equipped to grapple with a complex web of interconnected lives and interests from within the problems.

While a select few, be they the kind of activist or academic described, have had the privilege of being able to visit and enjoy the kind of Wilderness and Wildness so praised and ride a conceptual merry-go-round that is often ontologically, epistemically, and experientially divorced from the material reality of environmental degradation and harm, there are those who have to live in and through the dangers and effects of environmental degradation. And it is to those situations, lives, people, and places we should turn to for a better understanding of environmental problems. Environmental ethics should look towards environmental pragmatism and how it navigates cases of environmental injustice in order to span the gap between theory and practice and accomplish its mission of addressing pressing and urgent environmental problems.

[89] "Does Environmental Ethics Rest on a Mistake?" *The Monist* 75, no. 2 (April 1992): 161-182.

CHAPTER V

TRANSCORPOREALITY AS DEMOCRATIC NATURALISM FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

On the formal and professional philosophical level, my arguments have been against a non-anthropocentric intrinsic value theory as a flagship argument in environmental ethics and as a foundation for environmental problem-solving. I have pointed out how the concept, specifically in its stronger forms, fails conceptually and materially in addressing environmental and social problems in that it, at best, is a lazy form of moral deliberation unable to grapple with complexity and, at worst, is a method for perpetuating oppressive and discriminatory social practices because it ignores or reduces the complexity of the problem. If my concerns and critiques are valid, environmental ethics is in need of a new direction.

This makes me responsible for suggesting an alternative that is better able to grapple with a complex web of interrelated non-human and human lives and interests. I hope to redirect the field towards socio-environmental problem-solving by addressing social injustice by focusing its energy and efforts on cases of environmental injustice. I believe that the work being done by Environmental Pragmatism is better able to grapple with complex environmental problems by not appealing to and favoring a single predetermined value outside the context of the situation. I also believe, however, that Environmental Pragmatism could use some help with how to better grapple with harmful power relations and complex sociopolitical situations in order to foster an effective environmental ethic.

This chapter seeks to accomplish three things. First, since the target audience of my critiques has been the champions of non-anthropocentric intrinsic value theory, I will argue for how classical Pragmatism, specifically John Dewey's naturalism, can help temper the concerns of dangerous anthropocentrism when environmental ethics is done without appeal to strong intrinsic value. Second, in order to make sure that social justice is an explicit dimension in the framing and deliberation in environmental problem-solving, I will highlight Ben Minteer's work in refounding environmental ethics with concerns for democracy and the public interest as a centerpiece.

Lastly, to bolster Dewey's naturalism and reinforce Minteer's reframing, I will introduce the field to Stacy Alaimo's use of trans-corporeality as a way of materially investigating the relation between environments and bodies that recognizes the power relations built into environmental degradation. This merger of Dewey's naturalism made sharper by Minteer's concern for environmental Democracy and the public interest and materialized by Alaimo's description of how trans-corporeality frames the project of environmental justice is what I call "democratic naturalism."

Environmental Pragmatism and Anthropocentric Concerns

Critical approaches to environmental ethics have been championed by environmental pragmatists who seek to bring to bear the ontological models and moral frameworks of the classical American Pragmatists on the metaphilosophical, ontological, and moral shortcomings of the conventional approaches. Some go even as so far as to claim that pragmatism has always already been an environmental ethic by taking into account environmental factors in diagnosing moral and social conflict.[90] Most prevalent

[90] Sandra Rosenthal & Rogene Buchholz, "How Pragmatism is an Environmental Ethic." In *Environmental Pragmatism*, edited by Andrew Light & Eric Katz (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996): 30-49.

in the environmental pragmatism is the work of John Dewey. Two main components of his philosophy are imported in order to do environmental ethics: his naturalism to reorganize the relationship between humans and non-human nature (i.e. a relational ontological model compared to the substance/static model with intrinsic value) and his theory of inquiry and valuation to navigate multifaceted and contentious environmental situations (i.e. value pluralism).

The latter would provide a framework for problem analysis and framing that intrinsic value does not have. This problem-framing failure and its conceptual and sociopolitical consequences have already been spelled out by Weston in Chapter II, rearticulated in Chapter III, and as exemplified by the application of the ESA for the Delta Smelt and the California Central Valley case in the previous chapter. The former would help address the issues of ontological distinction highlighted by Cronon and how these ontological and moral distinctions lead to inappropriate moral frameworks as highlighted by Guha. Or as King put it, it is a "disembodied environmental discourse with diminished influence on citizens and policy makers."[91]

There are concerns, however, that having as the focus the social and political conditions of environmental issues in addressing environmental problems shirks the philosophical duty of addressing "discipline-defining questions" such as "answering foundational questions, questions such as 'what sorts of entities are owed moral consideration?'"[92] The conventional approach demands that that causal order of

[91] "Narrative, Imagination, and the Search for Intelligibility in Environmental Ethics," *Ethics and the Environment* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 23.

[92] Christopher Pearson, "Does Environmental Pragmatism Shirk Philosophical Duty?" *Environmental Values* 23 (2014): 335.

investigation proceed from answering the theoretical question in order to address the material conditions (and in this way avoid (dangerous) anthropocentrism).

This is reminiscent of the Rawlsian method of knowing the content and structure of ideal theory before addressing the pressing and urgent non-ideal matters. How can we get the ideas right, however, before knowing what the problems are? As has been argued, the field of environmental ethics and mainstream environmental activism has framed the environmental problem as an issue with the human-nature relation, namely that there is a lack of recognition and respect for the special and intrinsic properties of Nature (mainly found in and through its Wilderness and Wildness). The structure and content of the field and the activist narrative has been about correcting the imbalance between the ontological differences between humans and nature. To convince those who are suspicious of not having a clear distinction between human and non-human interests, what has to be argued is how Dewey's naturalism, in reorganizing the relationship between humans and non-human nature, is not just another way of championing a purely anthropocentric and instrumentalist relationship with the non-human elements of environments.

Dewey's Naturalism

Dewey's pragmatism makes no such sharp ontological distinction between humans and the more-than-human world. Dewey's naturalism spells out why this kind of distinction is unnecessary and is actually part of the problem as echoed by Cronon, Guha, and King. Larry Hickman and Hugh McDonald have already spoken to how Dewey's naturalism is not just a disguised form of anthropocentrism (by uncritically merging together the human and non-human) and how it is in fact a better ontological model for

proceeding with environmental ethics. [93] While Hickman and McDonald differ in certain aspects of their interpretation, both defend it against accusations of dangerous anthropocentrism. In fact, they suggest that Dewey's naturalism trumps the conventional method, for it does not appeal to a constrictive and limiting idealized, independent, and objective realm of non-human nature while also not being a bottomless pit of purely subjective values that can offer no foundation for moral deliberation.

Dewey is famous for speaking about organisms in their environments. Inquiry, in its most basic form, is an organism (re)negotiating its life in and with its environment for a better end; what he calls growth.[94] Dewey's description of what it is for an organism to be in and with its environment has prompted worries on both ends of the philosophical spectrum. George Santayana would accuse Dewey's naturalism of being "half-hearted" or "short-winded" and "ignoring, or worse, idealizing, non-human nature."[95] At the other end, Dewey has been accused of instrumentalism akin to that of the 17th century natural philosophers; reductionist to the point of mechanism.[96] It seems that he describes too little or too much depending on what the interpreters seek to champion.

To interpret Dewey's naturalism and what he calls instrumentalism as either an idealization or a mere reduction is a gross misunderstanding of Dewey's philosophy according to Hickman. "Nature" is a construct, "a complex of objects of knowledge"; it is

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[93] Hugh McDonald, *John Dewey and Environmental Philosophy*.(Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004); Larry Hickman, "Nature as Culture: John Dewey's Pragmatic Naturalism." In *Environmental Pragmatism*, edited by Andrew Light & Eric Katz (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996): 50-72.

[94] The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953. Edited by Jo Ann Boydston and Larry Hickman. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967-1991): LW V. 1.

[95] Hickman, "Nature as Culture: John Dewey's Pragmatic Naturalism," 52.

[96] Hickman, "Nature as Culture: John Dewey's Pragmatic Naturalism," 53.

a cultural artifact, ever-changing, never finished, but "not constructed out of nothing."[97] Dewey's naturalism aims to collapse the sharp Cartesian distinction between mind and body, human and nature.[98] For Dewey, mind, read as human experience, "is found in connection with some organized body. Every such body exists in a natural medium to which it sustains some adaptive connection"[99]; "the human situation falls wholly within nature."[100] If we are to read experience as such, experience is not a privileged and purely subjective position of humans defined as concepts and propositions having only to do with truth claims about discrete objects in the world. Experience is but a basic and ubiquitous activity by all organisms in their material environments as they navigate and negotiate relations; "experience is of as well as in nature."[101] Values, then, are not just in the mind *a priori* or *ad hoc* nor are they transcendent and universal waiting to be appealed to. Values are in and of the (natural) world, dependent on the situation as experienced in and through an environment, not independent or predetermined by a pre-existing, non-natural moral property.

Given the always already entangled character and quality of human experience and the constantly changing environments in which organisms live out their lives, Dewey's naturalism describing how human experience is an extension of the ever on-going (re)negotiation between an environment and its elements cannot be the kind of dangerous anthropocentric utilitarianism that so many fear. That kind of

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[97] Ibid.

[98] McDonald, *John Dewey and Environmental Philosophy*, 67-89.

[99] LW 1.212.

[100] LW 1.315.

[101] LW 1.4.

anthropocentrism only makes sense in an ontology that makes a sharp distinction between human interests and environmental interests; a sharp human-nature antagonism as described by mainstream and radical environmentalism and how many of the intrinsic value arguments are framed.

If done properly, and by that I mean if done with critical self-awareness of history and context, inquiry into environmental problems with a basis in this kind of naturalism is not and cannot be anthropocentric, for it demands an investigation of the entire relational field that creates the problematic situation; human and non-human experience are intertwined and experience growth and regression together. And as with any domain of inquiry for Dewey, in order to inquire correctly "tools must be continuously revised if they are to be appropriate to new tasks. Tasks must be likewise continuously re-evaluated in the light of the tools available for their execution."[102] The tools needed to address the situation should stem from in the midst of the situation and not be predetermined outside the situation in an abstract way, something intrinsic value theory does.

What this kind of ontological and epistemic model does is reveal the deep and rich ever-existing connection between humans and their environments. As has been alluded to throughout this argument, environmental problems and social problems are causes and results of each other, ever (re)negotiating the relationship between how the environment responds to how (sections of) human society (inter)act with their environments. Environmental problems are socio-environmental problems that cannot be disentangled from each other. And attempts to do so, as with intrinsic value theory, blinds one to the histories of how the power relations within human society have caused many

[102] Hickman, "Nature as Culture: John Dewey's Pragmatic Naturalism," 53.

lives – human and non-human alike – and environments to be more harmfully affected than others.

Approaches to environmental ethics like intrinsic value theory, in its attempts to discover or create a neutral narrative that will correct the human-environment relation by pointing to the special and superior properties of Nature, silence the stories of the communities and environments who have had to bear the burdens of sociopolitical constructions and environmental harms. What Dewey's naturalism points out, and what Ben Minteer highlights, is how not all humans experience the same advantages of disrespecting and polluting Nature; not all members of the public reap the benefits of the instrumental human industry of Nature.

Environmental Democracy and the Public Interest

Ben Minteer has highlighted how the issues of unfulfilled democracy and social inequalities are either left unsaid or are soft-spoken in only being pointed at as something that happens in the field of environmental ethics at large and also within the environmental pragmatist camp. He finds the "highly ideological and potentially undemocratic character of the strong version of the nonanthropocentric program" distressing in the potential and active practice of sacrificing local concerns in different specific environments and communities in the name of saving "the environment" at large and in general by closing off collective inquiry and discussion before it can even begin.[103]

Much of what it would mean to be socially and environmentally just rests on there being a democratically sensitive and open inquiry into the causes, both ecological and

[103] *Refounding Environmental Ethics: Pragmatism, Principles, and Practice* (Pennsylvania, PA: Temple University Press, 2012):17.

political, of problems, the values and interests at play in the situation, and the potential avenues to address socio-environmental problems through these causes, values, and interests. Closing off collective inquiry, however, is the result of suspicions, harbored by some in the non-anthropocentric program, concerning democratic approaches to environmental problem-solving. The tension concerning democratic values in environmental ethics, however, or at least according to the conventional environmental ethicists as championed by Callicott, is that they tend to be "cryptic," "insidious," and ironically undemocratic for non-human participants.[104]

Democracy, in any form, is difficult to foster and maintain. That should not be an argument, however, for why it fails or is an impediment to addressing environmental problems. Minteer contests that Callicott wants some sort of "prepolitical claim regarding the essence of human nature, or perhaps the existence of certain natural rights" upon which to ground claims of democratic values, neither of which are philosophically tenable (or at least in the way Callicott and other non-anthropocentrists would want them/accept them).[105]

Minteer defends Dewey's concept of democracy against debate within the pragmatist camp of whether or not it is robust enough to be more than an ungrounded "social hope" or a "fuzzy" utopian vision.[106] He does this by fleshing out in detail how a retooled notion of the "public interest." At the center of environmental ethics should be a citizenry informed and critical of how problems are connected and framed. Listening to the "public interest" requires an open democratic inquiry with the end-in-view of

[104] Minteer, *Refounding Environmental Ethics: Pragmatism, Principles, and Practice*, 23.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Minteer, *Refounding Environmental Ethics: Pragmatism, Principles, and Practice*, 31-35.

changing the material conditions of lives and environments.[107] Minteer boldly states that the field of environmental ethics, or at least the non-anthropocentrist camp, has pitted itself against the "public interest" because it has framed "the public" as having a unified pan-human interest defined as being distinctly against the interests of Nature.[108] In this light, "the public and its problems" are always and only anthropocentric and, as such, cannot be trusted to properly address environmental problems. What of "the public and its environmental problems"?[109]

Minteer reintroduces environmental ethics to the human dimension of environmental problem-solving via democracy and the social justice interests and concerns certain communities have. He suggests that had environmental ethics had a more nuanced and critical notion of different populations of the public and had they paid serious attention to the environmental problems of the marginalized public's interest and concern through Dewey's conception of democracy and theory of inquiry, "it doubtless would have been (and would be now) much more engaged with influential movements in citizen environmental action, not to mention a range of discussions in such areas as risk communication, pollution prevention and regulatory reform, public understanding of science, and so on."[110] I argue that this nuanced notion of the "public interest" is key to avoiding a method that lacks value and method pluralism and that is only comfortable, willing, and able to proceed in a single-minded fashion as the only way to correct environmental problems.

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[107] Minteer, *Refounding Environmental Ethics: Pragmatism, Principles, and Practice*, 41-54.

[108] Minteer, *Refounding Environmental Ethics: Pragmatism, Principles, and Practice*, 39.

[109] Minteer, *Refounding Environmental Ethics: Pragmatism, Principles, and Practice*, 37.

[110] Minteer, *Refounding Environmental Ethics: Pragmatism, Principles, and Practice*, 41.

Minteer describes a framework that takes as its starting point the concerns of different groups with different social positionalities and using those values and concerns to motivate the inquiry into the situation. In not being preoccupied with accomplishing a preset goal via a preset path, it allows for the acknowledgment that not all humans have the same environmental interests (as the non-anthropocentrist program seems to assume in the manner they set up their arguments pitting human values against Nature). And while this is no guarantee that oppressive hierarchies will be immediately dismantled, it at least recognizes them as part of the complex socio-environmental problem that also needs to be addressed.

Environmental pragmatism provides a better ontological foundation for environmental ethics through its adoption of Dewey's naturalism and a better framework for moral deliberation through the application of Dewey's theory of inquiry and valuation. Ben Minteer's work seeks to make the field's centerpiece concerns for the "public interest" and social justice. What is left to be done, however, is to describe how this nuanced and critical perspective of the "public interest" in addressing environmental and social inequalities is not just another step back to purely anthropocentric concerns in addressing environmental problems. Alaimo's trans-corporeality can help temper that concern.

Trans-corporeality and Democratic Naturalism

Environmental (in)Justice

The term "justice" has been used often over the course of the argument. In the previous section through Minteer's work on the "public interest," the notion of what social justice was briefly defined: justice is the result of a democratically sensitive and

open inquiry into the causes of problems, the values and interests at play in the situation, and the potential avenues to address sociopolitical problems through these causes, values, and interests. And so a just act or circumstance is one produced by a certain kind of inquiry. This is meant to address what has been highlighted as being disproportionate social, and environmental, inequity and harm due to power relations that aim to maintain a certain order and hierarchy of social and political power by denying this kind of democratic inquiry.

Defined as such, justice involves a process that involves everyone (i.e. all of the related parties) in the process of inquiry based on the idea that if the voices of all those involved are heard, the process will be able to, as Dewey describes, "be continuously revised" in order "to be appropriate to new tasks" with the tasks likewise being continuously re-evaluated in the light of the tools available.[111] I argue that the kind of focus Minteer puts on social justice as a means to address environmental problems can be sharpened by making cases of environmental injustice the priority of environmental ethics.

Julia Rinne and Carol Dinkins define environmental justice as the task "to create equal access to ecological resources and equal protection from environmental hazards for all persons."[112] The United States Environmental Protection Agency defines it as "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of

[111] Hickman, "Nature as Culture: John Dewey's Pragmatic Naturalism," 53.

[112] Julia Rinne and Carol Dinkins, "Environmental Justice: Merging Environmental Law and Ethics," *Natural Resources and Environment* 25, no. 3(2011): 3.

environmental laws, regulations, and policies."[113] Their criteria for when it will be achieved are "when everyone enjoys: the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and; equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work."[114] The former address the inequities in general. The latter address it as a social, political, and legal project. What will continue to raise eyebrows, however, are the seemingly purely anthropocentric concerns of environmental justice. While the Pragmatist method does reaffirm certain elements of these kinds of notions of justice such as political recognition and procedural fairness that seem purely anthropocentric, what it opens the path for, however, is the idea that justice and its process is not a fixed target but rather one that must be revised through inquiry as circumstances changes.

A focus on environmental injustice will provide a reminder that environmental issues are a consequence of how sociopolitical and environmental circumstances are constantly changing and how these changes affect which environmental are affected and how. Even if there are Earth-system-affecting phenomena like climate change that are bound to affect everyone and everything in some way or rampant and systemically harmful environmental practices such as deforestation, pollution, and extinctions, the causes are multiple and the affected people and areas are not equally harmed. I believe that investigation and action to address environmental injustice should be the centerpiece of environmental ethics. This would simultaneously address the sociopolitical power dynamics that cause and influence environmental degradation and harm and how

[113] U. S. Environmental Protection Agency website, environmental justice page; https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice.

[114] Ibid.

environmental degradation and harm influences and reinforce sociopolitical power dynamics. This can best be done with Stacy Alaimo's description of trans-corporeality.

Trans-corporeality

In her book *Bodily Natures*, Stacy Alaimo spells out how feminism is taking a turn back towards the material. She argues that the linguistic turn, a move thought to be able to better navigate the tensions of gender through social construction, is actually an escape from the source of the problem of how sharp dualistic distinctions between human and nature are the foundations for the sharp distinctions between the masculine and the feminine. The material turn, for Alaimo, is a move directed towards investigating the materiality of human experience in its relations with its environments, because this frame is better at navigating the urgent issues of gender inequality and physical harm perpetuated through disparities in environmental health.[115]

Alaimo appeals to trans-corporeality. Her close readings and ecocriticism of cultural texts pinpoints where and how examples of trans-corporeality highlight the interpenetration and interrelatedness of humans and their environments. She draws upon the work of other material feminists[116] and speaks of the human body as a "viscous porosity" and a "mediating membrane" "which may be biological, social, and political, [and] is a powerful model for understanding material interactions in scientific/ethical/political terms."[117] As spelled out with Dewey's naturalism, by dissolving the sharp and antagonistic distinction between human and Nature, the

[115] Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010): 4-11.

[116] Just to name a few: Elizabeth Grosz, Karen Barad, Jane Bennett, Nancy Tuana, and Lorraine Code.

[117] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*, 15.

experience of environmental problems is not just an abstract violation of moral values but material and physical harm created in and through the on-going complex and entangled interactions between organisms and their environments. It means to describe the multiple levels of importance the exchange of energy and matter have as meaningful and purposive communication between lives and places through time and space.

Trans-corporeality is not, however, just a new materialist or material feminist version or application of Dewey's naturalism. Unqualified naturalism can run the risk, as voiced by Dewey's critics, of homogenizing and potentially flattening out the differences in how lives and environments experience and are experienced. What makes trans-corporeality an integral tool for "democratic naturalism" is how it describes and takes as primary how different bodies and environments experience each other differently because of different sociopolitical statues caused by sociopolitical power differentials. And when the causes of these power differentials influence the unequal exposure and access to environmental harms and benefits as a result of being denied a voice in the process of democratic inquiry, the result is environmental injustice for humans and non-humans alike.

Dewey of course knew of public health problems in cities due to smoke, garbage, and pollution. Minteer mentions environmental justice but only as a public concern that should be a part of inquiry into environmental problems. What makes trans-corporeality different in how it frames and investigates public health and social problems, however, is that it spells out how they are not just human concerns. The most pressing public health concerns such as the increasing occurrence of new and unique cancers and chronic ailments for those who live adjacent to (petrol)chemical refineries, incinerators, (toxic)

dump sites, and agricultural pesticide drift; the effects of hormones and endocrine disrupters and antibiotics leaking and leeching into water; and heavy metal release, deposition and bioaccumulation into skin, organs, bodies, soils, water, and air are not just concerns for the human public. A trans-corporeal investigation would show how human and non-human lives and places are adversely affected and would trace the sources to long-standing and complex sociopolitical and economic issues demanding immediate democratic inquiry for solutions in the public's interest.

Trans-corporeality and Democratic Naturalism

Trans-corporeality gets at something that in many ways Dewey's naturalism alone does not and something Minteer gestures at without fleshing out fully. It understands the extent to which the (human) body is psychosocially and ecologically entangled with its environments. It acknowledges that not all bodies have to face or experience the same environmental fallouts in the same ways because of their social, political, and historical positions. And it remembers the fact that all these issues that ail and affect human bodies, health, and lives are the very same issues that cause and are caused by deforestation, pollution, and extinctions and are involved with the creation and manifestations of Earth-system-affecting phenomenon like climate change. If environmental ethics is first and foremost a practical discipline, it stands to reason that addressing environmental injustices in the method suggested would address the environmental problems that the non-anthropocentric intrinsic value theorists and mainstream and radical environmental activists want to address (even if the problem-framing is vastly different).

"Democratic Naturalism" is a method that takes as primary the disproportionate harmful effects that socially and historically oppressed groups, communities, and their

environments face because of sociopolitically constructed power differentials. How these power differentials are (re)produced and reinforced through bodies and environments should be the starting point for inquiry and the method for framing the ways and means to address socio-environmental problems. To pit the concerns of historically discriminated, underrepresented, and underserviced groups and communities of the public in environmental health and justice against the supposedly higher moral need to protect Nature, its Wildness, and Wilderness and favor the latter over the former at all costs to the point of ignoring it in order to maintain a level of philosophical and theoretical objectivity and neutrality is tantamount to violence. Alaimo's description of trans-corporeality offers a site and framework for identifying what the problems are and why addressing them as issues of environmental justice, with its democratic values and principles, are not just anthropocentric but are also an environmental ethic (at least in the first sense that O'Neill spelled out) in demanding careful inquiry into problems that aim at analyzing unequal and unjust power relations among places and lives that affect humans and non-humans alike.

Because if Callicott is suspicious of talk of democracy in environmental ethics and environmental problem-solving as being dangerous for being "cryptic," "insidious," and ironically undemocratic for non-human participants,[118] it is only because he must not be talking to the right groups of people. Of course it is the case that democracy as it works currently in the United States is not ideal. And it likely never will be. As used here, however, democratic inquiry refers to being critically self-aware that there is a myriad of perspectives and values that must be taken into account when framing problems and in deciding how to best address them. Moreover, it is about realizing that these negotiations

[118] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*, 23.

do not happen in a vacuum of power relations and that these imbalanced relations manifest themselves socially, politically, and environmentally.

Non-anthropocentric intrinsic value theorists, along with most of the field and most mainstream and radical environmental activists, know that there is a gap between concerns and actions. As demonstrated throughout this thesis, the injustice stems from championing methods that are single-minded in their approach to inquiry, silencing groups and lives, which cause pre-existing social and environmental inequities to be aggravated. Given the strong non-anthropocentric part of the field's centerpiece of intrinsic value, it is methodologically and almost purposely blind to how it does not address social inequalities and perpetuates environmental injustice. The mainstream and radical activist campaigns are dangerously overly committed to an environmental story and narrative that time and again has been shown to be nativist, racist, privileged, and out of touch with the concerns and lives of those who cannot visit and commune with Nature in its Wildness and Wilderness in the ways prescribed.

Democratic Naturalism is the commitment to the fact that environmental problems are both causes and consequences of social problems and vice versa in a feedback loop that will not and cannot be stopped by appeal to and the operationalization of some set of values outside the complex situation that needs to be addressed. So if environmental ethics and mainstream environmentalism wants to hold true to their missions of addressing environmental problems, they must begin to address social problems differently (i.e. not through appeal to rigorous conceptual frameworks or reductionist environmental legislation such as the ESA).

By focusing on environmental justice issues through "democratic naturalism," I believe the field can begin to span the theory-practice gap in a way that addresses the co-constitutive and reciprocally influential social and environmental problems without fear of the "dangerous" anthropocentrism. If championing the environmental "public interest" has to do with fewer pollutants, toxins, and environmentally destructive practices effecting (human and non-human) bodies, lives, and environments through addressing failures to achieve social justice for the most vulnerable groups and communities in society by making sure that as many (human and non-human) interests are brought into the inquiry, I cannot see it being anything but ethical, environmentally and otherwise.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Ethical Environmentalism and Pragmatic Environmental Ethics

What does it mean to be an environmentalist? What does it mean to be an environmental ethicist? At its core, these are the questions I have been investigating. More accurately, I have been investigating different answers to these questions. I have described a history shared by mainstream and radical campaigns for environmental protection, reform, and regulation and the professional academic field of environmental ethics – the great American nature writers from the past two centuries and their environmental narrative. The majority of those who identify as environmental ethicists in the professional academic debate probably also identify as environmentalists. And those who identify as environmentalists but who are not part of the professional academic discussion still hold some kind of environmental ethic.

For many, this American environmental narrative heritage takes the form of a need to explore the wild and untrammeled Wilderness on a regular basis to commune with Nature in order to gain a reverence for it. And through the special power this reverence demands, they seek to fulfill a moral obligation to preserve wild Nature, non-human lives and places, by any and all means possible, legal and otherwise, at all costs, and with no compromise. For some others, it takes the form of a professional academic debate that delves into the philosophy of the matter in order to prove and describe how and why Nature and "the Environment" are worthy of moral consideration. And in doing so, it creates/discovers reasons for how and why it ought to be protected.

In Review

I have argued that for the past 40 years the field of environmental ethics, specifically the non-anthropocentrist camp, has been (too) heavily focused on how the concept of intrinsic value is supposed to do this work. In fact, I have likened it to being stuck on a conceptual merry-go-round, a ride that most of its contributors have the privilege treating more like a puzzle. Such a puzzle when solved could provide a "bauble to brandish like a lucky charm in the face" of those who stand in the way of environmental protection. Such a bauble will change minds and practices by its sheer moral force.[119] What I have heavily highlighted, however, is the gap between the rigorous conceptual analysis of something meant to have strong moral force and the work of putting it into practice along with debating the means by which to put it to work in order to address and rectify complex environmental problems. This is what most demands attention because, after all, "environmental ethics is first and foremost a practical discipline" that "should be primarily be concerned with" reasons for and means of action.[120]

I have suggested that the concept of intrinsic value fails as a foundation for and as a method of moral deliberation in environmental ethics because, at best, it is a lazy framework for moral deliberation in that it ignores the entangled sociopolitical and environmental complexity of a situation by reducing the answer to a single set of predetermined values and interests. And in doing this through the vehicle of legislative acts that embody the strongest forms of the concept, it (re)produces and reinforces social and environmental injustice. It is an approach that methodologically has lost sight of the

[119] Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 429, 430.

[120] Samuelsson, "Reasons and Values in Environmental Ethics," 530.

fact that every environmental issue is, by definition, a complex socio-environmental problem and not just a matter of violating or ignoring the moral value of Nature.

Losing sight of this is what prompts the reproduction and reinforcement of social and environmental injustice. According to Minteer, this is due to a myopic vision of what environmental problem-solving should look like academically and sociopolitically. He mentions that Eugene Hargrove, the editor of the journal *Environmental Ethics*, proposes that graduate students in public policy be required to take environmental ethics courses to counterbalance the dominating force of economics in policy programs.[121] Minteer believes that the argument needs to run in the other direction as well; environmental ethics should be interdisciplinary, looking outside of its philosophical home and strength towards other fields to bolster and fill its blind spots.[122] The non-anthropocentrist intrinsic value camp of the field appeals to biology and ecology often to ground its strong moral realist and objectivist claims of mind-independence properties and values. These are often the limits to its venturing (along with those who dare to flirt with utilitarianism, appealing to economics).

This is not to say that rigorous philosophical work is not useful; the philosophical duty of addressing "discipline-defining questions" such as "answering foundational questions, questions such as 'what sorts of entities are owed moral consideration'" can still be part of the inquiry.[123] If the philosophical duty of environmental ethics, however, stops short of engaging with the sociopolitical dimension because it is of no concern to

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[121] Minteer, *Refounding Environmental Ethics: Pragmatism, Principles, and Practice*, 55. Minteer here is referring to Eugene Hargrove in "What's Wrong? Who's to Blame?" *Environmental Ethics* 25 (2003): 3, 4.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Pearson, "Does Environmental Pragmatism Shirk Philosophical Duty?" 335.

the moral truth of the matter, then the duties must be redefined. As Minteer states, "when ethical critique is necessary, environmental philosophers can certainly provide it, although they will be doing so as politically engaged *citizens* rather than dogmatic metaphysicians – or, worse, as environmental philosopher kings;" they do not have "special *knowledge* of the moral and metaphysical truths that must govern communities' relationship with their natural and social environments."[124] Environmental ethicists would be part of an interdisciplinary approach to socio-environmental problem-solving and not the only way of doing it. Moreover, they must engage with environmental problems as engaged citizens aware of and sensitive to the social and political history of lives, people, and places.

Environmental pragmatism begins to do this following Dewey's theory of inquiry and valuation making for a better foundation and method of moral deliberation. Minteer pushes this further by building into the framework Dewey's commitment to democracy through focusing the discussion on the "public interest" which takes both the social and physical environments into consideration when investigating the situation and framing problems. Depending on how a problem is framed, it defines and dictates the possible solutions. The results tend to be very different when the problem is framed as an issue of violating the mind-independent moral value of Nature versus a matter of social inequities in access to environmental protection and benefits. Environmental ethics tends to follow the former model of problem-framing. "Democratic naturalism" tries to address both at the same time (without the "mind-independent" part, though).

Of course, the champions of intrinsic value will always be suspicious of any human interest being a part of the deliberation process, let alone at the front and center of

[124] Minteer, *Refounding Environmental Ethics: Pragmatism, Principles, and Practice*, 35.

it. Dewey's naturalism as the ontological foundation to environmental pragmatism's method begins to address the concerns of anthropocentrism. Bolstered by Alaimo's description of trans-corporeality, it works through the reality that not all humans benefit equally from "untampered" economic growth and development; the environmental degradation from economic development is not just a non-human concern. "Democratic naturalism" takes as primary the power relations that make, reinforce, and embed the material disparities between bodies, human and non-human, in constant dynamic interaction with their environments.

Democratic Naturalism for the Delta

To return to the concrete example of the California Delta Smelt, what would the application of "democratic naturalism" look like when engaging with this complex socio-environmental problem? It would be no simple task, asking many contentious stakeholders and agencies to come together and work cooperatively. As mentioned, the issue has to do not just with the Delta Smelt and their numbers but also with century-old water rights law, agricultural policy at the state and national level, immigration policy, labor policy, public health policy concerning the conditions of the people living in the Central Valley communities, industrial and commercial water use regulations throughout the state, and regional disputes concerning political clout and power. Their entangled character means that in order to address any one of these involves addressing all the others.

To begin in the Delta itself, the Delta Smelt should continue to be monitored by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the CA Fish and Game Department as an indicator species for the health of the Delta. The heavy cultivation of the Delta itself leads to

chemical run-off that affects the water quality for both the Smelt and those who live in the area. There are environmental justice groups already addressing the use of toxic chemicals. The social and political will for addressing toxic fertilizers and pesticides already exists and is gaining momentum throughout the Central Valley with institutions and associations doing research on alternative farming methods with advocacy groups campaigning for a restructuring of how federal and state agriculture bills fund and support alternative farming practices.

In addition to addressing agricultural and chemical use practices, water rights and allocation processes would also have to be changed. The State Water Resources Control Board and municipal water districts throughout the state would have to grapple with the fact that almost 60% of the state lives in the Southern 10 counties and are mostly dependent on non-local sources of water (and mostly from the Northern part of the state). California's water rights laws would have to be updated to better reflect the current population centers and water availability in the face of increasing drought and less snowpack. Most water districts already have strong water conservation campaigns. Most water use, however, is for industrial and agricultural purposes. These, however, are hardly ever addressed when discussing drought mitigation and water conservation. Efforts to hold large industrial use of water responsible are already happening.

In terms of the lives and livelihoods of those in the Central Valley, there are already campaigns that seek to better the working conditions of farmworkers and provide better protection for documented and undocumented migrant workers. With better allocation of funds in the state assembly and federal Congress, social services can be made more readily available for the communities that are most affected by the labor and

economic fluctuations in the farmworker market. The environmental justice groups mentioned mobilize communities and lobby for these changes.

As is evident, there is much that needs to be done. And most of it is being done but in piece-meal. The issue is that when the ESA is used as the problem-framing and problem-solving framework, these different campaigns and efforts are not encouraged to work in concert to address the systemic issues of which the Delta Smelt is an indicator. After investigating the sociopolitical issues at the heart of the problem, "Democratic naturalism" would focus on coalition building in order to unite the political will around addressing all these different issues. It requires massive governmental inter-agency communication and collaboration that is yet to happen. It requires coalition building between mainstream environmental groups and environmental justice groups that is, so far, lacking.

What must also be addressed, however, in order to make sure that this method does not find its way back to only addressing anthropocentric interests is the question of what does justice look like for non-human participants in the process, namely the Delta Smelt. It is true that the Delta Smelt may not live past the next 25 years. [125] Even if all these campaigns on multiple fronts are successful in the next several decades, the likelihood that the Delta Smelt will survive is quite low. Not even following the strong intrinsic value method as done by the ESA would the survival of the Smelt be likely. Even as the species becomes extinct, the process to save it would not address the larger underlying sociopolitical issues. Is "democratic naturalism" a failure if it is unable to save the Delta Smelt? I do not think this kind of question is the most useful way of judging the success or failure of the method. Justice for the smelt would be it being taken as an

[125] 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq., Federal Register, 59 (242), 65256-65279; CA FISH & G § 2050 - 2115.5

important factor in the situation, an indicator of the health of the Delta and of the effects of the efforts to address all the different aspects of the complex issue. The method cannot guarantee its survival. But very little can.

The method seeks to be able to help foster and build coalitions and multifaceted campaigns that recognize and address the sociopolitical power dynamics that influence social and environmental injustice. It works to immediately address certain problems and to build the social and political resources to be better able to abate other problems as they begin to surface. And of course there will be problems that may be unforeseen. Open democratic inquiry with a central focus on the most vulnerable bodies and environments – human and non-human alike – hopes to minimize the number and degree of unforeseen or unseen issues. The health of the Smelt is integral to assessing the state of the democratic inquiry and its progress. Even if this is the best "democratic naturalism" can do is help build networks of communities and frameworks of idea that are better equipped to handle socio-environmental problems as they are happening in the hope of addressing them before they happen., it is still better than what the intrinsic value method produces.

The Task Ahead

Reframing environmental ethics with environmental justice as its centerpiece is not a panacea, of course. But there is no panacea, no silver bullet, no bauble or lucky charm that will easily correct the inexorably entangled complex of socio-environmental problems that affect so many lives, human and non-human, in so many places at tremendously large scales. Most of those in the non-anthropocentrist intrinsic value theory camp will have little to no faith in the sociopolitical route I am championing for

environmental ethics either because of continued concerns about anthropocentrism or because the sociopolitical route of addressing anything has always been a Sisyphean task.

For those who fear the former, they need to get out more, and not to the mountains to heed their call as Muir did or to the solitary landscape of the desert as Abbey did. They need to be sensitive to what it is like to live next to a petrochemical plant that releases compounds most chemists cannot even pronounce, gases that sting lungs and burn eyes and irritate skin, causing new and unique cancers never before seen. These gases change the world of the people living near them by no choice of their own or because they have no other choice. These gases, when you take into account how many sites where they are released and how many people face their harmful effects, are the very same gases that change the atmosphere and change the world at the Earth system level. So where is the anthropocentric danger in addressing the environmental health concerns of these communities when it would also have to address climate change and acid rain and toxins and other by-products that affect the non-human flora and fauna?

For those who fear the latter, what else is new? Addressing environmental problems will always be difficult, no matter how the problems are framed. I have argued that the way non-anthropocentric intrinsic value theory frames problems results in efforts to circumnavigate the human dimension through legal means by giving non-human lives and places legal and moral priority. In doing so, it (re)produces and perpetuates social and political problems (often times the very problems that created the environmental issue). At least with environmental justice being the focus, the field would immediately begin engaging with the sociopolitical aspects of problems and hopefully address environmental degradation along with/due to addressing social inequities. This means

that the field in general, and especially the non-anthropocentrist intrinsic value camp, would have to incorporate more political science, legal studies, and other fields while also engaging and being a part of the political and social movements that have been championing environmental justice for decades. Because if the field and its different camps hope to be what Samuelsson says it is – "first and foremost a practical discipline" that "should be primarily be concerned with" reasons for and means of action – and to do it in a manner that does not (re)produce and reinforce social injustices by ignoring or reducing complex situations, it has to begin to work differently.[126] If it is to be a practical discipline, it must find a new arena for the field, an arena outside of ink and paper and into a field that works with communities to address socio-environmental problems as concerned and engaged citizens.

[126] Samuelsson, "Reasons and Values in Environmental Ethics," 530.

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