

Edited by
Erin McKenna and
Andrew Light

Animal Pragmatism

Rethinking
Human-Nonhuman
Relationships



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2 Dewey and Animal Ethics

Steven Fesmire

The Silence of Pragmatism

Animal ethics, which investigates the appropriate ethical relationship between humans and nonhuman animals, emerged in the 1970s as a response to the powerful impact of human practices on other species. As is true of environmental ethics more generally, this investigation has a significant bearing on how we understand ourselves and on what policies we will endorse. The field is dizzying in scope, encompassing topics as varied as animal experimentation, zoos, hunting, bushmeat, livestock agriculture, landscape sustainability, biodiversity, ecosystem management, ecological restoration, companion animals, diet, sabotage, the moral status of animals, animal suffering, animal mentality, biotechnology, and animal rights.

It is also a field ignored by most contemporary philosophers working in the classical pragmatist tradition. There are several reasons for this neglect. The pragmatist tradition, despite its empirical naturalism, has historically tended toward anthropocentrism both in its valuations and in its descriptions of the generic traits of existence (see appendixes 2-1 and 2-2). At the same time, because the analytic philosophers who dominate animal ethics draw from a tradition more explicitly concerned with discursive form than specific substantive content, they are at greater liberty to widen the sphere of moral considerability. Moreover, animal ethics has been dominated by utilitarians and Kantians, who hold monistic positions that strike classical pragmatists as flat. Quite simply, one who sidesteps a confrontation over the relative merits of the utilitarian maxim or practical imperative as supreme moral principles is not likely to quibble over anthropocentric versus sentientist variations of these principles. An unfortunate, though understandable, result is that pragmatism has been silent in one of the most conceptually rich and practically significant fields of contemporary ethics.

Pragmatism and Animal Ethics

From a pragmatic standpoint, particularly as inspired by John Dewey, ethics is the art of helping people to live richer, more responsive, and more emotionally engaged lives.¹ This art is a branch of pragmatic philosophy, understood as the interpretation, evaluation, criticism, and redirection of culture. Such an

understanding is closer to Aristotle than to Kant, who approached ethics primarily as the rational justification of an inherited moral system. While advocating the guidance of principles, rules, moral images, and the like as a means to perceptive and responsible moral behavior, pragmatist ethics does not assume, prior to inquiry, that there is one "right thing to do" in moral situations. Nor does it provide a univocal principle or supreme concept to "correctly" resolve all ethical quandaries about right and wrong or to solve conflicts over values.

The word *theory* is derived from the Greek *theōrein*, "to behold," and a good theory enlarges and stimulates observations about how experience hangs together. All theories highlight and hide relevant moral factors, so they cannot finally resolve conundrums. Conundrums are resolved, at least at the level of practical policy, by the cooperation of individuals.² Nonetheless, resolutions are more trustworthy when those individuals approach conflicts over values with a toolbox of carefully honed theories, even in the absence of a "right" standpoint from which these theories can be seen as fully commensurable. Like Dewey's notoriously misunderstood educational theory, pragmatist ethics mediates between polarities of closed systems of ready-made principles, on the one hand, and offhanded recklessness, on the other hand. In pursuit of coordinated thinking, experimental intelligence, and imaginative forethought, the pragmatist in ethics steers between the Scylla of haphazard drifting and the Charybdis of pat solutions.

The central dogma of ethical theory is that it identifies a moral bedrock that tells us the right way to organize moral reflection. Moral skeptics accept this dogma, plausibly reject the possibility of discovering or erecting such a foundation, and hear the bell toll for ethics. Many self-described normative ethicists hear no such bell. They argue, or uncritically assume, that the fundamental fact of morality is our capacity to set aside our patchwork of customary beliefs in favor of moral laws, rules, or value rankings derived from one or more foundational principles or concepts. This is indeed an ineliminable assumption of ethics, moral skeptics rejoin, but sadly we all lack such a capacity.

A siren lure compels the hyperrationalist's quest for the grand theory or meta-ethical principle that will systematically unify, without sacrificing robustness, competing and seemingly incommensurable ethical theories. Yet in contemporary philosophical ethics there is a growing demand to reject unidimensional theories in favor of multiple considerations, a demand stemming in part from the past century's rejection of ahistorical matrices for values. But the plea by pluralists for multiple considerations arises primarily from honest attention to the complex textures and hues of moral life.³ The apparent trajectory toward pluralism in ethics is far less visible in animal ethics, however.

On this meta-ethical quest for a nexus of commensurability, animal ethicists concur with some of their holistic critics in environmental ethics—for example, J. Baird Callicott, who regards animal ethics of the 1970s and 1980s as an ancestral form of nonanthropocentrism predating the ascendancy of a communal land ethic ("Introduction"). Callicott adopts a meta-ethical variation of one-

size-fits-all monism, grounded in "the community concept." Monism, he argues, is the only alternative to the "intellectual equivalent of a multiple personality disorder": pluralism (*Beyond the Land Ethic* 175). The pluralist adopts an incoherent set of foundational ideas by "facilely becoming a utilitarian for this purpose, a deontologist for that, an Aristotelian for another, and so on" (172). I argue in this section that Callicott's description of pluralism is itself facile.

In "Three Independent Factors in Morals," Dewey presents a pragmatic pluralism that can ameliorate current debates. He argues that ethical theorists should cease asking which principle or concept is the ultimate and unifying one and should attempt instead to reconcile the inherent conflicts between irreducible factors that characterize all situations of moral uncertainty. He identifies three such factors that need to be coordinated: individual ends (the origin of consequentialist ethics), the demands of communal life (the origin of theories of duty and justice in deontological ethics), and social approbation (the principal factor in virtue theories).

The preference for three primary factors may be an aesthetic one for Dewey, and he knowingly exaggerates differences among the three ("Appendix 5: Three Independent Factors" 503). What is more interesting is his idea that moral philosophers have abstracted one or another factor of moral life—say, the community concept in the case of Callicott; amelioration of suffering, for Peter Singer (*Animal Liberation*); and inviolate subjectivity, for Tom Regan (*Defending Animal Rights*)—as central and then treated it as the foundation to which all moral justification is reducible. This tendency to reify moral factors explains why ethical theories are categorized according to their chosen bottom line.

Two theories have dominated the past twenty years of ethical reflection on animals. Peter Singer offers a utilitarian grounding for the principle of equality and then compellingly argues that to be rational and consistent, we must give equal consideration to relevantly similar interests of all sentient beings. Tom Regan objects that Singer misses the fundamental wrong, which is that we violate the rights of any subject of a life whenever we treat the being as a mere means to an end. Meanwhile, many environmental ethicists claim that both miss the forest for the trees, because both limit moral considerability to individuals and relegate the integrity and stability of ecosystems to a secondary, supporting role.

Each of these theories serves to streamline moral reflection. Our relationship with nonhuman animals is inherently ambiguous and conflict-ridden, so we need all the help we can get to make judgment more reasonable, less biased by what Dewey calls "the twisting, exaggerating and slighting tendency of passion and habit" (*Human Nature* 169). The practical imperative or utilitarian maxim, like Callicott's broader communitarian concept, serves moral life. In Dewey's words, such a conceptual tool provides a way of

looking at and examining a particular question that comes up. It holds before him certain possible aspects of the act; it warns him against taking a short or partial view of the act. It economizes his thinking by supplying him with the main heads

by reference to which to consider the bearings of his desires and purposes; it guides him in his thinking by suggesting to him the important considerations for which he should be on the lookout. (Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* [1932] 280)

For example, Tom Regan's neo-Kantian notion of animal rights—that it is disrespectful to treat any subject of a life simply as an instrument for others' satisfactions—has been taken by some as an inescapable indictment of anthropocentrism. Regan argues, "The fundamental wrong is the system that allows us to view animals as our resources, here for us, to be eaten, or surgically manipulated, or put in our cross hairs for sport or money" ("Case for Animal Rights" 14). Certainly the practical imperative summarizes a great deal of moral wisdom. Taken as a guiding hypothesis, it is a tool for perceiving the vagaries of moral situations. Although the tool was honed by Kant for use on human issues, our current scientific understanding of animal mentality renders obsolete the suggestion that there is nothing worth respecting in the interior lives of at least some other animals. Still, the pragmatist ethicist refuses to play the winner-take-all game. The practical imperative is a trusty tool but no more than a tool: it is valued and evaluated by the work it does and thus is subject to reworking.

For a taxonomy of some current approaches, consider the ethics of hunting. Because most ethical theories reduce all but one of the following questions to secondary status, they cannot *on their own* do justice to the ambiguity and complexity of situations. The ecocentrist helpfully asks, Is therapeutic culling of "management species" (especially ungulates such as deer or elk) ecologically obligatory, regardless of whether anyone desires to pull the trigger?⁴ The biocentrist inquires, Is nonsubsistence hunting compatible with respecting an animal as a fellow "teleological center of life" pursuing its own evolved good? The virtue theorist wonders, What traits of character are cultivated by sport and trophy hunting, and do these contribute to the best shared life? Do humans have predatory instincts that are most healthily expressed through hunting? Is hunting essential to a healthy relationship with the land, as Aldo Leopold believed? The deontological rights theorist inquires, Do other animals have rights; that is, might their interests as we perceive them override any direct benefits they might offer humans as prey?⁵ The feminist ethicist of care asks, Does hunting affect our ability to care for animals; indeed, are we genuinely capable of caring about beings with whom we have no sustained relationship? The utilitarian questions, Should all sentient animals' preferences or interests as we perceive them, including our own, have equal weight when we evaluate consequences? Can human preferences for hunting, if nonbasic, justifiably trump basic animal interests in life, liberty, and bodily integrity?

To spotlight only one of these pressing questions risks bringing ethical deliberation to a premature close. The moment when deliberation culminates in a resolutely formed plan of action always provides strong subjective reinforcement, which supplies a psychological motive to find a unifying ethical theory to do the job. But no practical ethicist wishes merely to taste the subjective sat-

isfaction of theoretical tinkering. The aim is, or ought to be, to mediate objective difficulties in the lifeworld, not simply to "resolve" an ethical quandary in inner mental space. To achieve that aim requires a greater tolerance for suspense than monism typically affords. The pragmatic pluralist cultivates habits of swimming against a psychological current that propels us toward easy answers and quick solutions to complex problems.

This psychology of suspense and belief is captured by William James in his watershed essay "The Sentiment of Rationality." James argues that the whole point of rationality is the restoration of manageability to doubtful circumstances. Because this restoration culminates an uneasy process, it is marked by "a strong feeling of ease, peace, rest" (317). He dubs this state of resolution the rational sentiment, a telltale sign that fluid interaction has been restored. But this seemingly oxymoronic "rational sentiment" is not to be equated with truth. For classical pragmatism, to discern the *truth* (in its older sense of "trustworthiness") of a proposed course of action requires investigating what follows from acting on it. How will the world answer back? At the same time, the rational sentiment is felt *whenever* doubt is replaced with substantive belief.

In *How We Think*, Dewey takes this a step further. He argues that deliberation is "a kind of dramatic rehearsal. Were there only one suggestion popping up, we should undoubtedly adopt it at once." But when alternatives contend with one another as we forecast their probable outcomes, the ensuing tension sustains inquiry (200). Monistic ethical theory is too impatient to sustain the tension needed; it sacrifices nuanced perception in favor of theoretic clarity. Reliable moral knowledge, as Martha Nussbaum explains, entails "seeing a complex, concrete reality in a highly lucid and richly responsive way; it is taking in what is there, with imagination and feeling" (152). This is why pragmatic pluralism, which employs univocal ethical theories as directive hypotheses, marks a path toward *responsibility*. Responding to a situation's multiple factors is not analogous to a personality disorder; failing to do so because of an obsession with theoretical reductions should, however, give a psychologist pause.

To return to the issue of hunting: what is at issue is not exclusively a matter of establishing who has rights or of equally weighing human and animal preferences or of valuing the overall biotic community. Tunneled perception can inhibit deliberation at least as much as it helpfully focuses it. On the view that there are *plural* primary factors in situations, the role of moral philosophy shifts. It functions not to provide a bedrock but to clarify, interpret, evaluate, and redirect our natural and social interactions. Some may find these pluralistic conclusions, or their implications, unsatisfying. But the principal aim of ethics is the amelioration of perplexing situations, even at the cost of the ease, peace, and rest we feel when we sort out an internally consistent theory.

Pragmatism and Paleopragmatism

Our sense of who we are, how we understand other species, the way we relate to nonhuman nature, and what we see as possible policies depends signifi-

cantly on our moral images of nature. Hilary Putnam implies that ethics is better served by exploring such tethering centers than by constrictive argumentation that is insensitive to what James calls the world's "relational mosaic" (Putnam 51). For example, it *matters* for deliberation if we conceive animals anthropocentrically: as resources (for human consumption or use), as property (commodities to be owned and sold), or as God's dominion (given to humans to subdue and rule over, or to steward wisely). It also matters if we conceive animals nonanthropocentrically, either as individuals with their own needs, feelings, and unique ways or as inseparable parts of ecosystemic wholes. Alternatives available under one model of animals or nature may not be available under another.⁶

This observation highlights a central difficulty in disjunctively framing the individualism-holism debate in environmental ethics: we cannot respond to what we do not perceive. "We grieve only for what we know," Leopold observes (52). We starve deliberation of the relations it needs when we exclude at the outset parts *or* wholes, individuals *or* systems—the "independent factors" of organic interaction—from our moral purview. These insights provide the ingredients for a Deweyan animal ethics, though the phrase appears oxymoronic, given Dewey's characterization of animals (see appendixes 2-1 and 2-2).⁷

After more than 3 billion years of organic evolution on Earth, creatures with extraordinary mental capacity emerged, sized things up, and projected their own mentality onto the cosmos as its necessary source, sustainer, and culmination. Having committed this hubris, they interpreted nonhuman animal nature as lacking the mentality that they had elevated to a godlike trait. Dewey takes us beyond the former conceit, but not the latter. Larry Hickman argues that for Dewey, "the principal difference between human beings and the rest of nature is not that there is no communication elsewhere than within human communities, but that human beings are unique in their ability to exercise control over their own habit-formation and therefore to alter in deliberate ways both the course of their own evolution and the evolution of their environing conditions" (51). This distinction is plausible and defensible. But contrary to Hickman's claim, Dewey *does* deny communication and all related capacities to other animals.⁸

On Dewey's "ground-map of the province of criticism" (*Experience and Nature* 309), sometimes referred to as his metaphysics, humans live alone on a third plateau (208), a field of interaction that includes all mental life and all individualizing factors. Appendixes 2-1 and 2-2, which present Dewey's thoughts on animal mentality and on the three plateaus, reveal residual traces of philosophies Dewey elsewhere discredits, such as an echo of the hierarchical great chain of being (absent Aristotle's teleological anthropocentrism), as well as a vestige of Cartesianism in which animals are mindless automatons. The mind is embodied, but only human bodies have minds. Moreover, when demarcating the "human plane," Dewey's picture surprisingly recalls planes of freedom and necessity in Kant's metaphysics of morals. With regard to animals, it is difficult to distinguish Dewey's view from a philosophical orthodoxy that may be empiri-

cally as obsolete as Ptolemaic astronomy or Aristotelian biology, insofar as his is a Darwinian landscape with Cartesian blotches on the horizon. The irony of all of this from the pen of the most anti-Cartesian and radically empirical of philosophers is itself a powerful reminder of the inescapably cultural and historical nature of inquiry.

A focus on imagination is perhaps the best way to reveal what is redemptive in Dewey's model. He is calling us to actualize our humanity, to establish social and material conditions that liberate our energies from enslavement to mechanized habits toward a life of critical inquiry, social responsiveness, emotional engagement, and artful consummations. By repeatedly casting animals in the role of unintelligent and unemotional brutes ruled by the inertia of habit, he attempts to throw into relief the human potential: Aristotle's rational animal becomes Dewey's imaginative animal.

Dewey scholars have yet to look out of the corner of their eyes to scrutinize this part of Dewey's horizon. Yet to keep the vitality of pragmatism from ossifying into paleopragmatism, it is essential to disclose passively accepted beliefs that inhabit and shape the roots and edges of American philosophy. There is a pressing need to supplement and correct pragmatism's uncritical perpetuation of prejudices and to confront complex issues of how best to comport ourselves toward other species. To pretend that our second-order desires simply outrank their first-order needs is prejudice premised on a metaphysical or ethical caste system, not ethical reflection. The beauty of Dewey's naturalistic empiricism is that his own perspectives must be run through its threshing machine: "Only chaff goes, though perhaps the chaff had once been treasured. An empirical method which remains true to nature does not 'save'; it is not an insurance device nor a mechanical antiseptic. But it inspires the mind with courage and vitality to create new ideals and values in the face of the perplexities of a new world" (*Experience and Nature* 4).

Pragmatism and Vegetarianism

How might we interpret the behavior of the girl in figure 2.1? willful public ignorance of the source of our food? a child's innocence of our appropriate role in the cycle of life and death? humane sympathy prior to the emotional hardening of enculturation?

Some very general remarks about vegetarianism may give a better sense of the tone and texture of a pragmatic pluralist approach to animal ethics. As situational and contextual, pragmatist ethics is responsive to social, political, and environmental contexts of eating, including the redemptive value of some traditional practices. Pragmatism does not fall prey to possible biases in utilitarian and rights theories that, according to Kathryn Paxton George, take dietary access and requirements of middle-class males as physiological and cultural prototypes and regulate to a "moral underclass" infants and children, pregnant and lactating women, some elderly people, and members of nonindustrialized societies.



Figure 2.1. *National Geographic* 57, no. 3 (March 1930): 347. Photo by R. R. Sallows.

Robert Newton Peck explores the tensions thoughtful people feel about slaughtering animals in his widely read children's book *A Day No Pigs Would Die*. In this fictional coming-of-age story set in rural Vermont, a child (much like the little girl in figure 2.1) grapples with the fate of his pet pig being raised for slaughter. In doing what is to be done, he eventually leaves his childlike innocence behind and joins an adult world in which felt preferences do not always square with the daily demands of living. Upon reading the book, a dairy farmer in upstate New York said approvingly: "A boy grows up when he sees there's things in the world he's got to do, not just do the things he wants to do" (Lovenheim 136).

It is simply not possible to survive, even as a vegan or vegetarian, without killing sentient beings. A belief in such a possibility could be held only by someone who had never tilled and tended a garden. Moreover, one who regards sustainable living as a virtue should concede the organic agriculturalist's point that free-range livestock agriculture (fed on grass and by-products) can be part of, and in a cold climate like Vermont's may even be essential to, a sustainable landscape. A diet, more or less like my own semi-vegetarian one, that depends in part on hundreds of calories of fossil fuel to transport a few calories of soy product across the country is at least not the *only* way to go. Real problems like these admit of more than one responsible moral resolution.

"Sure, I understand the pain the pigs must go through when their tails get chopped off," a student recently wrote in response to reading a chapter from

Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*. "And I understand the pain the chickens must go through when they are debeaked. However they weren't born for fun and games and to have a painless life. They were only born to feed millions of Americans. And if some pain is necessary for this then that is fine with me. Why should the pigs, cows, and chickens have space to roam and be comfortable? They were simply born to die for us."

Many would find this bald statement troubling, including most of the 96 percent of Americans who, according to a 2002 Time/CNN Poll, do not consider themselves to be vegetarians (Corliss). This uneasy response by meat eaters provides an emotional opening seized on by animal rights advocates, who correctly point out that modern industrial animal agriculture—now involving the slaughter of more than 10 billion animals each year in the United States—is premised on precisely this reduction of other animals to market commodities. They are conceived for and consumed by us.

Vegetarianism is one way to coherently express regard for nonhuman animals, but it is myopic to suppose this is the only way. To anyone not already caught in the orbit of ethical theorizing, what immediately stands out about the aforementioned student's remark is not its violation of an expanded practical imperative but its callous tone. His unquestioning subordination of other animals to human interests is ethically relevant, but secondary. The Talmudic story of Rabbi Judah makes the point:

One day, the story goes, Rabbi Judah was sitting at a café in a small town when a wagon came by carrying a calf to the slaughterhouse. The calf cried out to Rabbi Judah for mercy, but the rabbi replied, "Go, for this you were created." For his callousness, God punished Rabbi Judah with a painful illness lasting seventeen years. Then one day, seeing his housekeeper about to sweep a weasel from the house, Rabbi Judah told the woman to treat the animal gently, and his illness ended. (Lovenheim 236)

The moral of the story, according to Talmudic scholars, is not that Rabbi Judah failed to save the calf but that the calf's fate should have elicited compassion rather than cold disregard (Lovenheim 236). The student's statement might be similarly interpreted.

This story indicates that it may be neither incoherent nor hypocritical to eat a turkey dinner or steak while responding with sincere moral concern when others exhibit callous attitudes toward livestock animals. But there *are* difficulties here, perhaps best disclosed by analytic argumentation. At least two hidden premises deserve mention:

1. A mature (dutiful, virtuous, beneficial, caring, respectful, or the like, depending on one's dominant ethical paradigm) ethical relationship between humans, other animals, and the rest of nonhuman nature *requires* (strong version) or *permits* (weak version) a system of production in which we breed, kill, and eat some of them.
2. Granting that callousness toward animal welfare is ethically problematic, *emotional responsiveness toward animals can be fully exhibited*

within customary consumption habits (i.e., while fully participating as a consumer in the commodification of animals—and workers—in industrial agribusiness).

Premise 2 seems sufficiently suspect to place the burden of ethical proof on the consumer, so I limit my brief remarks to premise 1.

Teleological anthropocentrism should be measured in half-lives, given its obstinacy as a habit of mind persisting through more scientific paradigm shifts than can be enumerated. It has, however, long disappeared from intellectually respectable circles, destroying forever any basis for an existential hierarchy of perfection and value. At least among most academics, Aristotle's remarks in the *Politics* (in the context of his justification of human slavery) now ring hollow: "Now if nature makes nothing incomplete, and nothing in vain, the inference must be that she has made all animals for the sake of man" (1256b).

At the same time, remnants of the medieval great chain of being pervade our intellectual habits and behaviors. As Dewey observed, moral progress has not kept pace with scientific advance. This is apparent in our treatment of other animals. When an evangelical Christian lobbyist in August 2001 urged President George W. Bush not to "reduce all human life to laboratory rats" by supporting stem cell research, he could safely assume that the moral considerability of rats was not at issue. In the House debate on therapeutic cloning that was front-page news prior to September 11, 2001, the conservative Representative Tom DeLay argued that therapeutic cloning "crosses a bright-line ethical boundary that should give all of us pause. This technique would reduce some human beings to the level of an industrial commodity" (DeLay). That is, it would place humans in the same category as animals, whose fluctuating worth is measured by prices fetched on economic markets. This should indeed give us pause, but unfortunately, DeLay's listeners are not likely to wonder whether his logic extends to other animals already so treated. That this hierarchy requires reasoned justification is obvious. It is equally obvious that such justification is seldom demanded, even among the millions who would regard Aristotle's comment quoted above as quaint.

Once crude forms of anthropocentrism are abandoned, at least two potentially defensible arguments for premise 1 are left. First, an ecocentric argument: As animals in trophic systems, we participate, whether or not we are vegetarians, in food chain cycles of life and death. We should not pretend to be "above nature." Thus, consuming other animals is at least permissible, and indeed conscious participation in this cycle may help us to cultivate an appropriately tragic sense of life. Proponents of this argument must, however, probe more deeply than an implicit appeal to entrenched customary views of what is "natural" for humans: The vegetarian gorilla participates in trophic systems no less than the omnivorous chimpanzee, and we do not suggest that the gorilla is above nature. Second, a popular organic agriculturalist argument: If we value a sustainable, working landscape that renews rather than depletes the soil, and if we seek a viable local food-source alternative to the environmental and social disaster of

much industrial agribusiness, grass-fed livestock agriculture can, or must, play an integral part. However, given the limited availability and greater expense of such meat, the consistent organic agriculturalist may practice a mostly vegetarian diet. On both arguments, it is tragic that animals will die for us, but consuming them does not logically entail cold disregard.

Dewey-Inspired Resources for Animal Ethics

I have underscored Dewey-inspired pragmatism's virtue as a pluralistic yet nonrelativistic framework within which to *listen* to and incorporate the insights of divergent theoretical perspectives. There is no univocal "pragmatic stance on animal ethics," nor does Dewey offer much in the way of specific guidelines for deliberation in cases in which conflicting goods of humans, animals, and ecosystems must be prioritized. He would have left such conflicts to democratic colloquy. Nonetheless, pragmatism has several additional resources to offer animal ethics.

1. Dewey carries out a radical redescription of moral inquiry that lays bare underappreciated deliberative capacities, chief among which is imagination. And he makes a compelling case for an artistic-aesthetic ideal of moral perceptiveness and responsiveness.⁹
2. Like contemporary biocentrists, the classical pragmatists took our shared ancestry with nonhumans seriously. *Human*, after Darwin, is an adjective for our specific animal nature, not the pinnacle of a hierarchy of final causes or something *sui generis*.
3. Dewey's "democratic ideal" is a resource to further develop what Bryan Norton and Andrew Light have articulated as a pragmatic method of policy convergence (see Light and Katz). When interests conflict, the democratic way of life elicits differences and gives them a hearing instead of sacrificing them on the altar of preconceived biases. This approach taps into our imaginative capacity to stretch perception beyond the environment we immediately sense. A democratic imagination opens up an expansive field of contact with which to flexibly interact so that goods are enjoyed rather than repressed and so that difficulties can be treated comprehensively instead of in isolation: This "greater diversity of stimuli" (Dewey, *Democracy and Education* 93) opened by imagination expands the sense of exigencies struggling for recognition. Integrative values may emerge to reconstruct and harmonize conflicting desires and appraisals. A democratic imagination—which may also operate as an *ecological* imagination—enables policy decisions to be made in richly responsible colloquy among advocates for competing values.¹⁰

Pragmatism values democratic colloquy over soliloquy. In contrast, in Singer's engaging and aptly titled *Ethics into Action*, the theorist discerns the ethical thing to do, then urges activists to turn up the rheto-

ric to get it done. The problem is that one may “do the right thing” at the price of ignoring what does not fit one’s preestablished trajectory. Democratic inquiry is the best check on this suspect assumption of epistemic privilege. Thus pragmatism engenders a democratic method of policy convergence that sidesteps theoretical debates of the winner-take-all variety and strives for amelioration rather than definitive solutions.

4. Dewey’s concept of “natural piety,” set forth in *A Common Faith*, can be reconstructed as a virtue exhibited by those who realize that parts of nonhuman nature are looking back at them with awareness and emotion. Unreconstructed, Dewey’s virtue falls short of a “full perceptual realization” (*Art as Experience* 182) of the lifeworld in which we are part. An incomplete piety would suffer, in John McDermott’s words, from “relation deprivation.” Without a deep perception of the kinship and differences between ourselves and other animals, reverence toward nature is severely limited. What ensues may be a pseudo-piety in which the ways of other species are uncritically subordinated to our own along pathways set by conventional morality.

Reconstructed, natural piety is a trait of character that contributes to the best lifeworld. It is not quite identical to Albert Schweitzer’s biocentric reverence-for-life (though the two concepts share a certain vagueness) since it extends beyond living organisms to the greater “imaginative totality we call the Universe” (*Common Faith* 14).

Deweyan natural piety does not idealize nature à la Rousseau, overly romanticize, or otherwise fail to extricate itself from assumptions of a providential natural order.

5. The starting point is the *problem*. The pragmatist in ethics does not simply deduce, on the basis of prior conclusions, how to respond to an issue at hand. Toolbox of principles in hand, the pragmatic pluralist attends to situational factors overlooked by theorists of other orientations.
6. In mainstream environmental and animal ethics, the starting point is to determine who or what has *moral standing*. This approach aids prioritization when values conflict, but it ironically conceives the domain of the “moral” too *narrowly*. As Mary Midgley explores in *Animals and Why They Matter*, empathy develops with use. As a trait of character, empathy diminishes when switched on and off as each candidate’s credentials for moral status is scrutinized. If a certain type of biological organism does not have “feelings of well-being” or is not a “subject of a life,” then according to Singer or Regan it is not a candidate for moral consideration or cross-species empathy. This stance rescues theories of animal liberation or animal rights from the absurdity of extending rights ad infinitum, and it focuses attention on beings whose interests have hitherto been thought irrelevant. But it also places blinders on moral perception. Squashing an insect is an act with *some*

moral bearing. On a related note, democratic inquiry is best served by giving a pink slip to some environmental ethicists who are attempting to detail *precisely* how to prioritize competing goods among humans, animals, and ecosystems.

Many additional resources of pragmatic pluralism could likewise be explored. It is committed to a self-correcting fallibilism; it acknowledges the genuineness of moral conflicts, dilemmas, and tragedy; it eschews "mysterious" notions of "inherent value," rightly criticized by Mary Anne Warren; and it recognizes the aesthetic as a nonsubjective factor in moral choice.

Anthropocentric Conclusion

Some environmental and animal ethicists dismiss all anthropocentrism with casual disdain, despite their awareness of how rarely moral life embraces humanity. These ethicists risk trading in one form of obtuseness for another. To the degree that we are morally educable, the ancients rightly perceived that we must cultivate traits of character that contribute to our flourishing as social beings. An environmental or animal ethic that marginalizes our social environment is irresponsible. Still, the teleology of the ancients is no longer tenable, and it served to subjugate slaves to masters, women to men, and of course non-human nature to humans. The persistent attempt in ethics to exclude non-humans from moral consideration has lost its credibility.

We cannot logically exclude any form of cruelty or needless subjugation from our moral framework. This is no less true if our primary commitment is to ameliorate our own plight. If our treatment of those who are vulnerable and dependent may be taken as a test for our values, then there is, to paraphrase John Steinbeck, a failure that topples all our success exhibited by our treatment of disadvantaged humans *and* animals.

Building on Dewey's pragmatic pluralism, animal ethicists need not drive a wedge between anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism. The arch-anthropocentrist Kant, in his way, was right to observe that our treatment of other animals has a bearing on our treatment of each other. Kant thought we *only had duties "regarding" animals, none directly "to" animals.* But if it became commonplace in moral education to (nonanthropocentrically) expand our sphere of care to include direct concern for other animals and nonhuman nature, this expansion would (anthropocentrically) supplement, reinforce, and render more rationally coherent our exertions to deal with the atrocities we commit against each other. It would also make us better planetary stewards for future generations, enrich our lives, fuel our sympathetic capacities, and cultivate a much-needed humility to replace our sadly entrenched vanity.

Appendix 2-1. Dewey on Animal Mentality

1. *Consciousness.* The most comprehensive ethological critique of the categorical claim that nonhuman animals are "passive reflex devices" is Donald Griffin's *Animal Minds*. Griffin helpfully distinguishes "perceptual" from "reflective consciousness." The former includes all awareness (such as memory, anticipation, choice, means-end thinking, etc.), while the latter is a subset in which "the content is conscious experience itself" (8). According to Dewey, both (not only the latter, as may be justified) are restricted to humans. Humans have "goods," which are conditioned by thought, while all other animals have "pleasures," which are accidental (*Human Nature* 146). In all nonhumans, responses are simply released by environmental conditions.

2. *Social Communication, Language, Thought.* Dewey believed only humans to be capable of social communication. Communication is possible because of language/speech, and it is a prerequisite for both thought and imagination. In Dewey's words, "If we had not talked with others and they with us, we should never talk to and with ourselves": "Through speech a person dramatically identifies himself with potential acts and deeds" (*Experience and Nature* 135). "Thought," Mead adds, "is but an inner conversation" ("The Social Self" 146). The upshot for animals of defining language narrowly as verbal speech is wittily captured in Dewey's quip: To claim that "lower animals, animals without language" are thinking beings is analogous to claiming a forked branch is a plow (*Experience and Nature* 215). Work on apes and aquatic mammals suggests a need to reinterpret this rich human-centered model of communication (e.g., see Fouts and Mills, or Cavalieri and Singer).

3. *Culture.* "[W]ith human beings, cultural conditions replace strictly physical ones" (*Freedom and Culture* 78). In *Freedom and Culture*, Dewey helpfully identifies at least six chief factors of culture (79): (1) law and politics, (2) industry and commerce, (3) science and technology, (4) the arts of expression and communication, (5) "morals, or the values men prize and the ways in which they evaluate them," and (6) social philosophy, "the system of general ideas used by men to justify and to criticize the fundamental conditions under which they live." In *The Evolution of Culture in Animals*, John Bonner offers a more inclusive definition now used in ethological studies, such as widely publicized work on chimpanzees and orangutans: "Certain kinds of information can only be transmitted by behavioral means. If the transmission of this kind of information is adaptive, then there would be a strong selection pressure for culture" (183). For a sustained criticism of the claim "that survival tactics [in nonhumans] must be hard-wired and instinctive" (19) rather than cultural, see Frans de Waal. On chimpanzee culture, see Gretchen Vogel; on orangutan culture, Carel van Schaik et al.

4. *Emotion.* Dewey contrasts "emotion" with blind discharges of "animal passion" (*Middle Works [MW]* 10:282, "Fiat Justitia, Ruat Coelum"; cf. *Art as Experience* 68). Emotion enables humans to experience pain as more than "blind, formless" (*Early Works [EW]* 5:361, review of H. M. Stanley's *Studies in the Evolutionary Psychology of Feeling*; cf. 362-67). Lacking emotions, animals do not anticipate the future or remember the past. Because their experience is not situated in an ongoing narrative, the animal parallel of human pain involves "simply a shock of interrupted activity" (*EW* 4:179; cf. 183-85, "The Theory of Emotion"). Ahead of the curve of a priorist scientific dogma for the century to come, in the 1890s Dewey derided as "unduly anthropomorphic" any attempt to claim an analogy between animal stimulus-response and human emotional experi-

ence. Animals *act* afraid, angry, and the like, but they lack the imaginative perception of past and future requisite to calling their experience emotional. It is instead inflexibly habitual (*EW* 5:364, review of Stanley; *Art as Experience* 276). (A historical parallel is Descartes's famous thought experiment, in the *Discourse on Method*, about a machine that mimics human behaviors.) Animals therefore are exempt from any sort of aesthetic experience, which for Dewey requires a unifying emotional quality from tensive beginning through consummation (*Art as Experience* 42-43; cf. *MW* 10:321-24, "Introduction to *Essays in Experimental Logic*"). For a contemporary discussion of animal emotions, see Masson and McCarthy.

5. *Imagination, Deliberation, Dramatic Rehearsal.* Animal pleasures and pains are accidental, for Dewey, caused by chance evolutionary hardwiring. Natural selection has geared animals for immediately satisfied instinct, "very much like a machine" (*Later Works [LW]* 17:258, "Periods of Growth"). Dewey is here observing chickens, but he goes on to generalize about all nonhuman animals. Animal pain gives rise to "blind, formless movements" useful by evolutionary chance, not choice. Implicitly echoing Descartes's praise of the providential order of animal "clockwork," Dewey asserts that an animal's sheer organizational mechanisms are perfected to deal with crises without "the additional problem of pain to wrestle with" (*EW* 5:361, review of Stanley). Animal action is immediate and overt, in contrast with what is found in humans: indirect imaginative forethought and experimental probing sparked by the tension of disrupted habits. Thus, for instance, there is nothing "on the animal plane" analogous to love. Nonhumans pursue the "physiologically normal end" of sex without any sort of redirection of impulses—such as in humans results in poetry—into other channels (*Art as Experience* 83).

Only with humans are "means-consequences tried out in advance [in imagination] without the organism getting irretrievably involved in physical consequences." Animal actions are "fully geared to extero-ceptor and muscular activities" and hence immediately translate into overt rather than indirect behavior (*Experience and Nature* 221). In 1939, Dewey wrote of "distinctively human behavior, that, namely, which is influenced by emotion and desire in the framing of means and ends; for desire, having ends-in-view, and hence involving valuations, is the characteristic that marks off human from nonhuman behavior" (*Theory of Valuation* 250; cf. *LW* 17:256-58, "Periods of Growth"; *Experience and Nature* 221; *MW* 10:282, "Fiat Justitia, Ruat Coelum"). On this model, other animals appear to be utterly outside the realm of moral agents or patients. This view played a role in Dewey's unqualified confidence that "scientific men are under definite obligation to experiment upon animals" (*LW* 2:98, "Ethics of Animal Experimentation"; cf. *LW* 13:333, "Unity of the Human Being").

Appendix 2-2. Dewey's Three Plateaus

All three "planes" or "plateaus" below involve the "interaction of a living being with an environment" (*Art as Experience* 276). Because "the human animal is a *human animal*" (Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* [1908] 335), operations of the higher include the lower, but not vice versa. Here, as with Peirce's doctrine of synechism, there are no ontological barriers to continuity between human and other forms of life, though of course developmental constraints in the other direction exist. For Dewey, these are descriptive categories for "fields of interaction"; unlike Aristotle's parallel categories, they do *not* support a fundamental ontology, hierarchy of final causes, or fixed teleology of any sort. Thus he fully understands that this categorization is fallible and revisable in light of new evidence (such as that available today). He says of the categories: "They stick to empirical facts noting and denoting characteristic qualities and consequences peculiar to various levels of interaction" (*Experience and Nature* 208).

III. The Human Plane (Aristotle: Thinking)

The "third plateau" (*Experience and Nature* 208) is the "highest" field of interaction, of art, science, morality, and religious life. It is the object of social sciences.

Mind is "the body of organized meanings by means of which events of the present have significance for us" (*Art as Experience* 276). This property is added to and incorporates the animal plane.

The primary relationship of the human plane is *means-consequence*, "responding to things in their meanings" (*Experience and Nature* 278). Experience does not merely end; it is consummated and fulfilled, perhaps superficially and hastily, but better artfully and perceptively. Only humans are "conscious of meanings" or have ideas.

Human goods are conditioned by thought. Unless we are subsisting on an animal plane (e.g., attacking someone as a reflex response), human goods are deliberate. Our instincts are directed through foresight of consequences.

The human capacity for learning, growth, stems from sociocultural interdependence and the fact that meanings enter "that are derived from prior experiences" (*Art as Experience* 276). Growth is a social, not physical, gift (*Democracy and Education* 48).

The human field of interaction includes conscious experience; freedom, culture; education (vs. mere mechanical "training"—see LW2:359, *The Public and Its Problems*; *Ethics* [1908] 190; *How We Think* 130); desire, effort, hope; valuation; creative intelligence (reason), memory, deliberation; reflective imagination; emotion; artistic-aesthetic experience; "objects, or things-with-meanings" (*Experience and Nature* 278); planning, constructing, means-end relationship, ends-in-view, purposes; variation, progress; language, communication; sympathy; individuality; temporality (narrative perception of past-present-future).

II. The Animal Plane (Aristotle: Appetitive/Sensitive)

The second plateau is a "lower" physical field of interaction. This plateau of brute animal nature may be dubbed "psycho-physical, but not 'mental,' that is, not aware of meanings" (*Experience and Nature* 198). It is literally the "state of nature": an object of the physical sciences (*Theory of Valuation* 229).

The primary relationship of the animal plane is *cause-effect*. Animal bodies, "driven by necessity, are pushed appetitively to "a mere end, a last and closing term of arrest"

(*Experience and Nature* 278). There is no perception of past and future, thus no control of means, no intelligence.

This is the level of sense and brute feeling, but not of emotion. Other animals *have* feelings, "but they do not know they have them" (*Experience and Nature* 198). Consciousness is a prerequisite for emotional life, and animals are not conscious. Lacking mind, animal behaviors that we take to be pain or grief or loving attachment are reflex responses. These reflexes are well suited to survival, but they are blind.

Behavior on the animal plane is determined by instinct pushed by unthinking appetite. Driven by the inertia of habit and impulse, nonhuman animal life is marked by mechanical recurrence and uniformity.

Nonetheless, the appropriate ethical relationship toward this plane is *not* simply to view it as a means to human ends. Such narrow anthropocentrism would entail impiety toward nature. The virtue of "natural piety" rests "on a just sense of nature as the whole of which we are parts, while it also recognizes that we are parts that are marked by intelligence and purpose" (*Common Faith* 18).

I. The Vegetative Plane (Aristotle: Nutritive)

The vegetative plane is a strictly physical field of interaction. It encompasses life, but no feeling. See *Experience and Nature* 198, 200.

Notes

I am grateful to students in my spring 2003 "Animal Ethics" course at Green Mountain College for their sincere intellectual engagement with these perplexing issues. I am also grateful to Indiana University Press for permission to use, in substantially revised form, some material from my book, *John Dewey and Moral Imagination: Pragmatism in Ethics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

1. The pragmatist conception of ethics is discussed in my *John Dewey and Moral Imagination*. For a helpful overview of Dewey's ethics that takes stock of recent scholarship, see Pappas.

2. Callicott, in *Beyond the Land Ethic*, takes an opposing view.

3. On pluralism and animal ethics, see, for example, Sorabji.

4. Varner provides a noteworthy treatment of obligatory management of ungulates.

5. See Wise's case for limited legal rights for some animals, based on levels of cognitive autonomy.

6. See Lakoff's analysis of liberal and conservative metaphors for nature in *Moral Politics*.

7. Given that one can be a "Nietzschean feminist," perhaps the idea of a Deweyan animal ethicist will not stretch credulity.

8. Moreover, Dewey's approach to defining key concepts of mentality may be too narrow. As the primatologist Frans de Waal observes, we historically have defined terms such as *communication* and *culture* in an anthropocentric way that excludes other beings in advance of empirical scrutiny. Analogously, if we derive the meaning of *flying* from a songbird's flight, then chickens cannot fly. Yet chickens do take wing and, to the annoyance of farmers, end up perched in tree limbs.

9. My *John Dewey and Moral Imagination* explores these themes.
10. The most comprehensive study of Dewey's democratic credo is Westbrook's acclaimed biography, *John Dewey and American Democracy*. Also see Eldridge, with a response by Westbrook, "Democratic Faith." For an upbeat study of the potential for Deweyan democracy in a multicultural setting, see Green.

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