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Does a Public Environmental Philosophy Need a Convergence Hypothesis?

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The convergence hypothesis, which Bryan Norton rolled out at the end of *Toward Unity Among Environmentalists* (1992), is often held as offering a core challenge to one of the received dogmas of contemporary environmental ethics, namely, that a truly "environmental" ethic would have to embrace some form of philosophical nonanthropocentrism which in turn would ground some account of the non-instrumental or intrinsic value of nature. According to this largely empirical claim, "provided anthropocentrists consider the full breadth of human values as they unfold into the indefinite future, and provided nonanthropocentrists endorse a consistent and coherent version of the view that nature has intrinsic value, all sides may be able to endorse a common policy direction" (Norton 1997, 87).[i]

One upshot of this fairly straightforward claim was to free up environmental ethicists from towing the line of the nonanthropocentric orthodoxy which had dominated the field since the early 1970s. If a more fully fleshed out, or as he later put it, "broad" anthropocentrism, could provide reasons for more morally responsible environmental policies (such as claims about our obligations to future human generations which entailed substantial environmental commitments) which converged with the policies advocated by nonanthropocentrists, then it was not necessary to always start the moral defense

of such policies with nonanthropocentric claims for the non-instrumental value of nature. If true this would mean that environmental ethicists did not need to see their views as necessarily at odds with other ethical arguments aimed at promoting other aspects of human welfare. For those of us interested in doing environmental philosophy in a way that was more likely to make an impact on public policy this view was most welcome given the overwhelming, and not necessarily inappropriate, anthropocentrism of the policy process.

In his recent book, *Sustainability: A Philosophy of Adaptive Ecosystem Management* (2005), Norton claims that the convergence hypothesis is only appropriate in a world dominated by dualistic categories of analysis, namely that human interests are necessarily at odds with the "interests" of nature, whatever those may be. If we were to follow his advice in *Sustainability*, and reject all such dualistic approaches, then "the convergence hypothesis will wither away for lack of polarized interests to be brought together" (510). Such a view seems to advise that those publicly engaged environmental ethicists who agree with Norton's approach should set a priority on working with him toward the elimination of these dualisms. In this chapter I will argue that an environmental philosophy intent at making a contribution to environmental policy (what I will call a "public environmental philosophy") may need to hold on to the convergence hypothesis. I do not think this is a view which Norton will necessarily disagree with, but the discussion of the importance of the convergence hypothesis will help to highlight some interesting differences between our respective approaches

to what has become known as environmental pragmatism and also provide an opportunity to extend and defend the hypothesis. I will begin with a discussion of our different approaches to environmental pragmatism, summarize my own pragmatist view, and then finish with a defense of what I believe is one of the most useful tools that Norton has provided us in a career that continues to produce some of the most important insights in environmental ethics.

1. Two Kinds of Environmental Pragmatism

In 1992 I began developing a position in environmental ethics which I called "environmental pragmatism" (Light 1993). Though not originally inspired by Norton's work I quickly came to see his views (and those of a few others like Anthony Weston) as allied with the general thrust of what I saw as the core elements of the position and absolutely essential for fleshing it out. At the time no one else was using this particular term to describe the infusion of pragmatist ideas into environmental philosophy but rather, like Norton, were describing their views as "broadly pragmatic" (Norton 1991, x), or, like Weston, were describing a role for the insertion of the thought of canonical pragmatist figures, such as Dewey, in environmental ethics (Weston 1985). Seeing this variety of views, with Eric Katz, I collected and commissioned what I saw as representative examples of this emerging strain of environmental thought, if not a school, in an anthology, which I titled using my preferred term: *Environmental Pragmatism*

(1996). Whatever the benefits or faults of that book, at the very least, it demonstrated that there were a wide variety of views that could be collected under this general term and there were a number of people out there who were looking for an alternative to the main currents of thought that had oriented the first generation of thinkers in the field.

However, my primary motivation for investigating this general line of thought was clear enough in my own head: the point of environmental pragmatism was to try to push environmental ethicists away from the various debates in value theory in which they had arguably become stuck since the early 1970s (anthropocentrism vs. nonanthoprocentrism, instrumental vs. intrinsic value, subjectivism vs. objectivism, etc.) toward a more pluralist approach which would improve their ability to contribute to the formulation of better environmental policies. To my mind then, and today, while there are many purely theoretical philosophical questions about the environment that are interesting and well worth teaching and pursuing, if, in the end, at least some elements of the field cannot contribute to the actual resolution of environmental problems then, at the least, the field is not fulfilling the promise which many of its founders espoused at the beginning, and, at worst, would be a failure. To strike an analogy, if environmental ethicists had nothing to offer the policy or advocacy process it would be like a counterfactual history of medical ethics which had nothing of use to offer medical practitioners, policy makers, or patients. Given that the realms of human health and environmental health

(broadly construed) clearly contain substantial, pressing, and critical moral issues, a medical ethics or an environmental ethics without a robust capacity to engage these issues on the ground would mark some kind of intellectual or moral failure.

At first glance however one may worry that my goal of policy relevance for environmental ethics under the name "pragmatism" is fraught with a fundamental complication. If, as I believe, the first goal of environmental pragmatism is to coax environmental ethicists away from their intramural debates, then does it actually do any good to at least appear to be adding another "school" to the meta-ethical debates already established in the field? For, as mentioned above, in the early 1990s there were other pragmatists in environmental ethics as well who were not describing their views as "broadly pragmatic" like Norton, but rather offered a straightforward application of established pragmatist thought to environmental problems and the on-going debates in environmental ethics. These figures, such as Larry Hickman and Kelly Parker were included in the 1996 volume as well. In this sense it may have appeared that *Environmental Pragmatism* was actually creating a new side to those intramural debates over value theory (most likely of interest only to other philosophers) rather than finding a way of getting around those debates and encouraging a more policy relevant body of literature in the field.

Such a picture is not actually far off from what has happened. Now, instead of filling the pages of journals like *Environmental Ethics* with arguments

between those influenced by J. Baird Callicott, Holmes Rolston, and the like, we can, and indeed have, added to those even more pages on the same debates by Deweyans, Jamesians and Piercieans. A tempest, whether it be in a teapot or not I am unsure, has emerged between various figures explicitly endorsing or denying environmental pragmatism as a school of thought (cf. Minteer 1998, 2001; Callicott 1998, 2002), and the editor of the principle journal in the field, without warning and not clearly motivated by any particular recent argument (but citing the introduction to the 1996 anthology), even editorialized against the importance of environmental ethicists being able to communicate anything to those outside of the field (Hargrove 2003). On this view the hard problem of environmental ethics was not application to actual environmental issues but getting the theoretical foundations of natural value right.

Norton and I continue to agree that the goal of environmental pragmatists should be to come up with a more pluralistic and practical environmental ethic and in that sense agree on the core idea of what environmental pragmatists should strive to achieve. But where we have parted over the years is how explicitly pragmatist environmental pragmatism needs to be. In *Toward Unity Among Environmentalists*, a book that helped to cement my ideas on the relationship that environmental ethicists ought to have with environmental advocates and hence define the mission of environmental pragmatists, he eschewed an explicitly pragmatist metaphysics or epistemology claiming that his pragmatism was never to be used as a premise but only as a "constant guide"

(Norton 1991, x.). In his monumental work *Sustainability* (2005), however, he has brought together what has been emerging in his work for some time, namely, a fully fledged and historically faithful pragmatist metaphysics and epistemology, relying mainly on Dewey and Pierce. Without explicitly criticizing those of us who endorse what I have come to call "methodological environmental pragmatism" the more recent Norton distances himself from those authors in the 1996 anthology who used the term, as he puts it, "broadly to include any problem-oriented perspective on environmental theory and practice" and instead embraces an environmental pragmatism that accepts the historical pragmatists understanding of the "nature of language and logic in relation to the world of experience" (Norton 2005, 77).

The point of this chapter is not to now dive into a protracted debate with Norton about the merits of methodological environmental pragmatism versus what I will call a "historical environmental pragmatism" (by which I mean a philosophical view more faithful to the pragmatist cannon) toward the goal of staking a claim as to which variety deserves the moniker "environmental pragmatism."[ii] I would expect that Norton would find such a discussion as tedious as I would. But because it will be important later for my defense of the convergence hypothesis I will say a bit here about my objection to the more historical environmental pragmatism that Norton now robustly defends. While I do have some reservations about Norton's Deweyan-Pierceian view my main reasons for stopping short of going beyond a methodological environmental

pragmatism are not principled but rather (1) strategic and (2) more a claim that rests upon what I take to be the proper enterprise of environmental pragmatism, and, essentially, what I hope to see as a good part of the evolution of environmental ethics.

My strategic worry is simply that the climate of academic philosophy is such that a position ground in the work of one or more historical pragmatists will be a tough sell despite the not inconsequential revival of pragmatism among figures such as Fine, McDowell and Putnam. Given the fact that most philosophers educated in both the Anglo-American and European Continental traditions are taught from the beginning either that pragmatism is a historical relic that should be rejected (see for example Callicott 1997, 133), have it ignored in their curricula altogether, or mistakenly view it as too closely associated with a Rortyian relativism that gets little respect in philosophy departments, the side to debates on environmental values that is being offered to environmental ethicists under the name "pragmatism" is one that can too easily be ignored. If, for example, a view rejecting claims to the intrinsic value of nature is ground in some Deweyan perspective (no matter how well explicated and defended as is Norton's view), then can't one reject it out of hand if one doesn't accept, doesn't understand, or doesn't take seriously Dewey's view on anything else?

One can respond to such a worry by arguing that this sort of concern is, as I admitted before, not a principled philosophical reason. If Norton's Deweyan and Pierceian environmental pragmatism gives us the best account of how to

understand a critical concept like sustainability then too bad for those unequipped or unwilling to engage it. But there are two answers to this reply, one straightforward and another which is a bit more subtle. The straightforward reply is one that, so far, has been most eloquently and thoroughly argued by Kevin Elliot (2007): that at least some of Norton's most important substantive positions may not need the elaborate pragmatist works which he employs in *Sustainability*. The other reply gets to my second reason for preferring a methodological environmental pragmatism to a historical environmental pragmatism: that the point of a pragmatic environmental philosophy should be to encourage as many ethicists and ethically inclined environmental advocates and practitioners to be more fruitfully engaged in the advocacy process regardless of their particular metaphysical and epistemological views. To continue the analogy with medical ethics, part of the point of environmental pragmatism is to make us, as a philosophical community, more "clinical."

From the beginning my version of environmental pragmatism explicitly argued that the point of the position was not to convince environmental ethicists that they should become pragmatists in the orthodox sense or even that they needed to go back to school to learn their Dewey, et. al. The idea was instead to develop an approach to doing publicly engaged environmental philosophy which could allow us to set aside our debates in ethical theory – largely concerning the description of intrinsic, noninstrumental, or inherent natural value and the moral obligations which followed from that description (see

Callicott 2002 for confirmation that this has been the core set of issues for the field since its inception) – either because we actually believed those debates were off the mark in and of themselves or because we thought they could be given up in particular contexts when we were engaged in public endeavors. As I will describe in more detail below one of the most important things that environmental pragmatism is supposed to do is encourage philosophers to pack as many ethical tools as possible into the box that they will then use to aid in the resolution of environmental problems. Some of these tools will be derived from traditional pragmatist lines of inquiry but surely some of them will not. My core concern then is that a more historical environmental pragmatism will thin the ranks of potential publicly engaged environmental ethicists by insisting that they embrace more traditional pragmatist views all the way down.

This view has garnered the attention of several more historically oriented pragmatists in environmental ethics who have attacked it for not being pragmatist enough to warrant the name "pragmatism." For example, Ben Minteer (2002) has suggested that there must be something wrong with the use of this term to describe my views as I employ it to argue that some of Eric Katz's explicitly anti-pragmatist views are methodologically pragmatist (Light 1996). In turn it would appear that Katz has accepted this description of his views endorsing a form of methodological pragmatism himself (Katz 1999). Worse still, arch anti-pragmatist J. Baird Callicott has employed my terminology to describe some of his work on world religions and environmental ethics as pragmatist. His

claim is that there is a pragmatist element to his attempts to articulate "how already fully formed and well-articulated older cultural beliefs," such as religious beliefs, should support the same policies that one would come to from something like Aldo Leopold's land ethic (Callicott 1998, 507).

But if my view describes how Katz and Callicott – both "foundationalist" thinkers on Minteer's view – can sometimes leave their metaphysical moorings and do environmental ethics in a pragmatic and more publicly engaged way then I count this as proof that my methodological pragmatism is setting out to do what I think a more pragmatic environmental ethics should do, namely, allow non-pragmatists to be pragmatists when it helps to make their ethics more useful in the policy process. If our hands are tied too closely to a particular metaphysics or epistemology, which is one of the things I fear happening in a historical environmental pragmatism, then we may cut short the tools which we can use and hence, as I will argue below, cut short our ability to talk to people about why nature should matter to them given their core beliefs about what matters to them in a moral sense.

All of that said, none of this means that just calling oneself a pragmatist of one sort or another makes one a pragmatist. Previously (Light 2003) I have criticized the anti-pluralist elements of Callicott's work on religion and the environment which calls into question whether this work is really consistent with my methodological pragmatism. (I do however find some of Callicott's more recent work (2006) to be squarely consistent with methodological pragmatism.)

Katz's 1999 paper, which revises his views on restoration under the name of "metaphilosophical pragmatism," is also flawed to my mind though I will not pursue those criticisms here. The point however is that both are trying to generate more pragmatic implications out of their more traditional views which I count as a very positive turn in their work.

One point of disagreement that I have with both of them however is their rejection of the convergence hypothesis. This shared view by both Callicott and Katz troubles me as I find the convergence hypothesis essential for providing a warrant for opening the big tool box of moral arguments beyond the nonanthropocentric intrinsic value claims but in such a way that allows nonanthropocentrists to do this in a consistent and coherent manner. I will turn to some of those criticisms below but will first summarize the essence of my particular version of methodological pragmatism and the role of the convergence hypothesis in it.

2. Methodological Environmental Pragmatism in Brief

My methodological version of environmental pragmatism is fairly straightforward. In essence the claim is that, given the practical reasons for moral pluralism in environmental ethics (see Light 2003), in particular, that many people do in fact find nature valuable for a variety of reasons given the variety of experiences and modes of appreciation that something so complex as "nature"

can provide, and given the democratic context in which (at least) people in developed countries will decide what to do about our environmental challenges, then, given a view about the responsibilities of environmental ethicists (to be explained below) we should in certain circumstances set aside our value theory debates in environmental ethics and embrace a more public form of our philosophical practice. This practice will entail adopting a strategic anthropocentrism whereby we use more enlightened, or broad, anthropocentric arguments in order to persuade a larger array of people to embrace better environmental policies because such indirect anthropocentric justifications for environmental protection can plausibly speak to our ordinary moral intuitions more persuasively than nonanthropocentric justifications. This is not suggested as a general method for applied ethics in particular or ethics in general but only for environmental ethics as it is directly dependent on the convergence hypothesis as an activating warrant for this methodology. When the environmental community converges on the same policy then environmental ethicists should set aside their debates on ethical theory and translate the ends of this community to as many coherent, consistent, and adequate moral reasons to appeal to as broad a slice of the public at large as is possible. In the rest of this section I will tease out the reasons for and implications of this approach.

While there are some disagreements on the impact of environmental ethics on larger debates on environmental policy a fair assessment would have to accept that the literature does not yet approach the impact or relevance of other

"applied" fields to their respective fields of inquiry. Again I return to my

comparison with medical ethics which appears substantially more robust than

environmental ethics. In part this could be because there are simply more people

working in medical ethics, more resources available for medical ethicists, or

because of the success of medical ethicists in integrating themselves into the

medical establishment. But without going into a detailed comparison of the

relative impact of the two fields given resources and person power it should give

us pause how lopsided is the critical mass of philosophers not just working on,

but actively involved in, debates over stem cell research and those working on an

issue like global warming. On this last issue in particular things are changing for

the better but the ranks of philosophers working on what is arguably the most

important environmental challenge humanity has ever faced are remarkably thin

and the relative number of articles on this topic in journals like *Environmental*

Ethics is remarkably small compared to the pages of debates over value theory.[iii]

I do not have the space here to fully document or prosecute this

observation. Callicott strongly disagrees with this view (1995 and 2002), citing

the influence of environmental ethicists on conservation biologists and a few

others. Avner de-Shalit and I have responded to him claiming in part that this

impact is nonetheless relatively minor given what it could be (Light and de-Shalit

2003). If the worry over the relative impact thus far by environmental ethicists

on advocacy and policy making is an intuitively plausible concern at all then we

may fairly ask if it matters, and if it does, if there is any way to improve this situation?

It matters to me given something that I briefly mentioned at the start of the last section: that from the beginning the field promised more than adding to the literature on value theory. Environmental ethics is one of the fields of study which arose in the academy in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a response to the growing awareness of the severity of anthropogenic environmental problems. As such, the field did not evolve as a part of professional philosophy in a vacuum, as just another interesting area of research in ethics, metaphysics, or epistemology, but instead as a specific attempt to use the tools of philosophical analysis to both better understand and better resolve a set of specific problems facing humanity. Figures like Norton (and others represented in this volume) are fulfilling this promise in the field but I think can fairly be seen as exceptions to the general rule. Most of us have not been like the clinical medical ethicist, developing the tools needed to actively work and communicate with our colleagues in other disciplines and on the front lines of actual cases.

If we accept that the field promises more than what it has produced so far then the next question is whether and to whom it may be responsible for failing to deliver enough so far. My start on this question has been to remind environmental ethicists that in addition to being a philosophical community we are also part of another community as well, namely, the environmental community. While this connection has never been clear, the field continues to at

least be part of an on-going conversation about environmental issues, if not an outright intentional community of environmentalists. The drive to create a more pragmatic environmental ethics is not only motivated by a desire to actively participate in the resolution of environmental problems, but to hold up our philosophical end, as it were, among the community of environmentalists. This does not mean that we cannot be critical of specific environmentalists, environmental groups, or environmentalists as a whole. But I think it does mean that we should be prepared to bring tools to the discussion of environmental problems that can be useful for the resolution of environmental problems when we have the opportunity to do so.

While the comparison is not ideal, again, consider the counterfactual history of medical ethics where it develops without any clinical application or resources to enrich on-going debates about medical policy. If such a field would seem to not be fulfilling its potential who would it be letting down? If we accept the fairly simple premise that there is a moral domain to human health issues then in one sense it would be letting all of us down. But more immediately I think a case can be made that the field would be letting down the larger medical community. That community indicated a need for ethical analysis of health problems in medical education, practice, and policy. If trained ethicists had nothing to offer that would help with the difficult and sometimes tragic choices that exist in the medical arena then the field would be failing in some sense.

How could environmental ethicists better serve the environmental community? The answer for the methodological pragmatist begins in a recognition that if philosophy is to serve a larger community then it must allow the interests of the community to help to determine the philosophical problems which the theorist addresses. This does not mean that the pragmatic philosopher in my sense of this term necessarily finds all the problems that a given community is concerned with as the problems for her own work. Nor does it mean that she assumes her conclusions before analyzing a problem like a hired legal counsel who doesn't inquire as to the guilt or innocence of her client. It only means that a fair description of the work of the pragmatic philosopher is to investigate the problems of interest to their community (as a community of inquirers). To go back to my analogy, the medical community as a whole needs an ethical analysis of stem cell research and we should be able to produce something that is helpful to the issues which emerge in this debate.

But if we really were to take seriously that we are not just part of a discussion but part of an advocacy process then I think we have a further public task as environmental ethicists which may be best captured by a methodological form of pragmatism. We could serve as an intermediary between the environmental community and the larger public by helping to articulate the policy recommendations of that community on these problems to those outside of their community. But articulation of the moral reasons, for example, of why the U.S. needs to sign on to a comprehensive international agreement on the

regulation of greenhouse gases, which everyone seems to agree upon in the more limited environmental community, to a broader public should be done in terms closer to the moral intuitions of the broader public. Why? Because the issue is so pressing and important that we cannot wait for everyone to become nonanthropocentrists, nor can we wait until the dualisms that dominate our thinking concerning the relationship between humans and nature, as Norton puts it, "wither away." One thing that philosophers are well trained at doing is figuring out how commitment to one set of reasons, or philosophical positions, entails or does not entail commitment to another set. What we could help to do as a bridge between the environmental community and the broader public is to help to show the broader public how an embrace of their personal values, P, ought to lead to an embrace of some green goal G. This work requires a form of "moral translation" whereby the interests of the smaller community of environmentalists is translated into a range of appeals corresponding to the various moral intuitions which are represented in the broader public arena. We can think of this work of translation as the "public task" of a methodologically pragmatist environmental philosophy. It is necessarily a pluralist project, attempting to articulate the considered interests of the environmental community in as broad a set of moral appeals as is possible so that a broad range of personal values, P_1-P_n, can be shown to entail some common G ends.

A public and pragmatic environmental philosophy would not rest with a mere description of, or series of debates on, the value of nature. A public

environmental philosophy would further question whether the nonanthropocentric description of the value of nature which dominates the philosophical work of many, and possibly most environmental ethicists today, is likely to succeed in motivating most people to change their moral attitudes about nature taking into account the overwhelming ethical anthropocentrism of most humans (amply demonstrated by studies like Kempton, et. al., 1997, which shows that most people take obligations to future human generations as the most compelling reason to protect the environment). As Norton points out again and again in *Sustainability* tools that chunk out a realm of the world that has a particular kind of natural value independent of other human values may not be the best tools to offer as they don't help us to weigh competing policy priorities.

As such, a public environmental ethics would have to either embrace a broad anthropocentrism about natural value (for example, arguing that nature has value either for aesthetic reasons or, as mentioned above, that its preservation fulfills our obligations to future human generations, or that preserving or protecting it is required given some account of human virtues) or endorse a pluralism which admitted the possibility, indeed the necessity, of sometimes using what I referred to above as "strategic anthropocentric" arguments to describe natural value in more conventional human-centered terms in order to help to achieve wider public support for a more morally responsible environmental policy.

The empirically demonstrable prevalence of anthropocentric views on environmental issues in the public at large provides the stimulus for this approach rather than an antecedent commitment to any particular theory of value, pragmatist or otherwise. So, this approach does not insist that environmental ethicists should give up their various philosophical debates over the existence of nonanthropocentric natural value, nor their position on these debates. Such work can continue as another more purely philosophical task for environmental ethicists. But ethicists following this methodology must accept the public task as well which requires that they be willing to morally translate their philosophical views about the value of nature, when necessary, in terms which will more likely morally motivate policy makers and the general public even when they have come to their views about the value of nature through a nonanthropocentric approach. In other work (Light 2002), I have provided more detail on how such a "two task" approach would work. Here I will only note that this strategy, asking that ethicists sometimes translate their views to a language more resonate with the public, is only warranted where convergence on the ends of environmental policy has been reached and is therefore dependent on the convergence hypothesis. That is, where the preponderance of views among environmentalists of various camps, as well as among environmental ethicists themselves, has converged on the same end, then the public task of the philosopher is to articulate the arguments that would most effectively motivate non-environmentalists to accept that end. Empirically, for many issues, this will

involve making broad anthropocentric arguments (which also have the virtue of often being less philosophically contentious). But one can imagine that in some cases nonanthropocentric claims would be more appealing as well. What appeals best is, like the convergence hypothesis itself, an empirical question. Where convergence has not been achieved however, this public task of moral translation is not warranted. Under those circumstances we must continue with the more traditional philosophical task of environmental ethicists, our version of an environmental "first philosophy," attempting to hammer out the most plausible and defensible moral foundations for the ethical consideration of nonhuman nature.

There are many other details to fill in to this approach; I trust charitable interlocutors will allow for its full defense and explication elsewhere. But, to provide just one recent example, when a coalition of British evangelicals and American scientists recently set out to convince their American evangelical counterparts to support efforts to push the Bush administration to take climate change more seriously at least some of these figures where engaging in a kind of methodological pragmatism. First, they recognized the convergence of views on the necessity of an international convention on regulation of greenhouse gases (and, of course, the science behind those views), second, they took this convergence as a warrant for action, third, they translated the reasons for such an agreement to the language of Christian fundamentalism, and finally, they found compelling ways of articulating those reasons to their target audience (American

evangelicals). The method worked. There is now a substantial community of American evangelicals lobbying the Bush administration to do something about global warming and also changing their personal consumptive practices (see Eilperin 2007).[iv] It is not that all those involved in this campaign believe the claims, for example, that a Christian God commands us to be good stewards of the Earth and that this has implications for how we should think about the threat of global warming. It is the case though that these figures saw that their core task was to open up the tool box of ethical reasons for environmental protection and translate the end of a comprehensive agreement on climate change to the moral lingua franca of an audience which they believed to be particularly important to moving the Bush administration to take this issue more seriously. The strategy has proven correct. Even though the Bush administration has not yet agreed to sign the Kyoto protocol, or initiated its own alternative it has at least acknowledged the scientific consensus on anthropogenic global warming, and, perhaps more importantly, the Republican party in general has acknowledged that it cannot ignore this issue any longer nor can it cling to climate change skepticism.[v]

Given the dependence of my version of methodological pragmatism on the convergence hypothesis I would now like to tease out a bit more of its continuing importance for the methodological environmental pragmatist, and perhaps even the historical environmental pragmatist, and along the way defend it against some criticisms.

2. Defending Convergence

One who shared Norton's views, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, that we should welcome, if not aim for, a withering away of the dualisms of how we understand the relationship between humans and nature which have dominated western thinking may not agree with my embrace of the evangelical climate initiative just mentioned. When discussing such examples I have often heard objections that they do not offer models for a responsible environmental pragmatism (or even a responsible environmental ethic) as the participants in such exercises are only leaving in place the bad old dualisms, if not out and out false views which people cling to, which will continue to cause problems for achieving long-term strong sustainability.

I do not know if Norton would share those worries but it is a question given his apparent desire for a nondualistic world. As he puts it, a view which emphasizes "placing humans within nature," leads him to

> . . . embrace a useful formulation developed by the deep ecologists, who
> insist that we are not really separate from nature; our skin is but a
> permeable membrane. When I consider myself to belong to a place, a
> community, insults to my immediate environment are insults to the
> broader self I embrace as a member of a community. On this view, which

I think is implicit in Leopold's simile of thinking like a mountain, there

will be little use for the convergence hypothesis. (Norton 2005, 510).

Norton need not be assuming here a full blown deep ecological metaphysics

about the ontology of humans (that they are really, as Arne Naess puts it, a part

of nature rather than apart from nature). He could be thinking of the deep

ecologists' ideas in this regard as providing a helpful metaphor. But it seems

there must be something more going on here than just a metaphor, that Norton

really does envisage a nondualistic world. If so, again, does the evangelical

climate initiative help or hinder the coming about of this nondualistic world?

On the one hand it seems clear that we can see these as compatible long

term and short term projects. Even conservative estimates among the climate

modelers see our window of opportunity for acting on climate change, and

mitigating some of the expected consequences of rising temperatures, as rapidly

shrinking. We therefore need to act now and so need to offer arguments which

will resonate with the many moral languages which presently exist and which

we will need to appeal to in order to generate enough public support to actually

do something about this problem. Achieving a deep ecological consciousness, or

a nondualistic world, is instead a millennial project. We should be able to pursue

both types of projects together. If correct then we certainly need the convergence

hypothesis now as it gives us hope for agreement in the short run on

environmental policies given the divides that do exist among environmentalists,

and, as this particular example shows, the divides that will persist as we

successfully bring more and more diverse groups who did not previously see themselves as environmentalists into the environmental fold. Someday, some of us may hope, we can afford to have the convergence hypothesis wither away but that day may be a long way off.

On the other hand, some will demur, we cannot pursue both strategies at the same time. Let's call one form of this objection the worry about compatibility of ends and another the worry about compatibility of consistent motivations. The first worry is that we cannot hope to pursue both strategies because the short term approach which works within established, potentially dualistic, value sets will forestall or even block our evolution to a nondualistic world. The second worry is that there is something unsavory, if not outright immoral, about advocating a view which one thinks is false, in this case implicitly endorsing a conservative Christian set of values which one finds untenable if only because one has trouble with, what Gerry Cohen calls, "the God premise."

I cannot answer the compatibility of ends objection here as it is of necessity an empirical objection. How do we know that using the convergence hypothesis now in the way that my methodological pragmatism does will block our evolution to a nondualistic world? Only time will tell, and even then, how we could assess progress would be a sticky evaluative question. But beyond this answer I also think it important to take heart in the original articulation of the hypothesis. If it really is the case that provided antithetical anthropocentric and nonanthropocentric "theories are formulated in their most defensible form

(defensible, that is, in their own lights as independent theories), applications of the two theories would approve many, perhaps all, of the same policies" (ibid., 508) then perhaps a broad anthropocentric world (World^1) would in the end be identical to a nonanthropocentric world (World^2). And if that is true, perhaps, both would be identical to Norton's nondualistic world (World^3) so there isn't so much to worry about after all. A world where people have different motivations to agree on the same environmental policies just puts us in the same condition of sustainability.

What I mean by the idea of Worlds$^{1-3}$ being identical is that, crudely put, they could contain the same stuff. They could have the same species richness and diversity, the same quality of resources available for future generations, the same scope of sense of place values, the same levels of integrity, ecosystem health, or whatever else one wants in a sustainable world. I say "could" in describing what we might find in these worlds rather than Norton's more forceful "would" because we, of course, can't know what any particular policy, whatever the motivation, would necessarily deliver but only what it could aspire to deliver. The issue for me on what Worlds$^{1-3}$ could contain is answered by asking the question what sort of environmental initiative could not be justified directly or indirectly from the starting point of broad anthropocentrism, nonanthropocentrism, or nondualism? If we admit that indirect moral reasons, for example, to protect endangered species, stabilize the climate, or advance ecosystemic health, can be sufficient to ground policies promoting these ends

then the three worlds start to look, if you will, aspirationally identical to me. If

we add in the temporal dimension of what we can most plausibly achieve

soonest then World[1] seems most compelling for the strategic reasons I mentioned

in the last section. Essentially, if the three worlds look identical then I don't feel

that we need to worry about the road that got us there.[vi]

Callicott, however, has raised a few objections to the convergence

hypothesis that may weaken my response to the compatibility of ends claim. In

"The Pragmatic Power and Promise of Theoretical Environmental Ethics" (2002)

he seeks to defend more traditional projects in environmental ethics – the pursuit

of a nonanthropocentric account of the intrinsic value of ecosystems and species

– in part by taking to task what he assumes is a common goal of all

environmental pragmatists: a critique of theory in environmental ethics,

especially accounts of intrinsic value. In fact, oddly, given that Norton never

articulates the convergence hypothesis specifically as a claim about intrinsic

versus instrumental accounts of natural value, for Callicott that is the root of the

position: "Because the concept of intrinsic value in nature makes no difference to

environmental practice and policy, debate about it is a waste of time and

intellectual capital that could better be spent on something more efficacious"

(2002, 12).

While this is not an accurate statement of the convergence hypothesis it

may reflect how many more traditionally oriented environmental ethicists have

come to unfortunately take the pragmatic turn in the field: they think that what

we really think what they are doing is a waste of time. Such a view is unfortunate and I do not think reflects the views of any serious environmental pragmatist. Nonetheless, Callicott uses this caricature to launch what are some more interesting criticisms of the convergence hypothesis itself which in the end are flawed in part because of this misunderstanding of the hypothesis.

First Callicott argues that the hypothesis is not credible because "it is hard to believe that all Earth's myriad species, for example, are in some way useful to human beings" (2002, 13) and then he goes on to give examples of how there are many species that don't seem to be useful to us or to larger ecosystems so must not be something that anthropocentrists could ever mount a case for protecting but which would be well worth protecting if one accepted a claim that, I suppose, all of nature has direct intrinsic value that generated moral obligations to protect it.

The first answer to this objection is one that Norton has raised again and again but which never seems to stick on the minds of those who read it. The convergence hypothesis is an empirical hypothesis and so, certainly, there may be instances of divergence. Second, as I suggested above, the issue is whether one *can* make a claim that a given species could be protected through a broadly anthropocentric value set rather than if anyone in particular has yet made that claim or made it on the basis of utility. Here too we can clearly see Callicott's error in assuming that the hypothesis turns on the intrinsic-instrumental distinction rather than the anthropocentric-nonanthropocentric distinction (see

McShane 2007, 171 for a good account of why the intrinsic-instrumental

distinction is not the operative distinction for testing the hypothesis). For

example, one could also bring in broadly virtue based arguments for why

destroying a species is something that we should not do which may have nothing

to do with relative instrumental utility. To do so, for example, may be an

instance of hubris, or, if stewardship is a virtue, an abrogation of that

understanding of human flourishing. Whatever difficulties we would have

mounting such a case they wouldn't seem to be any more or less difficult than

mounting the nonanthropocentric alternative.

Next Callicott argues that if we look at the "formalities" or "structural

features" rather than "contents" of anthropocentric based versus

nonanthropocentric environmental policies then we are likely to see divergence

rather than convergence (2002, 14). The gist of the argument (which is a reprise

of similar comments which Callicott made in his aforementioned 1995 piece) is

that the importance of arguments for intrinsic value is that they will shift the

burden of proof away from those who wish to preserve or protect nature onto

those who wish to develop or destroy it. Intrinsic value claims will in this sense

be like rights claims and work as moral trumps protecting repositories of natural

value.

I have two responses here in addition to those I have previously made (see

Light and de-Shalit 2003). First, if we really are talking about environmental

policies in general, such as the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act or any other of

the twenty some pieces of environmental legislation passed in the U.S. from the late sixties to 1980, then we should not assume that they were based (or in the case of future hoped for legislation on issues like climate change, would be based) on any single set of narrowly defined values which we could label as anthropocentric or nonanthropocentric or allocating intrinsic or instrumental value to nature. There are no general structural features to anthropocentric or nonanthropocentric inspired policies because most environmental policies (especially if one closely investigates the legislative record) are based in a myriad of intuitions which would fall into one, both or neither of these camps. To imagine that there are policies that are based on one narrow set of values is to imagine policies that rarely exist in a democracy. Given that pragmatists are by and large concerned with the application of environmental ethics to democratic environmental policy making then we would assume that values under-girding any policy would and should be plural.

Second, if there were something more morally straightforward than an omnibus bill, such as some kind of environmental bill of rights based in a recognition of the intrinsic value of nature, there would be no reason to believe that it would be more sound, effective, trumping or workable than a comparative set of rights to humans to have sustainable environments or granting some rights to future generations of humans which could have environmental implications. Either alternative could do what Callicott wants: shift the burden of proof away from destruction of nature to protection of it. In fact, such an avenue may be

more likely given the simple fact that it is actually happening now. Dozens of countries currently have laws granting rights to a safe, healthy, or sustainable environment to their populations (see Hayward 2005) and it is now only a matter of time before we begin to see the implications of these laws. If Callicott would reply by claiming that rights to nature would be different in kind to environmental rights to humans because they would grant rights to things other than humans which could trump human rights then I would point out that rights often do conflict. Whoever we grant environmental rights to – humans or natural entities themselves based on intrinsic value claims – they will be in conflict with other rights and the resolution of such conflicts will be based on a myriad of historical and legal issues not on the fact that rights have been granted to something other than humans.

Let us now turn to the second general worry concerning my application of the convergence hypothesis, the problem of compatibility of consistent motivations. My methodological environmental pragmatism is quite clear on this issue. Other easily defensible moral prohibitions against lying and deceiving should be sufficient in most cases to take care of the worry that there may be something unsavory or immoral about articulating the implications of moral frameworks with which one does not agree.

As I have put it elsewhere (Light 2002) I cannot walk up to a Christian evangelical gathering and say something like "Jesus sent me here today to talk to you about climate change and your responsibilities to him to preserve and

protect this precious world that he has given you" because it would simply be a form of deception which is independently objectionable. I find nothing wrong however with pointing out the compelling argument for stewardship in a book that this community takes very seriously and helping them to see how some values and duties that they derive from that book strongly entail taking seriously this particular problem and how the responsibilities they find sufficient to motivate them to action provide reasons to do something about this problem. I can imagine however that some more adamant atheists, say Richard Dawkins or Sam Harris, would still find participation in such an activity objectionable. But I would find such views as compelling as the objections of the strong moral monist who claimed that there was one and only one true moral foundation for why nature has value that should be respected in a moral sense and that any argument to protect nature for any other moral reason must be actively rejected. I have independent reasons to disagree with such positions and nothing in my methodological pragmatism would insist that moral monists adopt this position. The pragmatist must be a pluralist.

One could also raise a similar objection that methodological pragmatism would appear to endorse the development of any argument for a given converged upon policy even, say, an eco-fascist argument just to make sure that the fascists are green too. But just as we have independent moral reasons to condemn lying and deceiving (which I think overcomes objections that have been raised to this view that it is "merely" rhetorical) we have independent moral

reasons to reject fascism, racism, and other contemptible views. Those reasons

are sufficient to reject working with such communities or making those

arguments.[vii]

Hopefully by now we may see an ultimate compatibility between my

methodological environmental pragmatism and Norton's version of historical

environmental pragmatism. Norton (or Nortonians) embrace the same pluralism

and, for example, appreciate the talents of someone like Aldo Leopold who was

able to appeal to a large array of audiences by using a large array of reasons

toward common ends. Norton's pluralism may be more principled than mine

but it gets us in the same place and so should, as Elliot puts it, be able to move

forward as a more political than metaphysical thesis (Elliott 2007) ultimately

proving it compatible with methodological pragmatism.[viii] When it comes to the

convergence hypothesis, when we take seriously the immediate problems with

the world we now live in, the necessity (even moral propriety) for building a

broad consensus on these problems, and the possible responsible role that

environmental ethicists can take in it, then we can readily see that it is a

hypothesis we cannot live without and should, as I have tried to do, make use of

in a more robust way. Those holding steady to Norton's historical

environmental pragmatism should be able to use this methodology to good ends

until, and if, we ever reach that nondualistic world.

If part of the motivation for methodological pragmatism is our connection

to the environmental community then we should remember that the origins of

the convergence hypothesis are also in that community and were not, as is often

forgotten today, a hypothesis invented by Norton. In *Toward Unity* the

convergence hypothesis is introduced by Norton as something that is taken as an

"article of faith" by the environmental community (which he apparently

deduced from interviewing leaders of that community while in Washington D.C.

on leave writing the book) rather than something that he had come up with

himself: "Although they are fascinated with the disagreement raging over the

center, or centers, of environmental values, *active environmentalists have made* their

peace over this issue by accepting an empirical hypothesis – the convergence

hypothesis. *Environmentalists believe* that policies serving the interests of the

human species as a whole, in the long run, will serve also the 'interests" of

nature, and vice versa" (Norton 1991, 240, emphasis added).[ix]

If the convergence hypothesis did emanate from the environmental

community itself, then, consistent with the arguments I made here, we can fairly

ask what that community expects should follow in general from this hypothesis

and what we can do in particular in response to it? The environmental

community may not care about the metaphysical or epistemological foundations

of our views, pragmatist or otherwise, despite their inherent value. While

continuing to articulate and flesh out those views I hope that my methodological

environmental pragmatism, or whatever we wind up calling it, offers another

public role for environmental philosophy given the faith that environmental

advocates place in that hypothesis, and, I hope, that they will eventually place in us.

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[i] There is some disagreement about what is meant by anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism. For reasons that I will not go into detail here I take the view that the distinction should be drawn over the issue of whether or not one believes that direct moral obligations can be extended to entities other than humans. Following Norton's discussion of "weak anthropocentrism" (1984) there seems to be no reason that an anthropocentrist couldn't value non-human individuals or collective entities like species or ecosystems for indirect reasons. Nonanthropocentrists then are those who extend direct moral obligations to things other than humans. This last category is admittedly very large but still meaningful insofar as it marks a departure from most of the history of western ethics.

[ii] For those keeping track, prior to 1997 I called methodological environmental pragmatism "metaphilosophical environmental pragmatism" and what I then termed "philosophical environmental pragmatism" I now call "historical environmental pragmatism." I only point this out because as recently as 2007 there were still several references to people endorsing "metaphilosophical environmental pragmatism" despite the abundant references in my work to "methodological environmental pragmatism" (see Elliott 2007).

[iii] That said the corps of philosophers working on climate change are exceptionally good, including, Chrisoula Andreou, Don Brown, Simon Caney, Steve Gardiner, Dale Jamieson, Henry Shue, and Clark Wolf. Interestingly, though I cannot pursue the issue here, or its implications, I would not count any of these figures as traditionally oriented environmental ethicists in the sense of primarily being concerned with the sort of projects that figures like Callicott and Rolston have been engaged. It should also be pointed out that the best work that I think has been produced by these figures and others has been published in more mainstream philosophical journals such as *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. I believe that in part this is because none of these figures are substantially departing from more traditional forms of ethical theory in pursuit of a moral response to global warming.

[iv] For more on the Evangelical Climate Initiative go to http://www.christiansandclimate.org/.

v Again, I do not have the space here to fully defend this assertion but, at this writing, none of the major Republican candidates for the US presidency are climate skeptics (though Fred Thompson has not yet formally announced his candidacy and he is, unfortunately, a climate skeptic). More importantly, as one senior Republican US Senator from a southern state put it to me recently, the important issue now, for him, is that most Americans believe in anthropogenic global warming and so the party has no choice but to address the issue.

vi Katie McShane (2007) offers a very interesting set of reasons for why we should continue to work out nonanthropocentrism even if the convergence hypothesis is true given that ethics is not just about policy making but also includes substantial questions about "how to feel, what attitudes to take toward different things in the world, which to care about and how to care about them" (170). I cannot here reply to McShane but will only say that formally my methodological pragmatism is designed so as to be agnostic on the question of the truth of anthropocentrism vs. nonanthropocentrism so there is nothing necessarily incompatible with this particular aspect of my views and hers. I certainly also think there is more to ethics than just serving public policy as should be evident in my recent book with John O'Neill and Alan Holland (2008). It would of course be absurd that there would be no differences between the possible worlds I just sketched. How much those differences matter in the service of sustainability however would be an interesting question to pursue.

vii I can imagine pushing this distinction between the evangelical Christian case and the ecofascist case by finding other independently morally objectionable views widely held by fundamentalist Christians and then arguing that the last thing we want to do is offer anything to such communities which would demonstrate how the background values they hold actually can fruitfully address the problems we encounter in the world. Teasing out an answer here would take some time and so will need to be addressed elsewhere but I think the objection is not insurmountable. It would require however a not insignificant investigation of the nature and scope of liberal tolerance and what we personally mind or don't mind in terms of how people treat each other and how they think about each other. I don't seem to mind that some of the evangelical climate enthusiasts believe that I will go to hell because I am a Jew. I do mind that there are fascists who would like to cleanse the world of people like me. Perhaps the difference is that the evangelicals are, to my mind, speculating about my possible future in a possible afterlife (a view which I do not share) rather than talking about my possible future in the here and now (a here and now that I am reasonably sure does exist). Also, wanting to work with religious believers to solve environmental problems does not entail that one condones all religious

belief or practice and can't make distinctions between committed belief in one's own personal basis for morality and fanaticism.

[viii] Indeed Elliot claims at the end of this article that the political version of Norton's thesis in *Sustainability* is a version of my metaphilosophical (now methodological) pragmatism.

[ix] Some have suggested to me that we have forgotten the origins of the hypothesis in part due to the way Norton later discussed it. See, for example, Norton 2002, 78: "The convergence hypothesis which I have offered . . ." And Norton 2005, 508: "I have introduced into the bifurcated discourse of environmental values what I call the convergence hypothesis." But I take this to be only short hand for introducing these discussions rather than claiming that the hypothesis is something that Norton invented *de novo* rather than, to my mind more admirably, naming it and introducing it to environmental ethicists from the larger environmental community to help set us straight.