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Foundations Old and New

The Problems of (Environmental) Philosophers

On many, if not most, academic measures, the field of environmental ethics can be considered a great success. Today, courses in environmental ethics and philosophy are offered in the majority of college and university curricula; in many places, these are taught outside philosophy departments (e.g., in environmental studies programs; schools of public policy, forestry, and natural resources; and, in my own case, the life sciences). The field has produced a large and interesting literature, including major textbook anthologies, monographs, and a growing fleet of academic journals. Professional societies have been established, and dozens of national and international meetings focusing on environmental ethics issues and themes have been held. In sum, the field has, in only a few short decades, carved out its own intellectual identity and become a fixture in the applied philosophical landscape, taking its place alongside its bioethics, business ethics, and engineering ethics counterparts.

Judged on more pragmatic criteria, however, the field does not score nearly as high. In fact, a candid appraisal of environmental ethics based solely on its public policy and management impact would likely conclude that it was something of a failure. If this seems an unfair standard for evaluating an academic discipline, especially a branch of philosophy (which often measures itself by its ability to transcend the affairs of daily life), we should remember that a major part of the justification of the field when it formed in the 1970s was to provide a focused philosophical response to society's environmental problems. Species extinction and the loss of wildlands, air and water pollution, overpopulation and resource scarcity, global climate change, and the decline of ecosystem services: These problems have evoked and continue to

generate serious ethical concerns and obligations, from our responsibilities to nonhuman species and ecosystems, to our character as local (and global) ecological citizens, to our duties and obligations to achieve a fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens for present and future generations. Yet it would be difficult to mount a convincing argument that environmental ethics discourse has made a significant contribution to tackling these societal challenges or that it has played an important role in the environmental policy process or conservation planning and practice more generally.

On the contrary, the field seems to have become increasingly irrelevant to addressing the major environmental problems facing society as we move deeper into the twenty-first century. Instead of (for example) becoming a productive ally in the work of shaping, critiquing, and justifying sound environmental policy agendas or clarifying key debates and normative standards in public discussions over alternative management actions, environmental ethics has largely chosen to turn inward, becoming an increasingly specialized and insular academic discourse. Although it may be a discourse of great intellectual and professional value to philosophers and other environmental theorists, it has proven to be of comparatively little value—and to have little tangible impact—in the “real world.”

This certainly seems to be the view of those who have worked in and studied the environmental policy and management domain. Donald A. Brown, an authoritative voice on the subject, with decades-long experience in the policy trenches at the state, federal, and international levels, has observed that the work of environmental ethicists “is almost never read by policy makers and infrequently considered in day-to-day decision making about pressing environmental issues” (Brown 2009, 215). Brown’s view is not an unusual one. Public administration specialist Susan Buck (1997) has similarly concluded that environmental administrators and agency personnel typically have very little use for the philosophical proclivities of environmental ethicists. In Buck’s experience, this attitude is largely due to the institutional culture and politics of agency decision making, especially the role of administrative discretion: “Discussions of environmental philosophy and ethics have little impact on the routine discretionary choices of government bureaucrats charged with administering environmental programs. . . . Public administrators take an oath to uphold the Constitution, not *Walden*, however much they may approve of the sentiments in the latter” (Buck 1997, 8–9).

In addition to these personal accounts, persuasive empirical evidence supports the judgment that philosophical environmental ethics has failed to break out of the confines of academic life and become a key player—or even an active participant—in the public realm. Legal scholar Christopher Stone conducted a revealing study of congressional and judicial databases in which he electronically scoured the record for explicit mention of environmental ethical concepts and authors. Stone’s results were discouraging, at least for philosophers hoping to shape legal and policy tools for environmental protection. An extensive survey of these databases revealed only “sparse allusion to environmental ethicists and their literature” (Stone 2003, 15). Although Stone’s study may be criticized for its narrow framing of what counts as an environmental ethical concept (see, e.g., Norton

2003), his analysis is nevertheless an illuminating investigation into the relative inability of the field to enter into the deliberations of Congress and the courts.

What explains this failure of influence and impact? Why has environmental ethics, unlike biomedical ethics (for example), been unable to escape the groves of academe and find its way into key policy, law, and management debates—the very discussions the founders of the field hoped (and still seek) to influence? I argue in this book that a number of reasons explain why this has happened, including the tendency for environmental philosophers to press ideological moral programs that do not comport with traditional (aka “anthropocentric”) human values and motivations shaping public policy and management. These same programs, moreover, do not articulate well with many of the established intellectual and methodological commitments within mainstream normative ethics, political theory, and the experimental social sciences. This creates further tensions between the field and the scholarly discourses that have historically been important to the justification of environmental public policy and management. Indeed, the dogmatic nature and disciplinary purity of much environmental ethical theorizing frequently renders it an oppositional force in public policy and management discussions, a style of argument that too often tries to confront and commandeer environmental decision making rather than clarify and enrich it. In my view, this produces a philosophical posture that fails to reflect (and often attempts to constrain) the diversity of interests and values at stake in particular environmental dilemmas. It is a move that I would argue ultimately prevents philosophers from making significant contributions to integrative and intelligent policy and problem solutions.

I believe that a critical choice needs to be made here, one that will do much to determine the public impact of environmental ethics in the coming decades. The field can remain a closed discussion among philosophers and environmental theorists, insulated from the empirical details and demands of policy and practice and theoretically and methodologically walled off from the other disciplines key to understanding and managing the human-nature relationship. Or it can choose a different path, one more appropriate to a pragmatic, collaborative, and inclusive style of practical philosophy that attempts to make good on the field’s original promise: to help us make sense of our environmental values and choices as moral agents and democratic citizens within a mixed (i.e., human and natural) community.

Refounding Environmental Ethics is my argument for taking this other path—that is, for choosing policy pragmatism over philosophical purity, democracy over dogma, and impact over ideology. The book makes a case for a major reorganization of environmental ethics as a branch of applied philosophy—in particular the reconstruction of its normative structure and methodological orientation—and a fundamental rethinking of the field’s wider political and policy ambitions. Specifically, in the chapters that follow, I try to sketch an image of a more problem-focused, more experimental (and less ideological), more integrative and interdisciplinary environmental ethics. This vision reflects my conviction that a philosophically sound and policy-relevant environmental ethics will necessarily be a pluralistic, naturalistic, and collaborative environmental ethics.

The “refounding” of environmental ethics I advocate in these pages is heavily shaped by my reading of a critical set of philosophical and methodological commitments in American pragmatic philosophy and democratic thought. In some cases, it is a direct derivation, employing the tools and arguments of this tradition to critique dominant tendencies in the field that I suggest are holding environmental ethics back from achieving its full potential as a policy-relevant, practical philosophy of human-environment relationships. In other places, it is a more general attempt to reconstruct environmental ethics to make it more compatible with other disciplines and frameworks key to understanding and resolving environmental problems, most notably the social and life sciences.

Writing in 1917, John Dewey, a founding figure in American pragmatism (and whose work informs many of the arguments and proposals in this book), articulated a revisionist view of the philosophical project that provides a touchstone for this more pragmatic understanding of environmental ethics. “Philosophy recovers itself,” he suggested, “when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men” (Dewey 1917, 46). For present purposes, I would like to revise and adapt Dewey’s conclusion to the following: “*Environmental* philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers, and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers *and others*, for dealing with the *environmental* problems of *society*” [emphasis added]. I describe, defend, and illustrate exactly what I mean by this modified Deweyan ideal in the chapters that follow.

Before we go any further, however, a quick sketch of the development of academic environmental ethics is necessary, because it will provide a fuller account of how we arrived at the crossroads I mention above. I also hope it will make clearer the challenges confronting any attempt to refound environmental ethics as a pragmatic field of inquiry.

The Origins of Environmental Ethics in the 1970s

Although it is fairly common today to hear talk of our having ethical obligations to conserve wild species, restore degraded ecosystems, combat global climate change, and so forth, explicitly moral rhetoric regarding the land and its nonhuman inhabitants was quite unusual until the later decades of the twentieth century. Writing in 1949, conservationist-philosopher Aldo Leopold, who would eventually become the most significant historical figure in the development of academic environmental ethics, observed that “there is as yet no ethic dealing with man’s relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it. . . . The land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations” (Leopold 1949, 203). Accordingly, Leopold proposed a new “land ethic” that he suggested should serve as a normative standard for evaluating good from bad land use (and ethical behavior toward nonhuman nature more generally). His words are by now quite familiar to environmental philosophers and conserva-

tionists: “A thing is right,” he concluded, “when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise” (224). Decades later, Leopold’s ethical dictum continues to challenge and inspire environmental ethicists as well as land-use planners, foresters, conservation scientists, and others seeking to apply and defend his fundamental ethical breakthrough to the landscape (e.g., Callicott 1989; Beatley 1994; List 2000; Knight and Riedel 2002; Freyfogle 2003; Norton 2005).

Leopold’s land ethic (and his other writing collected in his well-known book, *A Sand County Almanac*) would cast a long shadow over the development of academic environmental ethics when it emerged in the early 1970s. Yet the field was ultimately the product of a fairly complex public and scholarly environment, which may be described as the convergence of “external” social, political, and cultural forces and more academic trends within the discipline of philosophy during this time. The rise of the U.S. environmental movement in the 1960s was the popular stimulus for the development of an applied ethics focused on environmental problems, the attempt to bring the analytical resources of moral philosophy to the “ecological crisis” (e.g., White 1967). As mentioned above, the indicators of environmental decline (then as now) were many and evident across a range of media: air and water pollution, endangered species and the loss of wilderness, resource shortages and human overpopulation.

The popularization of the science of ecology during this same time was another contributing factor, providing the descriptive foundations upon which many philosophers would attempt to build a comprehensive worldview and value system that accounted for the integrity and richness of natural processes and biological entities. From the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962—often considered to be the literary fountainhead of American environmentalism—to the work of Paul Ehrlich (1968) and Barry Commoner (1971), which warned the nation (if not the world) of the ecological and social dangers of human overconsumption, overpopulation, and rapid technological development, the ecological conception of human-environment relations would directly feed into environmental ethics (albeit in often wildly disparate ways), shaping ethicists’ understanding of human impacts on biological populations, species, and ecosystems.

Internal developments in academic philosophy also provided the context for the birth of environmental ethics in the 1970s, particularly the revival of interest in social and political philosophy signified by the appearance of such works as John Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice* (1971) and Robert Nozick’s *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974). The founding of the journal *Philosophy and Public Affairs* in the early 1970s as an outlet for a more socially and politically engaged mode of philosophical writing was another indication that philosophers were becoming increasingly concerned with examining challenging and controversial societal issues, such as poverty, warfare, and abortion. Environmental ethics was therefore part of the larger applied ethics movement that arose in this period, which also included (among other domains) biomedical ethics, engineering ethics, and business ethics. Perhaps the most influential philosopher working in this new applied and publicly engaged mode was Peter Singer, whose work (again, then as now) provided a

critical ethical assessment of a wide range of social practices, including the treatment of animals, famine relief, and euthanasia (e.g., Singer 1975, 1979).

The origins of environmental ethics thus reflect societal and academic trends in the 1960s and 1970s that found philosophers seeking to respond to environmental decline as part of a more engaged style of moral philosophy. Since its beginnings, the field has evolved primarily as a nonanthropocentric moral discourse—that is, as a series of normative arguments for preserving wilderness, wildlife, natural communities, and so on for their own sake rather than any contribution they might make to human welfare or well-being. As part of this project, nonanthropocentric philosophers also were determined to highlight and ultimately dismantle the “arrogant humanism” of modern attitudes toward the natural world (i.e., anthropocentrism). Picking up on the antianthropocentric theme sounded by historian Lynn White, Jr., in his widely discussed essay published in 1967 in the magazine *Science*, early papers by Richard Routley (1973), Holmes Rolston (1975), and Kenneth Goodpaster (1978) set the stage for much of the field’s subsequent development along nonanthropocentric lines, whereas work by legal scholar Stone made a parallel case for the rights of natural entities (Stone 1972). The nature-centered worldview and ethical system would be advanced in a steady stream of book-length arguments published in the following decades by Paul Taylor (1986), Rolston (1986, 1988, 1994), Laura Westra (1994), Eric Katz (1997), and J. Baird Callicott (1989, 1999a), among many others.

Although important differences existed among these approaches, such as whether a nonanthropocentric ethic should target individual organisms (biocentrism) or ecological communities (ecocentrism), whether intrinsic value in nature was viewed as being independent of (or dependent upon) human consciousness and valuation, and so on, they were generally united in the view, alluded to above, that environmental problems were the consequence of a flawed anthropocentric ontology and ethics. These philosophical failures, nonanthropocentric theorists argued, needed to be corrected by the adoption of a value framework able to account for the intrinsic value or inherent worth of nature within a biologically or ecologically defined metaphysical system. One of the more significant conclusions that the nonanthropocentrists drew was that many of the resources of the Western philosophical tradition, hobbled by an exclusivist concern with the “interests” or “moral considerability” of human beings, was incapable of motivating and justifying pro-environmental attitudes and practices, at least in their conventional humanist forms.

Not everyone shared this view during the field’s formative period, however. For example, philosophers John Passmore (1974) and Bryan Norton (1984) argued that a nature-centered moral philosophy was not necessary to support conservation policies and environmental protection. Passmore argued that sufficient moral resources were already present in established humanistic philosophical traditions, while Norton’s version of “weak anthropocentrism” made a critical distinction between exploitative readings of anthropocentrism and more enlightened, idealistic formulations of “human-centeredness” that could effectively guide pro-environmental policies and practices (I discuss this in more detail in Chapters

4 and 5). These dissenting humanist arguments in the field were largely made in isolation until the mid-1990s, which saw the development of what would become known as “environmental pragmatism,” following the title of an influential anthology of papers edited by Andrew Light and Katz (1996). Although this general designation masked a fair amount of philosophical diversity, it captured an important familial relationship linking the work of more practice-oriented and pluralistic approaches in environmental ethics that represented a significant departure from the field’s prevailing nonanthropocentrism.

The Pragmatic Turn

Indeed, the new environmental pragmatists (among whom Norton was the most prominent) would soon become identified by a number of methodological and theoretical attributes that distinguished their work from that of the biocentric and ecocentric writers in the field. Perhaps the most notable was the adoption of a general empirical temperament toward environmental values and principles. Many of the pragmatists in environmental ethics would devote their energy in the early years of the movement to making a variety of arguments for paying more attention to using philosophical tools to make more significant and useful contributions to the realms of public policy and problem solving (e.g., Norton 1991; Light and Katz 1996). In doing so, they were following in the tradition of American pragmatist philosophy, a school originally associated with the writing and thought of such late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century philosophers as Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), William James (1842–1910), and Dewey (1859–1952). Although I elaborate many of the significant themes of pragmatism and its implications for environmental ethics throughout this book, I would like to briefly highlight some of the tradition’s key features and commitments here, with some additional explication in the next section, where I outline the book in more detail.

For starters, it is helpful to make a basic semantic distinction relevant to understanding what it means to refer to a philosophical approach as “pragmatic,” especially given that “pragmatism” is one of those crossover terms that has currency in popular speech and in philosophical discourse. In its everyday, nontechnical usage, being pragmatic typically implies that one is focused more on achieving results rather than conforming to higher principles or doctrinal purity. In its least flattering articulation, pragmatism becomes synonymous with political expediency, a semantic shading that suggests a sharp division between pragmatism and ethical integrity. Although aspects of the popular meaning of pragmatism do parallel its philosophical expression, the latter is much more sophisticated (epistemologically and ethically) than the commonsense usage might lead one to believe.

Historically, the pragmatist tradition in philosophy may be traced back to the “Metaphysical Club,” a short-lived philosophical discussion group that met in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the early 1870s (Menand 2001). Its members included first-generation pragmatist philosophers, such as Peirce and James, who sought to reconstruct philosophical concepts and methods to comport with a

Darwinian and post-Cartesian worldview (which entailed the rejection of fixed essences and a priori truths). The classical pragmatist tradition would reach its peak with the work of Dewey in the early decades of the twentieth century. Dewey's "instrumentalist" version of pragmatism is especially known for its attempt to make philosophical analysis relevant to pressing ethical, social, and political questions. His project was the most politically and socially engaged of the classical pragmatists; as a result, and as I argue in various ways in the ensuing chapters, Dewey's reconstruction of the traditional philosophical methods and categories is especially valuable for a pragmatic refounding of environmental ethics.

Pragmatism's influence in academic philosophy waned greatly by the 1940s, when it became overshadowed by the rise of logical positivism and logical empiricism, which were much more concerned than pragmatism with the formal study of logic, language, and semantics. The eclipse of pragmatism in academic philosophy was not total during this period, however, as quasi-pragmatist ideas were kept alive in the work of such philosophers as W.V.O. Quine and Rudolf Carnap, who are sometimes considered "analytic pragmatists." Pragmatism would eventually experience a significant resurgence in philosophy beginning in the 1970s, a rebirth largely attributable to the work of what came to be called "neopragmatist" philosophers, such as Richard Bernstein, Cornel West, Hilary Putnam, Jürgen Habermas, and especially Richard Rorty.

The philosophical heterogeneity of American pragmatism (past and present) makes it challenging to offer accurate generalizations about the tradition as a whole, especially those regarding the familial linkages between the prominent neo- and classical pragmatists. Some contemporary neopragmatists, for example, reject much of the epistemological and metaphysical trappings of historical pragmatism; Rorty's postmodernist makeover of Deweyan pragmatism is notorious for attempting to jettison any trace of Dewey's strong commitment to science and the logic of experimental inquiry (I have more to say about this in the next chapter). To make matters even more taxonomically complicated, pragmatism has captured the imagination of a diverse assortment of scholars outside philosophy, including those within cultural theory, law, history, politics, religion, and economics (see, e.g., Brint and Weaver 1991; Gunn 1992; Feffer 1993; Festenstein 1997; Hamner 2002; Posner 2003; Bromley 2006).

In its philosophical mode, pragmatism evokes a loosely connected set of theories about truth, meaning, inquiry, and value. The "pragmatic maxim" first stated by Peirce—the idea that a belief regarding an idea or object is properly fixed by inquiry into its practical consequences—provides a basic logical entrée to pragmatist philosophy, although we can identify a few related commitments and concepts that begin to flesh out the tradition in more detail.

One of the defining philosophical moves within pragmatism is the rejection of foundationalism—that is, the denial by pragmatists of the idea (shared by traditional rationalists and empiricists) that knowledge and belief must be grounded in a class of certain, fixed, and basic beliefs that themselves require no justification (i.e., they are self-evident or self-justifying in some manner). In questioning the existence of such foundational truths, such pragmatists as Dewey thus rejected

traditional philosophy's "quest for certainty" and embraced a more experimental and fallibilistic view of knowledge in which all beliefs—even those we have good reason to hold based upon previous experience—are open to criticism, revision, and replacement (Kloppenber 1998, 85). As I describe in more detail in the next chapter, the foundationalist impulse has significant implications not only for epistemology but also for wider arguments in moral and political philosophy. The search for fixed and immutable beliefs or standards for ethical and political life, for example, conflicts with an explicitly pragmatic and contextual approach to ethical judgment and democratic politics; unlike foundationalist approaches, the latter rest upon the contingent beliefs and practices of particular communities rather than universalist and absolutist claims to certainty and moral purity (Festenstein 1997, 4).

The rejection of foundational anchoring for knowledge, however, did not entail the wholesale surrender to skepticism for the pragmatists; as philosopher Putnam has suggested, the notion that one could be a fallibilist and an antiskeptical is perhaps the most novel epistemological insight of pragmatism (Putnam 1994, 152). Instead, the pragmatist embrace of fallibilism leads necessarily to a pluralistic rather than a singular or reductionistic view of belief, value, and the good. Given that individuals and communities are differently situated and are shaped to a significant degree by dissimilar traditions and experiences, as well as the fact that novel ethical situations and empirical problem contexts are always emerging (and with them, new tests for previously held beliefs and values), pragmatists view adherence to any single belief, moral principle, or rule in the face of such complexity and change as unacceptably dogmatic and ill-advised. The pragmatist commitment to pluralism, in turn, reinforces the embrace of fallibilism: As Bernstein (1989) points out, the adoption of a pluralistic ethos requires taking seriously the condition of contingency and human fallibility, for no matter how committed we are to our own beliefs and values, we must be willing to listen to others with different ideas, demonstrating the virtues of open-mindedness and tolerance for opposing views that are among the most significant features of pragmatism as an anti-ideological and experimental philosophical system.

Classical pragmatists did not ignore the incommensurability and even open conflict among disparate values, however; indeed, it was well understood by Dewey, whose hopes for a more naturalistic and scientific approach to value formation and ethical judgment may be read as an attempt to cope with the inescapable challenge of having to choose among competing goods, beliefs, and courses of social action. In Dewey's work, this led to a method of humanistic inquiry modeled after the workings of the scientific community—that is, the view that we should turn to the "laboratory" of lived human experience to determine what is in fact good and right for any given community attempting to solve its own particularized dilemmas and problematic situations. Indeed, Dewey and Peirce believed that working in concert, a diverse association of experimental "inquirers" (which could include experts, citizens, or, ideally, both) was better positioned to identify relevant facts and to construct problem solutions—and to root out factual error and distorting forces—than were individuals operating by themselves,

constrained by their idiosyncratic perspectives and biases. For Peirce, who sought to develop pragmatism as a scientific metaphysics, truth would eventually emerge from the ideal workings of organized experimental inquiry over the long run (Haack 2004). For Dewey, truth and good would emerge from a similar yet less formalized process of discussion, debate, and persuasion within a community of inquirers, a method of “social intelligence” that was supported by and in turn secured a democratic social order (Westbrook 2005).

Antifoundationalism, fallibilism, pluralism, experimentalism, empiricism: These are a few core features of philosophical pragmatism (to this list, we could also add further commitments, including the moral and linguistic emphasis on community; e.g., Bernstein 1989, Campbell 1992). But returning to environmental ethics, we can now see just how pragmatist environmental philosophers at the end of the twentieth century would begin to develop a number of themes found in the work of the classical pragmatists, including the embrace of value pluralism, humanism, and a strong methodological naturalism that found pragmatically minded ethicists seeking empirical resolution for many of the philosophical and ethical questions facing environmental philosophers, professionals, and activists (e.g., Norton 1991; Light and Katz 1996; Minter 1998; Minter and Manning 2000). In doing so, environmental pragmatists were thus launching a fundamental challenge to the dominant philosophical project in environmental ethics—that is, monistic nonanthropocentrism. In particular, pragmatists criticized nonanthropocentrists’ rejection of humanistic value systems and justifications for environmental policies and practices as being metaphysically and epistemologically flawed—and a move that would likely undercut the desire of citizens and decision makers to support a sufficiently strong environmental policy agenda (e.g., Norton 1992, 1996; Light 2000). Instead, environmental pragmatists saw the broad instrumentalism, experimentalism, pluralism, and, above all, practical temperament of the tradition of Peirce, James, and Dewey as offering a more compelling philosophical backdrop to nature conservation and environmental protection, even for those who drew upon the tradition more for methodological inspiration than for substantive philosophical content (e.g., Light 2002, 2004).

Not surprisingly, the reception of environmental pragmatism among most nonanthropocentric philosophers in the field has been chilly at best (e.g., Katz 1997, 2009; Rolston 1998, 2009; Callicott 1999b, 2002a; Westra 2009). Even though environmental pragmatists subscribe to a more pluralistic and far less environmentally aggressive form of humanism than the “strong anthropocentric” attitude characteristic of mainstream economics and certain strands of traditional ethical theory, many still see the pragmatists’ rejection of strong nonanthropocentric theories of intrinsic value as a kind of philosophical revolt, a direct challenge to what it means to be doing environmental ethics in the first place. Nevertheless, most environmental pragmatists argue that the “nature-centered” ethic of the nonanthropocentrists—which many take to be the field’s unique contribution to applied ethics—is philosophically unpersuasive and that, regardless, it is a politically ineffective and ultimately unnecessary position. A liberal, pluralistic environmentalism in which the normative focus is shifted to the full array of human values

provided by nature can, pragmatists suggest, effectively explain and justify sound environmental practices and policy choices, including the transition to a more sustainable society (e.g., Norton 1991; Norton and Minter 2002; Norton 2005).

Despite the gloomy appraisals of the legal and policy influence of the field discussed above, some philosophers, such as Callicott (2002a), have long maintained that theoretical environmental ethics—which typically means investigations into and defenses of the intrinsic value of nature—is nevertheless having a significant impact in the public realm, transforming the discourse of environmental value among activists and environmental professionals in much the way the language of human rights changed the legal and political culture of the West. For example, Callicott (2009) has recently argued that an analysis of judicial decisions in the wake of the passage of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 provides powerful evidence in support of the view that nonanthropocentric ideas are increasingly significant in the protection of listed species, a view that the pragmatist Norton (2009) has disputed. Although the debate between nonanthropocentrists and pragmatists over the empirical evidence for philosophical impact will likely continue, it is worth mentioning that even those observers with very little at stake in the debate over value theory in the field—and no particular loyalty to the pragmatist position—have noted that the field has not had much of an impact in the public realm, certainly not as much as many environmental philosophers had hoped (e.g., Frodeman 2006).

Accordingly, in *Refounding Environmental Ethics*, I argue that the field needs to focus on improving its methods of inquiry and becoming more open to a public mode of ethical and policy deliberation, one strongly supportive of environmental value pluralism and an experimental and contextual approach to ethical reasoning (of the latter, more is said in Chapters 4 and 7). Unlike most nonanthropocentric philosophers, I do not think that additional forays into moral ontology (i.e., what things in the world “count” or have moral status in ethical deliberations) will do much to settle what have become intractable disputes over value theory in environmental ethics, nor would a theoretical consensus on this score (highly unlikely as it is) make the field more useful and relevant to policy makers and administrators. This does not mean, however, that the pragmatic alternative rejects theory building in environmental ethics; the approach I advocate in the chapters that follow requires working through some of the more critical philosophical and political questions bearing on the relationship between moral principles, democratic values, and the methods of moral inquiry, deliberation, and public judgment. The argument for paying more attention to the pragmatics of policy and practice in environmental ethics is therefore *not* “anti-philosophy” as Callicott has claimed (e.g., 1999a, 30–32). But it is true that the model I encourage is critical of the arid theorizing and parochial character of traditional environmental ethics and that it supports calls for a considerably more applied empirical and integrative approach to normative debates and projects in the field.

Another way to put this is that, rather than seeing environmental policy and management problems as a failure of moral *principle*—that is, the result of the failure to adopt the single, correct moral attitude toward threatened species,

wilderness, or the biosphere—the model of environmental ethics I outline and illustrate in this book views environmental problems as primarily a failure of moral *intelligence*. That is, I suggest that environmental problems, from the vantage point of environmental ethics, should be understood as the result of the collective failure to adopt experimental methods and a tolerant and inclusive view of the range of human and environmental values over the long run. When such values are properly examined, critiqued, and integrated via debate, discussion, and deliberation, ethical judgment in conservation decision making and environmental management and policy contexts becomes more normatively robust—and therefore more durable.

Toward Refounding

In the chapters that follow, I argue for the reformation of environmental ethics on several fronts, from the philosophical to the methodological and political. This agenda includes (1) a call for the field to move away from stalled foundational value debates and increasingly vexed questions of moral considerability; (2) a set of arguments about the need to adopt a less ideological, more democratic stance toward alternative environmental values and ethical decision making; (3) a plea to take more seriously public environmental opinion and attitudes toward nature in environmental policy and management proposals; (4) a philosophical, political, and empirical defense of pluralism, particularism, and contextualism in environmental value theory; and (5) a focused ethical reconsideration of environmental practice and policy, including ecological research, natural resource management, and nature conservation under global change. Although each chapter examines a specific question in either the theory or application of environmental ethics to conservation action or to environmental policy and management dilemmas, together they can be read as an exploration and defense of those pragmatist themes I believe are key elements in the attempts to refound environmental ethics as a more inclusive, experimental, and effective form of normative discourse in public environmental affairs.

Chapters 2 and 3 develop an aspect of the political tradition within American pragmatism, arguing that much nonanthropocentric environmentalism has been too skeptical of democratic values and processes, especially as these bear upon the traditional appeal to foundational moral principles in environmental decision making. Chapter 2 provides a justification for democratic life that rests on an epistemological move in pragmatism, most clearly articulated in Dewey's work, that views democratic social conditions as a precondition for experimental inquiry and intelligent problem solving. It is an argument that I believe should be seriously considered by environmental philosophers seeking to influence public policy and to contribute to the resolution of environmental policy and management debates. In Chapter 3, I elaborate this position by homing in on the "public interest" as a normative standard for political judgment and policy action, appeals to which are common to the philosophy of public administration and American pragmatist thought. In particular, I uncover a deliberative strain of public interest

theory in Dewey's democratic writing that I suggest can help environmental ethics reconnect to a core concept in conventional political, policy, and administrative discourse and in the process become an important force in shaping this expression around environmental values as critical dimensions of the public interest in specific policy discussions.

Chapters 4 and 5 turn more toward value theory, including procedural and substantive arguments for rethinking and revising the historical emphasis on nonanthropocentric theories of value in environmental ethics. In Chapter 4, I argue that, contrary to the conventional wisdom, pragmatists in environmental ethics are not precluded from embracing certain kinds of intrinsic value arguments in particular situations, a claim that I illustrate by examining the guarded receptivity to intrinsic value by Norton (often thought to be one of the most strident critics of this concept in the field). Moreover, I suggest that pragmatic appropriations of intrinsic value can prove quite useful and effective in certain environmental policy and management contexts. I close the chapter with a discussion of the use of intrinsic value theory in international conservation arguments, including a detailed rejoinder to Rolston's example of the plight of biodiversity conservation and development in Nepal's Chitwan National Park. In Chapter 5, I attempt to recover an underappreciated aspect of the pragmatist tradition—Dewey's religious thought—in an effort to enrich the normative discourse of environmental pragmatism. Specifically, I argue for the value of Dewey's understanding of "natural piety" for shaping a more idealist understanding of pragmatic instrumentalism that captures many of the ethical intuitions of the non-anthropocentrists without requiring a metaphysical commitment to the intrinsic value of nature.

One of the recurring themes in *Refounding Environmental Ethics* is the need to reconceive environmental ethics as a dynamic and adaptive process of problem solving, a procedural model of ethical inquiry that sees the field operating more in the mode of a deliberative political argument, or, as I argue in several places, as a form of dispute resolution. In this vein, Chapter 6 examines a central normative debate in environmental ethics: the conflict between holistic environmental ethics and individualistic animal welfare and rights approaches. I argue in this chapter that, although discussions of moral considerability in environmental ethics have served an important purpose (i.e., they have turned our attention to the question of "what counts" in nature), they have unfortunately produced intellectual stalemates, as environmental holists and animal individualists dig further into long-entrenched positions. I advocate a move away from repeated claims of moral considerability toward a process of coordinated dispute resolution and consensus building in particular problem contexts.

The next two chapters attempt to advance several pragmatist tenets in environmental ethics, including the commitment to value pluralism and contextualism as well as the need to pursue a more practical agenda in the field. Together, these two chapters also make a case for greater interdisciplinarity in environmental ethics in terms of methodology and application. In Chapter 7, I employ theoretical argument and empirical data to make the case for a pluralistic, naturalistic,

and contextual reading of environmental ethical inquiry and judgment. I turn to the ethical thought of Dewey to defend the rejection of moral monism in environmental ethics (the reduction of a complex field of environmental values to a single worldview and small set of moral principles) and to justify the incorporation of social scientific/empirical methods of inquiry into ethical analysis. The chapter includes the results of public opinion surveys I have conducted on New Englanders' environmental ethical commitments and their attitudes toward natural resource management (specifically, public lands and wildlife), and demonstrates the value of taking a methodologically naturalistic approach to core environmental philosophical topics.

Chapter 8 continues the theme of interdisciplinarity and pragmatic engagement by bringing the tools of environmental ethics to the dilemmas and problems that emerge within the life sciences and biodiversity management. This chapter, written with ecologist James P. Collins, argues for a new practical extension of environmental ethics to the ecological research and conservation management community. Ecological research and biodiversity management often raise unique ethical questions in areas that include responsibilities and duties to the scientific community, public welfare, research animals, species, and ecosystems. Answering these ethical questions is challenging, because ecologists and biodiversity managers do not have the equivalent of bioethics, an established field with a support network for biomedical researchers and clinicians, to guide them in making decisions. Traditional environmental ethics provides some insight into environmental values and the duties these may impose on humans. But for the most part, those in the field do not take into consideration many of the common responsibilities and obligations ecologists and managers have to the scientific profession or to public welfare. This chapter presents a series of cases to illustrate the kinds of ethical questions faced by ecological researchers and biodiversity managers in practice. Collins and I argue for the creation of an extensive case database and a pluralistic and integrated ethical framework, one that draws pragmatically from the theoretical (normative), research, animal, and environmental ethics traditions.

The book's final chapter takes stock of several changes currently taking place—and anticipated in the coming decades—in conservation policy as a result of global environmental change. There, I suggest that we are moving toward a new paradigm of nature conservation, one in which older ideals and norms of preservation, wildness, native species, and so on are becoming eclipsed by more relativistic and dynamic standards and concepts. The emerging legal and policy regime under global change in turn demands a more interventionist and anticipatory conservation philosophy. I argue that traditional preservationist arguments for saving species and wildlands, and the anti-interventionist nonanthropocentric principles that frequently support them, will become increasingly untenable in novel environments that bear little resemblance to the historical systems of the past. The challenge for a pragmatic environmental ethics within this new model of conservation action and policy is to guide acceptable environmental change in an increasingly dynamic ecological order while also providing sufficient moral restraint on the destructive human modification of nature. It is a formidable

challenge, to be sure, but I believe it is one that the field must meet head on if it is to play a meaningful role in nature conservation under global change in the twenty-first century.

To wrap up this Introduction, I want to be clear about what this book is and what it is not. Although I cover many of the major traditions and debates in contemporary environmental ethics and engage the work of many important philosophers in the field, such as Rolston, Callicott, Norton, and others, *Refounding Environmental Ethics* is not intended as a general introduction to the subject, nor does it attempt a systematic overview of the field's theoretical development and applications. Many fine books undertake this important project, including a growing list of anthologies designed for classroom use (some of the better collections are Light and Rolston 2002, VanDeVeer and Pierce 2002, and Pojman and Pojman 2007). Recent synthetic accounts of environmental philosophy by John O'Neill, Alan Holland, and Light (2008) and Dale Jamieson (2008) are also good places to turn for a more comprehensive treatment of the field.

What this book offers instead is a critique of mainstream environmental ethics and a defense of my own pragmatist alternative, one that seeks to integrate environmental ethical theory, democratic thought, and the empirical demands of environmental practice in an effort to widen the field's appeal and influence. Although I include ample discussion of theory in environmental ethics, especially in the early chapters, I have tried to expand the theoretical conversation beyond narrow environmental value theory to include arguments in classical and neo-pragmatism, democratic theory, and the philosophy of public administration, among other traditions. The book should therefore pair well with the standard anthologies or monographs, serving as a pragmatic counterpoint to the field's traditional nonanthropocentric—and more “principle-driven”—approaches to environmental ethics.

I have also sought to illustrate my brief for a pragmatic environmental ethics with numerous case discussions, from the management of invasive species and the impacts of ecological research, to park-people conflicts and public-lands management, to species conservation under climate change. I hope that these and other cases and issues presented in the book work to clarify and also to defend the theoretical arguments made throughout *Refounding Environmental Ethics*. I also hope that they will encourage students and educators from a variety of fields—for example, environmental policy and politics, the human dimensions of natural resources and ecology, and conservation biology—to engage in more concrete discussions and debates surrounding the ethical dimensions of environmental practice. Finally, although it is impossible to engage on the literature of environmental ethics without recourse to the field's often-esoteric jargon, in the pages that follow, I have tried my best to present these ideas and arguments in the clearest possible terms and in a style that I hope will be accessible to readers across a wide range of environmental disciplines, especially those beyond academic philosophy.