

Reclaiming Dewey's Pragmatism as a Philosophy of Urban Environmental Reconstruction

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Abstract: This essay reclaims elements of John Dewey's theory of democratic public education in order to articulate the philosophical bases for initiating academic and community programs that will address the problem of post-industrial urban contamination. Deweyan environmental pragmatism is especially appropriate for this purpose because it is naturalistic, socially progressive, and association-centered. Human intelligence is the basic bio-cultural good of his democratic method of social reconstruction. Free inquiry in the academy alone is insufficient to ensure that increases in scientific knowledge will foster democratic intelligence. It is also necessary to create institutions and community-based associations that can disseminate expert knowledge and empower citizens to participate in the process of social problem-solving. Contrary to common philosophical objections, it is argued that pragmatism's favored forms of "civic environmentalism" are neither essentially pro-industry nor thoroughly anthropocentric.

Keywords: John Dewey, pragmatism, political theory, democracy, public education, civic environmentalism, urban environmentalism, post-industrial contamination, anthropocentrism, ecocentrism.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the still quite young philosophical tradition of American pragmatism has undergone its first revival, after having been marginalized by the dominance of analytic positivism for much of the second half of the 20th century.² More recently still, this philosophical renaissance has generated a lively offshoot movement of environmental pragmatism.³ First forays into this field have largely focussed on pragmatism as an ethical theory of environmental values, rather than as a political theory of environmental practice. Perhaps for this reason, the emergence of pragmatism as a philosophical framework for environmental concern has been attended by remarkably few concrete practical proposals.⁴ I wish to correct for these trends, which I see as practical shortcomings, and also to contribute to the rebirth of pragmatism generally, by addressing the concrete problem of urban chemical and heavy metal contamination in light of key components of Dewey's political theory.

Deweyan pragmatism represents a brand of philosophy devoted to the articulation of new ways of practical thinking that might effectively address context-specific social problems. Accordingly, I shall start, in section 2, by briefly describing a specific context of urban environmental concern. In sections 3 through 5, I proceed by briefly outlining salient features of a Deweyan philosophical framework of environmental pragmatism, and by showing how this framework lends support to certain proposed programs in public environmental education. I then conclude, in section 6, by defending this approach at greater length against objections that I anticipate will be raised by proponents of competing environmental philosophies. The goal is to appropriate, elaborate and give new direction to some traditional elements of pragmatic philosophy, a new theoretical direction which has been determined in advance by the perceived need for new forms of public environmental education.

2. The Urban Context

The specific context of environmental concern is the city of Detroit. Once the center of American automotive manufacturing, much of Motown now lies in ruins. The inner city is a post-industrial wasteland, littered with decaying factories, crumbling warehouses, boarded-up commercial spaces, skeletal remains of once grand skyscrapers, burnt-out mansions, and entire blocks that encompass little more than heaps of rubble and resurgent vegetation. Detroit's former affluence has largely escaped to the surrounding suburbs over the last half-century. The urban population continues to decline at a current rate of around 10,000 people per year.⁵ Although similar scenes of urban decline abound in the U.S., Detroit is arguably the worst case.

The resurgent vegetation just mentioned may at first sound like the kind of "greening" that urban environmentalists often clamor for. It does not, however, or perhaps does not yet, amount to anything of that kind. Demolished and abandoned city lots may support plant cover, but they are also often spiked with shards of metal and glass or, in many cases, especially in or near former centers of industry, saturated with chemical and heavy-metal contaminants. In addition to historic fallout from now defunct metal smelting plants, the inner city is interspersed with the often outmoded manufacturing facilities and waste incinerators that remain in operation. As a consequence of unusually high levels of earthbound and airborne contaminants, many of these greening spaces are unfit for city playgrounds, gardens or residential developments. The presence of lead, mercury and dioxin contamination in levels far below what is commonly found in Detroit has been scientifically linked to myriad birth defects, developmental problems and chronic illnesses. Under such conditions, local universities have both the opportunity to better understand scientifically the health risks associated with different exposures to these substances and the responsibility to provide expert guidance for public

projects of urban decontamination and renewal. Success in both environmental research and environmental education/consultation will require novel forms of cooperation between academics and various community groups. Specific health risks cannot be scientifically assessed without the willingness of citizens to divulge medical histories and provide hair samples to academic investigators, and citizens can only be politically empowered to improve their environmental conditions if local experts are able to find effective ways to disseminate relevant knowledge. This excursion into environmental pragmatism as a framework for democratic public education grows out of an ongoing effort, taken up by a local consortium of environmentally active university professors and civic leaders, to address this specific set of challenges. The initial plan was to offer, with the assistance of public education grants, a set of community outreach programs that would inform the public, engage school children and adult citizens in the process of gathering data for further research, facilitate the organization of civic and religious associations into effective environmental coalitions, and consult with private enterprises about potential liabilities and alternative practices.

In this context, it may at first seem unclear what role philosophy can play. Philosophy, as Aristotle aptly described it, is thinking about thinking; but the situation at hand calls for various forms of action. Or, to paraphrase Marx, philosophers are adept at interpreting the world, but the challenge here is clearly to change it. Philosophers, after all, are the consummate generalists, adept at conceptualizing broad areas of knowledge within which they may have little specific expertise. They are typically more at home in the realm of *a priori* reasoning than in the realm of hands-on, practical experience. Moreover, philosophical works of the greatest genius are often ignored outside the discipline on grounds expressed in the old adage that what is defensible in theory may be unworkable in practice. These complaints are familiar and well-taken. Yet, they should not turn us away from the philosophical dimension of the practical challenge that post-industrial urban contamination represents. Instead, they should only make us wary of unpragmatic philosophies which condemn practicable theories on grounds that they do not conform to the purity of cherished principles.

Here in the city of Detroit, talk of “urban renewal” tends to fall on deaf ears of resigned despair; and in the suburbs, it is often met with polite derision. These discursive occasions often call for the kind of pragmatic philosophical response which explores the outer reaches of reasonable hope and prescribes practical possibilities. More specifically, recourse to Deweyan political theory offers a cogent way of defending the notion that our envisioned programs fall within the ambit of traditionally recognized academic responsibilities. Funding is a pragmatic necessity for the full implementation of new academic programs. Effective proposals for such funding need to resort to plain-speaking philosophical argumentation in order to convince granting agencies to rethink what counts as the practice

of public education. A Deweyan theory of democratic education is an especially appropriate framework for this purpose because it is (a) naturalistic, (b) progressive, and (c) association-centered.

3. Pragmatic Naturalism

Dewey's philosophy of public education begins with the kind of naturalistic biological understanding that is crucial to environmental practice. As he argues in *Democracy and Education*, the reason it is a mistake to conceive of the human mind as a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate, upon which any notions whatsoever can be imprinted, is that all genuinely educative experience arises from "the native structure of our body, organs, and their functional activities . . . and their direct interaction with the environment."⁶ In short, the relationship between the body's natural needs and its given historically and geographically contingent environment furnishes "the initiating and limiting forces in all education."⁷ The starting point and outer limit of environmental education in the context of our post-industrial city is the fact that people are not capable of learning to flourish in the midst of chemical and heavy metal contamination. No amount of social training can convince a kidney to adapt itself to mercury poisoning. Infant brain damage caused by toxic levels of dioxin in mother's milk can permanently and severely limit a child's ability to learn. Lead poisoning further damages the brain. These facts exemplify the insight, which Dewey persistently urged, that there is no fundamental divide between human culture and its natural environment. The cultivation of human capacities unfolds in dynamic relationship with nature, whether it be pristine wilderness or degraded cityscape. It is therefore, in the present context, a matter of pragmatic bio-cultural imperative that we must alter our thinking in ways which will help us to solve existing problems of urban contamination.⁸

Human intelligence is the first bio-cultural good that institutions of public education are supposed to cultivate. Yet the cultivation of this good is hampered by concentrations of brain-damaging chemical and heavy metal contaminants. If the pragmatic goal of institutions of public education is the cultivation and fair distribution of human intelligence, then educational initiatives that facilitate decontamination of the urban learning environment are necessary means to that end. We already know from initial soil samples taken by Wayne State University Geologist, Ed van Hees, that at least one inner city school sits adjacent to a site where the lead content in the ground is several hundred times higher than what the Environmental Protection Agency deems safe. We need a comprehensive geochemical map of such sites. This task is too great for a solitary geologist, however. It will require the coordinated efforts of many people. Hence, in concrete terms for the present context, the pragmatic goal of public education would be well-served by enlisting school children, as part of their study of the rudiments of urban ecology, in the task of gathering

soil samples and paint samples for analysis in university laboratories. A similar program was used in the Santa Monica Bay Keeper's successful kelp bed restoration project, seedlings for which were grown through "Kelp in the Classroom" programs.⁹ Further decontamination of home environments would also proceed by means of public education programs conducted through local churches and civic organizations. For instance, responsible and trusted church members would not only assist with the collection of hair samples, but they would be enlisted to operate university-owned portable mercury analyzers within the homes of parishioners.

4. Progressivism

Education, according to the Deweyan pragmatic model, is a social instrument for human adaptation within historically changing social and physical environments. Each generation must engage in a critical and experimental process of what Dewey called "social reconstruction," a process through which we revise traditional practices in light of what we have learned about their consequences. To update this model in light of recent advances in the health sciences, we now need new modes of public education that can foster a critical process of *environmental reconstruction*. Our institutions of public education must learn and teach environmental management, not only in forest and field, but also, and perhaps especially, in our densely populated and environmentally degraded urban areas.

Fulfillment of this responsibility requires that institutions of public education should endeavor to correct for shortcomings of the marketplace. Market-based democracies tend to make individuals responsible for identifying their own needs and problems. Other things being equal, this feature of social organization is generally advantageous to the extent that "the man who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches."¹⁰ Yet, in the face of invisible harms and liabilities, public institutions created for the purpose of disseminating scientific knowledge are also socially necessary. Other things being equal, the institution of private property rights is also generally advantageous insofar as it makes individuals secure in their possessions, and thereby gives them incentive to contribute to the available pool of social assets. Yet, historic maldistributions of private property have thrown up the greatest obstacles to the mobilization of democratic intelligence. It is as evident today as it was in Dewey's time that "the control of the means of production by the few in legal possession operates as a standing agency of coercion of the many."¹¹ The divisions and inequities of the labor market constrain the capacities of most citizens to become engaged participants in a shared public sphere. This social condition tends to "render things of the environment unknown or uncommunicable by human beings in terms of their own activities and sufferings," and it ought to be "deplored as a disaster."¹²

In order to ameliorate this disaster and foster effective democratic intelligence, it is necessary that “intellectuals” avoid becoming “the willing tools of big economic interests” and, instead, “ally themselves with the masses” and help them to exercise their fair share of social power.¹³ Thus, in the present context, it is the responsibility of today’s universities to make visible the largely unseen problems of chemical and heavy metal pollution, to make citizens aware of their environmental health risks, and to help foster the creation of community-based organizations devoted to the communication of common interests. Only in this way can we hope to cultivate the virtues of active and intelligent citizenship that markets alone fail to foster. In the process, by means of targeted consulting, we may also help to make businesses and major land-owning interests aware of their potential liabilities, and thereby to spur on the process of reconstruction and the development of alternative practices. Such effects of democratic environmental education may even help to prevent the excessive costs which are invariably associated with legal methods of conflict-resolution.

5. Association-building

For Dewey, “all behavior proceeds in ultimate analysis through individual human beings,” but these individuals essentially “exist and operate in association.”¹⁴ Thus, the central problem of progressive democratic politics is the problem of organizing human associations in ways which facilitate the perception and communication of “common interests,” and which thereby enable communities to contend with historically changing exigencies. The most important tasks of democratic public education are often those taken up out of school. As pedagogical (or, better, androgogical) pragmatism teaches, classroom lessons about our world are more vital and engaging when they grow out of the practical experience of trying to improve it. Moreover, and more importantly, even ideal academic curricula will fail adequately to educate citizens in the absence of extra-curricular networks and forums of communication that cut across the public sphere. Free inquiry alone is insufficient to ensure that increases in scientific knowledge will promote the common interests of a democratic society. It is also necessary to create institutions that help to distribute expert scientific findings to interested parties when market forces alone fail to do so.

Dewey made this point well: “We live, as Emerson said, in the lap of an immense intelligence. But this intelligence is dormant and its communications are broken, inarticulate and faint until it possesses the local community as its medium.”¹⁵ Pragmatic democratic education is therefore a function of both “inquiry and publicity.”¹⁶ For this reason, Dewey realized in his later works the limitations of “child-centered” pedagogy and the limitations of schools as confined places of social progress. Democratic public education must be association-centered, establishing communications and common interests between schools,

churches, local government agencies, private enterprises, groups of concerned citizens, and so on. To this end, in the present context, local institutions of public education cannot fulfill their basic missions unless they establish viable forums in which the full range of relevant experts and stakeholders may contribute to intelligent deliberations about environmental reconstruction efforts.

6. Defending Environmental Pragmatism

Given that the elements of environmental pragmatism outlined above have been selected and elaborated in response to context-specific concerns, some philosophers may object that this approach is blatantly *ad hoc*. This objection is simply incorrect. To be sure, pragmatism is a philosophy according to which there is no need to apologize for reconstructing principles and methods around concrete social problems. For the pragmatist, ethical and political inquiry are akin to inquiry in the physical sciences in being experimental and prospective. As Eric MacGilvray notes in his defense of pragmatic political theory,

Just as the empirical inquirer must decide which hypotheses to endorse (and which ontological commitments to adopt) based upon an uncertain assessment of past experience and future expectations, so must the normative inquirer posit ideals whose validity cannot be assessed prior to our willingness to act upon them.¹⁷

Pragmatism is not another school of “applied ethics” which develops general abstract principles in theory prior to their application in specific decision-making contexts. It is, instead, a practice of philosophical reflection which is committed to remaining embedded within and engaged with ongoing processes of social problem-solving.

A tempting way to capture the difference between applied ethics and political pragmatism would be to follow Brian Norton in saying that for the pragmatist “practice is prior to theory in the sense that principles are ultimately generated from practice, not vice versa.”¹⁸ This formulation of pragmatic methodology suggests a false separation and foundational ordering between practice and theory, however; and it therefore makes it difficult to understand how pragmatic political theory can offer concrete prescriptions for the generation of new practices. A better formulation would be to point out that we inherit various traditional theoretical principles and methods, and we reconstruct them in the process of reconstructing our practices. Every prescription of environmental pragmatism is a working hypothesis about how best to marshal human intelligence in order to address concrete environmental problems. On the basis of these prescriptions we conduct experiments in human practice, and

we revise our prescriptions for other occasions in light of the practical experience we thereby gain. This approach is contextual, revisable and progressive, but not strictly speaking *ad hoc*.

Some may wish to resist my appropriation of Dewey's pragmatism as a means of advancing academic environmentalism on more overtly political grounds. Perhaps the most familiar objection to the idea that Dewey can be understood to offer an environmentally constructive political theory may be traced back to the Progressive Era itself when he was accused by George Santayana of being a "devoted spokesman of the spirit of enterprise, of experiment, of modern industry."¹⁹ Is Dewey's pragmatism too congenial to the traditional instruments of industrial capitalism?

From what has already been outlined above, in section 4, it should be clear that the charge that Dewey was a devoted friend of modern industrial capitalism is far from the mark. The conditions of modern industrialization pose the greatest obstacles to the realization of Dewey's particular vision of intelligent democracy. He offers what can at best be called an ambivalent assessment of the legacy of modern industrialism. On one hand, the historical development of modern democratic governments was spurred on primarily, not by philosophies of individual natural rights, but by technological and industrial invention. On the other hand, however, insofar as such forces have been attended by staunch legal protections of private property rights from public interference, they are also responsible for the greatest environmental failings of modern industrialized democracies.²⁰ Hence Dewey's historic embrace of a partially "socialized economy" as a means of furthering "free individual development."²¹

In the context of considering public education initiatives, perhaps more important than Dewey's call for democratic governance of economic institutions is the question of whether his experimental "method of intelligence" is biased in favor of traditional industrial practices. Some philosophers, such as C. A. Bowers, object to the experimental nature of Deweyan pragmatism on grounds that the methodologies of experimental science are part of the complex of industrial practices that got us into this environmental mess in the first place.²² Does the charge that pragmatism's methodology is "experimental" impugn its environmental credentials?

That pragmatism is devoted to the spirit of experimentation is beyond doubt, but arguably unproblematic. Pragmatic inquiry into the consequences of traditional practices only favors those which have demonstrably yielded the most favorable and widespread consequences, but especially those which best advance the democratization of further pragmatic inquiries. This test of the pragmatic value of our practices is not to be confused with the utilitarian test of maximizing group pleasure. If Deweyan pragmatism aims to maximize anything it is not pleasure as such but the social distribution of creative intelligence and freedom, which is the

chief means by which we are able to adopt historically appropriate values, make wise choices, and solve social problems.²³

To see the contemporary appropriateness of Dewey's democratic method of intelligence, it is especially important to recall that the central argument of *The Public and Its Problems* insists that forces of private industrial development have tended to "eclipse" the public sphere by generating ranks of professional experts whose ultimate ties are to private interests. The pragmatic upshot of this argument is that a viable public can be achieved only when experts align their efforts with public interests which are too often contravened or inadequately advanced by private enterprise.²⁴

Even academics whose expertise may be quite independent of particular private interests too often fall prey to regimented forms of professionalism which render their work democratically impotent. Thus, as Frank Fischer shows in his recent study of local environmental politics, scientific and policy experts can only align themselves with the public interest by altering the way in which they practice their expertise. Fischer's Deweyan diagnosis of the problem of modern expertise and his general prescription are worth quoting at length:

In industrial society all these basic goods and services are mass-produced and marketed through large, highly interdependent, impersonal structures and functions ever-increasingly dependent on expert systems. Given these features of industrial society, in particular the central role of expertise, Dewey saw little future prospect of well-integrated political communities organized around a knowledgeable citizenry... How is it possible to overcome the challenge posed by this unprecedented level of social and technical complexity? The answer for Dewey was a division of labor between citizens and experts. On the technical front, experts would analytically identify basic social needs and problems. On the political front, citizens could set a democratic agenda for pursuing these needs and troubles.²⁵

Expertise, understood as specialized and exclusive professional authority, always represents a deficit in the implementation of Dewey's pragmatic method of democratic intelligence. One of the most important responsibilities of scientific and policy experts is therefore to share with other members of civil society, not only what they know, but also the very process by which they produce their knowledge. Although Fischer is primarily concerned with the practice of public administration, his

pragmatic prescription for implementing Dewey's theory of democratic intelligence applies equally to the practice of public education.

The answer for Dewey was a collaborative division of labor between citizens and experts. Toward this end, he called for an improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion, and persuasion. Public debate would require the participation of experts, but rather than merely analyze and render judgments per se, they would interpret complex issues in ways that facilitate citizen learning and empowerment.²⁶

As with Fischer's public managers, the role of the academic expert should also be that of "facilitator of *citizens'* deliberation." In practical terms, fulfillment of this role would require the establishment of a public forum on analogy with the "citizen's tribunals" or "consensus conferences" of the Canadian Berger Commission or the Danish Board of Technology. Through such "counter-technocracy" fora, by engaging citizens in a shared process of "civic discovery," scientists and policy experts not only enhance the sociological and qualitative dimensions of their own expertise but they also better serve affected communities.²⁷

Environmental pragmatism's insistence upon the need for citizen participation in public deliberations also sets it firmly against the cultural forces of modern industrial capitalism. Insofar as those forces have proven more adept at cultivating mindless consumerism than thoughtful civic engagement, they embody the social problem for which pragmatic public education must seek creative associational solutions. Thus, William Shutkin, a practicing Deweyan pragmatist, has recently drawn upon case studies of the San Francisco Bay Area's Transit Village and the Dudley Street Neighbourhood Initiative Realization Plan in making a compelling case for the power and promise of "civic environmentalism."²⁸ In order to follow suit, institutions of higher learning would do well to counter the pitfalls of a consumerist culture, first, by rethinking their civics curricula in new democratic and environmentally responsible ways, and second, by providing adequate incentives and resources for the creation of complementary extra-curricular programs of academic research and community involvement.

In this vein, as a further concrete contribution to the constellation of envisioned academic programs, I propose the creation of a local Environmental Quality Forum that would bring together academics, public administrators, civic leaders, business interests and citizen-volunteers, for the purpose of addressing and ameliorating Detroit's post-industrial condition. If philosophical critics of this approach to the problem believe that it is too much of a concession to industrial capitalism to give business interests a seat at the conference table, then I can only respond as a

philosophical pragmatist, first, by wishing them luck in their preferred spiritual or political revolution, and secondly, by suggesting that ideal theory may prove more relevant and effective, especially in a putatively democratic society, when it concedes the possibility of a constructive role to the existing practices of contemporary citizens. Is environmental pragmatism philosophically radical enough? Unfortunately there is no *a priori* answer to this question. Whether a duly reconstructed Deweyan pragmatism is capable of yielding sufficiently radical environmental change depends upon what might come from our “willingness to act” upon its recommendations. Pragmatic arguments for philosophical alternatives to the present model will, of course, be entertained and welcomed.

Bowers raises another worry about Dewey’s methodology which is worth briefly mentioning here. His concern is that the experimental method of pragmatism would exclude “other cultural epistemologies.”²⁹ In the present context, this would primarily be a problem when encountering cultural mentalities that do not recognize the methods or the authority of medical toxicologists and chemical geologists. Those who embrace such mentalities may choose not to participate in our project, which is their prerogative. Although this problem is very real in an American culture increasingly marked by such anti-scientific worldviews Christian fundamentalism and New Age mysticism, there are so many greater motivational obstacles in our way to worry much over this one. It is important to note, however, that studies of recent deliberative expert-citizen fora indicate that they tend to increase trust in scientific expertise.³⁰

Finally, it is also important to address a familiar form of ethical objection to environmental pragmatism which takes issue with the seeming anthropocentricity of emphasizing human biological needs. Does environmental pragmatism promote a narrowly anthropocentric point of view which fails to accommodate the intrinsic or inherent value of non-human nature?

One of the defining features of philosophical pragmatism is its skepticism about absolute philosophical foundations. Although Dewey himself did not recognize the need, it seems that the time is now ripe to question the assumption that we are somehow obliged (or otherwise pragmatically compelled) to choose between fundamentally anthropocentric and biocentric ethical standpoints. To be sure, the experimental method of pragmatism is anthropocentric in the sense that it examines human thoughts, attitudes, values, dispositions and practices in light of their consequences for the advancement of intelligent human life. Yet, environmental pragmatism is also ecocentric in the sense that it is centrally committed to the critical examination of humanity’s relationship with and impact on its ecosystems. That commitment may not be ecocentric enough to quell some forms of philosophical dissent, but I should like to conclude by trying just the same.

The dominant alternative to the pragmatic method of democratic experimental intelligence is the kind of moral rationalism that purports to deduce justifiable practices from fixed fundamental principles, typically held as philosophical absolutes. Most moral rationalisms are also monistic in the sense that they attempt to rule out conflicts between principles by reducing them all to a single, all-encompassing ethical criterion designed to generate justifiable decisions in any conceivable practical context. Many environmental moral rationalists have abandoned the traditional anthropocentric absolutes of utilitarian and Kantian ethical reasoning, and have instead embraced biocentric principles of categorical respect for non-human nature.³¹ Although the field of philosophical alternatives is varied, much of the discourse of environmental ethics remains locked within an intractable dialectic between anthropocentric and biocentric points of view.

In contradistinction, pragmatism's emphasis on the ontological interpenetration of natural environment and human culture suggests a world without a center, within which the most suitable human ethos may similarly lack a central, foundational and comprehensive point of view. Indeed, it may be that no suitably well-adapted human point of view can be absolute, not even the pragmatic point of view. Pragmatism's experimental method, which focusses, above other effects, upon the cultivation of intelligent human life, may have to be self-limiting. The question of what exactly human intelligence would look like in this or that ecological context may, in many cases, be unanswerable without due consideration of the needs of the given ecosystem itself, quite apart from what human beings may happen to want or even need from it.

In a global context, we can only fully realize our capacity for intelligent living by becoming well-integrated into our non-human environment. Yet, this goal makes little sense in inner city Detroit, where the prospect of flourishing may depend more upon one's ability to master, overcome, transform or escape one's environment. So, environmental pragmatism should welcome ecocentric points of view, while remaining skeptical of any claim that they represent comprehensive rational foundations for ethical decision-making.³² In many contexts, the pluralistic public forums favored by environmental pragmatists may only generate appropriate prescriptions if principled ecocentrists are willing to participate. But in the present local context of urban environmental concern it is unclear what guidance a principled respect for non-human nature could provide. Does the already contaminated ecology of the post-industrial inner city possess an integrity of its own worth respecting and preserving? We should hope not. In this context, ecosystem integrity is a lost ideal, the original purity of which is beyond practical reclamation. The philosophical attitude of respect for the integrity of existing ecosystems is most at home in very different contexts of environmental concern. Yet, urban environmental pragmatism need not be seen as threatening to erode that respect. The desire to confer a certain status of ethical inviolability upon

what remains of the earth's pristine wetlands and rain forests may deserve a level of urgency (pragmatic urgency) equal to the cause of urban environmental reconstruction. Moreover, these very different forms of environmental concern need not be conceived as being in essential practical conflict with one another, given that the increasingly abandoned inner-city is ringed by rapidly sprawling suburbs. There is no doubting the ecological devastation which results from the kind of urbanization that goes along with growth economies of industrial manufacturing. Yet, for the post-industrial society in transition from a manufacturing to an information economy, suburban sprawl is the new frontier of environmental impact, and consequently urban redevelopment is now an important means of restraining our expanding "ecological footprint."³³

Perhaps the basic framework of environmental pragmatism can therefore accommodate (if not encompass) both the obviously human-centered needs of urban reconstruction and the kind of non-instrumental values that speak loudest on behalf of unspoiled ecosystems. If, as Henry David Thoreau so clearly saw, wilderness is the ultimate source of civilization, which humanity ignores and degrades at its own peril, then there is sufficient pragmatic reason for adopting a very different, non-anthropocentric mode of valuation in other contexts of environmental concern. But I know of no theoretical ideal in meta-ethics so compelling that it could convince me to abandon as confusion a set of attitudes which combines reverence for the sanctity of unspoiled nature with a pragmatic commitment to urban environmental reconstruction.

Notes

¹ For the initial conception of this essay, in January 2005, I am indebted to conversation with the members of GreenConnect.org, principally Ed Van Hees, but also Linda Schwietzer, Phil Clampett, Charles Mabee, Olaf Slidums, and Jessica Henry. I also benefitted from conversation with Clark Wolf at the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics conference, San Antonio, February 2005; from various conversations with participants and organizers at the 4th Global Conference on Environmental Justice and Global Citizenship, Mansfield College, Oxford, UK, July 2005; from the comments of Dagmar Cronn at Oakland University's Sigma Chi lecture series; and from conversation with Paul Thompson, Bryan Norton and Clark Wolf (again) at Oakland University's Environmental Quality Forum, November 2005.

² Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth & History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), ch. 6.

³ Anthony Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 7 (1985): 321-339 and "Before Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 14 (1992): 321-38; William Chaloupka, "John Dewey's Social Aesthetics as a Precedent for Environmental Thought," *Environmental Ethics* 9 (1987): 243-260; Bob Pepperman Taylor, "John Dewey and Environmental Thought: A Response to Chaloupka," *Environmental Ethics* 12 (1990): 175-184; Brian Norton, *Towards Unity Among Environmentalists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) and "Why I Am Not a Nonanthropocentrist: Callicott and the Failure of Monistic Inherentism," *Environmental Ethics* 17 (1995): 341-358; Kelly A. Parker, "Pragmatism and Environmental Thought," Sandra B. Rosenthal and Rogene A. Buchholz, "How Pragmatism Is An Environmental Ethic," Larry A. Hickman, "Nature as Culture: John Dewey's Pragmatic Naturalism," in *Environmental Pragmatism*, Andrew Light and Eric Katz eds. (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 21-83; Ben A. Minteer, "Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics: Democracy, Pluralism, and the Management of Nature," *Environmental Ethics* 21 (1999): pp. 191-207; Ben A. Minteer, Elizabeth A. Corley, and Robert E. Manning, "Environmental Ethics Beyond Principle? A Pragmatic Contextualism," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 17 (2004): 131-156.

⁴ Notable exceptions to these trends include the following: Andrew Light, "Compatibilism in Political Ecology" and Paul Thompson, "Pragmatism and Policy: The Case of Water," in *Environmental Pragmatism*, Andrew Light and Eric Katz eds. (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 161-208; Frank Fischer, *Citizens, Experts, and the Environment: The Politics of Local Knowledge* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); and Bryan Norton, *Sustainability: A Philosophy of Adaptive Ecosystem Management* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁵ George Hunter, "Detroit Leads in Loss of Residents," *The Detroit News*, 24 June 2004.

⁶ Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (1916) in *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Middle Works* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press), volume 9, pp. 101 & 121.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 121.

⁸ The way in which the body's biological needs anchor Dewey's political philosophy of democratic education makes some of the objections raised against him seem badly misplaced. Hence, Hugh P. McDonald, in "Dewey's Naturalism," *Environmental Ethics* 24 (2002): 189-208, has shown that it is a mistake to characterize Dewey as a proponent of ethical subjectivism as has been the case in the competing appraisals of both

Anthony Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value," and Eric Katz, "Searching for Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism and Despair in Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 9 (1987): 231-41.

⁹ For the Santa Monica Bay Keeper's "Kelp Restoration" project see <http://www.smbaykeeper.org/index.php?func=programs&program_id=0004> (accessed 6/23/05).

¹⁰ Dewey, *The Public and It's Problems* (Denver: Henry Holt and Company, 1927), p. 207.

¹¹ Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1935), p. 63.

¹² Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, p. 173.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 17 & 23.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

¹⁷ Eric A. MacGilvray, "Five Myths about Pragmatism," *Political Theory* 28 (Aug., 2000): 499.

¹⁸ Bryan Norton, "Integration or Reduction: Two Approaches to Environmental Values," in Andrew Light and Eric Katz ed., *Environmental Pragmatism* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 108.

¹⁹ "Dewey's Naturalistic Metaphysics," *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, 3rd edition, ed. P. A. Schlipp and L. E. Hahn (La Salle Illinois: Open Court, 1989), p. 247. Quoted by Larry A. Hickman, "John Dewey's Pragmatic Naturalism," in Light & Eric Katz (1996), p. 69. This objection has been reiterated more recently by C. A. Bowers, "The Case against John Dewey," pp. 25-42.

²⁰ Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, p. 109.

²¹ Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, p. 90.

²² C. A. Bowers, "The Case against John Dewey as an Environmental and Eco-Justice Philosopher," *Environmental Ethics* 25 (2003): 25-42.

²³ Eric A. MacGilvray, "Five Myths about Pragmatism," *Political Theory* 28 (Aug., 2000): 495.

²⁴ Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, pp. 126 & 206.

²⁵ Frank Fischer, *Citizens, Experts, and the Environment: The Politics of Local Knowledge* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 231-38.

²⁸ William A. Shutkin, *The Land that Could Be: Environmentalism and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

²⁹ C. A. Bowers, "The Case against John Dewey as an Environmental and Eco-Justice Philosopher," *Environmental Ethics* 25 (2003): 29.

³⁰ Frank Fischer, *Citizens, Experts, and the Environment: The Politics of Local Knowledge* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

³¹ Paul W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Holmes Rolston, III, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); J. Baird Callicott, *In Defense of the Land Ethic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); Laura Westra, *An Environmental Proposal for Ethics: The Principle of Integrity* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994); Eric Katz, *Nature as Subject: Human Obligation and Natural Community* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996).

³² Andrew Light, "Environmental Pragmatism as Philosophy or Metaphilosophy? On the Weston-Katz Debate," Light & Katz ed. (1996), pp. 325-338.

³³ William E. Rees and Mathis Wackernagel, *Our Ecological Footprint* (New York: New Society, 1995); Richard Dagger, "Stopping Sprawl for the Good of All: The Case for Civic Environmentalism," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 34 (2003): 28-43; Andrew Light, "Urban Ecological Citizenship," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 34 (2003): 44-63.