

AGENCY & ENVIRONMENTAL PRAGMATISM: A DEFENCE FROM VIRTUE THEORY

Robert Hanson

Universidade de Minho
rwahanson@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Environmental Pragmatism has come under increasingly scrutiny in recent years for resting on supposedly philosophically contradictory foundations. These criticisms typically present Pragmatism's philosophical commitment to open-minded inquiry as at odds with holding any specific philosophical convictions, including environmental ones. In this paper, I build upon Campos and Vaz's "Justified Moral Pluralism" (JMP) to present an agent-focused account of Pragmatism that, I will argue, allows for a philosophically tenable understanding of being an Environmental Pragmatist. My account presents the Pragmatist as treating open-minded inquiry as intrinsically valuable and, subsequently, phenomena conducive to open-minded inquiry as instrumentally valuable. This will present the Pragmatist as capable of holding and acting on environmental values so long as they can justify these values and the way they elect to act on them as consistent with a commitment to open-minded inquiry. The resulting theory, I will argue, provides a framework of making case-specific, holistic, practical decisions grounded in philosophically tenable foundations, perfect for the complex and ever-changing political landscape that is the climate emergency.

Keywords: Environmental Pragmatism, Non-Ideal Theory, Agency, Virtue Ethics, Policymaking

Introduction

At the start of 2024, Murray Auchincloss, the CEO of BP, one of the world's largest oil and gas producers, stated that the company would be taking a more pragmatic approach to its environmental policies in response to BP's significant reduction in profits.¹ Mr. Auchincloss clarified what he meant by being "pragmatic" as: maintaining an aim to reduce emissions whilst protecting the company's value and its shareholders' returns. Unsurprisingly, this decision was met with frustration from many Environmentalists who questioned how it can be *environmentally* pragmatic to increase ecological damage. An Envi-

ronmental Pragmatist might respond to this question by highlighting that BP's capacity to provide a greener alternative to their competitors depends upon their finances, casting this decision as unideal but the more ecological option amongst those available.

Situations like these have fuelled both support for and scepticism over Environmental Pragmatism (EP). For its defenders, this serves as another example of EP being capable of assisting individuals in using philosophy to make practical decisions in unideal situations.² For its sceptics, meanwhile, it demonstrates EP as a philosophically vacuous position that merely uses philosophical rhetoric to justify what the user wants.³

One of the main questions Environmental Pragmatists are frequently confronted with is how they reconcile Pragmatism with Environmental Values. Specifically, scholars like Okke Loman (2020) have argued that Pragmatist's commitment to open-minded inquiry as incompatible with holding other normative values, including Environmental values.

In this paper, I present an agent-focused account of EP that, I will argue, should satisfy Loman concerns. Within my framework, the Pragmatist is presented as assigning intrinsic value to open-minded inquiry and, subsequently, instrumental value to the necessary conditions for open-minded inquiry. This, I will argue, allows for a path from Pragmatism to holding and acting on Environmental values, so long as their rationale for both comes from their Pragmatic commitment to open-minded inquiry.

This paper is presented in 4 of sections. In the first section, I will outline the nature of Pragmatism and EP. The second section will then present Loman's concerns regarding the normative foundations within EP before outlining Campos and Vaz's efforts to address these concerns via Justified Moral Pluralism (JMP).⁴ I will then

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/feb/06/bp-profits-halve-oil-gas-share-buybacks> [accessed on 15/04/2024]

² Ansell, C., & Geyer, R. (2017); Campos, A.S. and Vaz, S.G., (2023); Donelson, R., (2017); Honnacker, A., (2023); Pearson, C.H., (2014); Robinson, J.G., (2011)

³ Callicott, J.B. (2003); Eckersley, R., (2003); Loman, O., (2020); Samuelsson, L., (2010); Rolston, H., (1988); Rydenfelt, H., (2023)

⁴ Loman, O., (2020); Campos, A. & Vas, S.G., (2021)

conclude the second section with Erik Rydenfelt's argument that JMP still fails to demonstrate how Pragmatism permits favouring environmental values.⁵ The third section will then present my account of Pragmatism where open-minded inquiry is assigned intrinsic value, committing the Pragmatist to assign instrumental value to phenomena, including beliefs and values, if they are conducive to open-minded inquiry. This, I will argue, allows for a logically tenable path from Pragmatism to holding and acting on environmental values, presenting the contradiction Loman identifies with some approaches to EP as avoidable. The final section then responds to Rydenfelt's concerns that JMP is exposed to challenges of Moral Relativism because of the normative significance it allows for people's beliefs and values, regardless of their validity and/or soundness.⁶ Here, I will an agent-focused account of being a Pragmatist with the environment that borrows from Virtue Theory and, I will argue, should address Rydenfelt's concerns.⁷ I will then conclude that EP does present a promising way to approach environmental ethics and policymaking and arrive at practical, case-specific guidance for non-ideal situations that can rest upon philosophically tenable foundations.

It is not the aim of this paper to argue for EP nor a particular understanding of being an Environmental Pragmatist. My aim is more modest: to challenge the common idea that Pragmatism is necessarily incompatible with holding values, including environmental values. I will accept that Pragmatism is incompatible with approaching environmental values in certain ways but that the pro-active and fallibilist nature of Virtue Ethics offers the Pragmatist a way to approach environmental values in a manner consistent with Pragmatic ideals. It is the hope that this paper may contribute to the ongoing discussions on how philosophy can better offer truly actionable guidance both within and beyond environmen-

talist debates, to have a greater role in policymaking and practical decision making.

1. Environmental Pragmatism

i. Pragmatism

Pragmatists hold a functional view on philosophy. For Pragmatists, philosophy only exists because there are inquiring minds, and these inquiring minds use philosophy to help them (1) better understand the world and (2) solve problems. This leads Pragmatists to the position that philosophy should not be used in a manner that obstructs greater understanding nor in a manner where it is philosophy that creates problems, as these outcomes contradict the function of philosophy.⁸

Campos and Vaz present the kind of philosophising the Pragmatist is antagonistic towards with, what they refer to as, METHOD 1.⁹ In METHOD 1, an individual arrives at a situation with a pre-selected moral perspective and then uses this to analyse and problematise their situation and options. The individual therefore *defers* to their theory and merely applies it to their current situation.

For Pragmatists, this act of deference is immediately problematic in a practical sense because it encourages epistemic habits that are detrimental to better learning and understanding (and therefore detrimental to philosophising).¹⁰ Campos and Vaz illustrate this with the example of an individual deferring to an imperative based upon a factual error.¹¹ Each time this individual defers to this imperative it always yields the same (wrong) answer which the individual gets accustomed to being the "correct" response. Over time, because of our human susceptibility to confirmation bias, this habit makes the indi-

⁵ Rydenfelt, H., (2023)

⁶ Ibid, p. 7

⁷ Hursthouse, R., (1991)

⁸ Light, A. & Katz, E., (1996); Morgan, D.L., (2014); Norton, B.G., (2015), pp.33-34; Rorty, R., (1985)

⁹ Campos, A. & Vas, S.G., (2021), p.6

¹⁰ It is this that leads Pragmatists to Fallibilism: that philosophy should be used in a manner that reflects our epistemic shortcomings to mitigate the extent to which they can undermine our capacity to philosophise. Fesmire, 2019, pp. 20-21

¹¹ Ibid

vidual less responsive to (potentially mounting) evidence that there is something wrong with their beliefs, making it increasingly unlikely that they will learn.¹²

Making this act of deference more problematic for the Pragmatists is that observers may defer to our example, meaning that we may encourage the same bad epistemic habits in others and, subsequently, encourage the formation of bad epistemic habits in others.¹³ Our epistemic shortcomings and our capacity to cultivate poor epistemic habits in ourselves and others therefore reinforce the Pragmatists' argument for more reactionary and less deferential uses of philosophy: to be a force for good epistemic habits and, subsequently, philosophy.

Moving to "philosophy for problem solving", Pragmatist are antagonist towards deferential uses of philosophy like METHOD 1 that can yield impossible guidance and do not allow for compromises.

Campos and Vaz illustrate the former with the example of moral impasses. Suppose one can only do A or B but one's theory says both are impermissible.¹⁴ For the Pragmatist, these situations reveals that one's respective theory is unsound, given that it cannot be achieved.¹⁵ As their theory is reactionary, it allows context to have normative significance. This allows the Pragmatist to approach a situation where the only options are A or B and treat it as a case where the only options are A or B. This allows the moral significance of A to be determined by the context, including for example, if the only options are A or B.

This brings us to the topic of compromises. METHOD 1 precludes the possibility of compromises because one's moral convictions come from their unchanging

moral principles. This is immediately problematic to the Pragmatist because it obliges the individual to limit their considerations to options that do not contradict their theory. METHOD 1 is therefore, and once again, counter-productive to open-mindedness because it encourages the individual to limit their considerations for the sake of the theory and not for the sake of discovery or problem solving.

Furthermore, the impermissibility of compromises is also problematic to the Pragmatist because this can lead to obligations that contradicts the values that informed there obligations' normative authority.¹⁶ For example, suppose there is a politician contemplating a policy supporting more humane animal farming, a politician that believes that animals have a right to life. Supporting the policy is therefore incompatible with their position that animals have a right to life. Failure to support the policy, however, will result in a worse situation according to the politician's own values. As Donelson notes, we should be mindful that any moral red line is a product of the values that led the line to be drawn, meaning that it gets its normative force from these values.¹⁷ This means that a given red line should not be used in a manner contrary to the values that are used to make the line normatively informative.

Returning to the animal welfare bill, two variables are relevant to the Pragmatist:

- 1.) the implications of (not) supporting the policy
- 2.) how these implications relate to the individual's values

The Pragmatist would reflect on these two variables and recognise the contradiction in prioritising a rule for animal welfare over doing what is most conducive to animal welfare.¹⁸

Now, it is important to note that whilst context and consequences are normatively significant to the Pragma-

¹² Ibid; Misak, C., (2009), pp. 34-36; Alfano, M., Lurino, K., Robinson, B., Christen, M., Yu, F., & Lapslet, D., 2017

¹³ Dewey, J., 1988; Kotzee, B., Carter, J.A., & Siegel, H., (2021); LaFollette, H., (1997), p. 403

¹⁴ Campos, A. & Vas, S.G., (2021), p.6

¹⁵ Misak and Robinson both make the point that theoretical impasses also reinforce the Pragmatist's argument that deferential uses of philosophy encourage poor epistemic habits because one rarely has the luxury of an absolute impasse to reveal the unsoundness of their beliefs and/or values. Misak, 2009, p.34; Robinson, J.G., 2009, pp. 958-961

¹⁶ Selznick, P., 2008

¹⁷ Donelson, 2017, p.385

¹⁸ Fesmire, 2019, pp. 7-8, 13-14

tist, Pragmatism is not Consequentialism.¹⁹ Consequentialism is the belief that the consequences determine the justness of one's (in)action. Pragmatism, meanwhile, is a school of thought concerning the role and proper use of philosophy of philosophy. We can see this by comparing the use of METHOD 1 Consequentialism with a Pragmatic approach to Consequentialism. With METHOD 1 Consequentialism, the individual arrives "knowing" what good and bad consequences are and uses this to evaluate their options and determine what course of action they should take given the perceived consequences. A Pragmatist, meanwhile, may have some preconceptions about what good/bad consequences are but they would arrive prepared to reflect on these preconceptions and prepared to revise them based upon new information.

For Pragmatists, the important question is "what do we use philosophy for?". This informs their functional understanding of how we should use philosophy: as a tool for better understanding and navigating the world, meaning that it should not be used in a fashion contrary to these ends.

ii.) Environmental Pragmatism

Environmental Pragmatism, unsurprisingly, is a school of thought that advocates Pragmatic approaches to environmental ethics and policymaking.²⁰ Bryan G. Norton presents EP as a reactionary movement to the limited and sometimes detrimental role philosophy has played in environmentalism, questioning the logic of sacrificing the environment for the sake of honouring an environmen-

talist theory. Focusing on how philosophy can encourage zealotry and undermine the possibility of ecologically beneficial compromises and collaborations, Norton argues that environmentalists should ensure that they are only using philosophy to achieve ecological ends, disallowing uses of philosophy that undermine this aim.²¹ This led Norton to his conclusion that Environmentalism requires Pragmatism, given how non-Pragmatic approaches have proven detrimental to the environment.

John G. Robinson makes a similar argument by demonstrating how the success rate of any environmental policy can be contingent on one's capacity to convince their audience to support it and that the best way to convince people is to appeal to *their* values.²² Like Norton, Robinson questions the individual's environmentalist credentials if they prioritise theory over achieving ecological ends. Robinson uses the example of an environmentalist engaging with business executives. This environmentalist recognises that their audience is more familiar with and sympathetic to the cost-benefit analysis logic of Consequentialism. This means that the most promising way to get this audience's support is to defend the policy on Consequentialist terms.²³ Assuming this Environmentalist has misgivings about Consequentialism, the situation presents them with a choice between loyalty to an Environmentalist theory or to the environment, with Robinson presenting prioritising the theory in this case as both environmentally and logically untenable.²⁴

Environmental Pragmatism, therefore, advocates a results-orientated use of philosophy in Environmental policymaking, with the "right" philosophies and policies being dictated by practical considerations including what

¹⁹ Enoch, D., (2017), pp. 6-7 where Enoch uses the example of an unconscious patient in immediate need of a blood transfusion to demonstrate how context and probable consequences should have normative significance in one's moral thinking because they can be relevant to the practical significance of one's options. Enoch uses the example of following the imperative "do not give transfusions without consent" to demonstrate the need to reflect on the values behind the imperative, valuing individual autonomy, and using this to determine what they should do given the specifics of this case and potentially revise the imperative for non-ideal situations.

²⁰ Light, A & Katz, E., (1996), p.4

²¹ Norton, B.G., 2015, pp.33-34

²² Robinson, J.G., 2009, pp. 958-963

²³ Ibid, pp.961-962

²⁴ These sentiments also support the conclusions of Eckersley, R., (2002); Hall, E., (2018); Herzog, L., (2023); Honnacker, A., (2023); and Huber, J. (2023) in their discussions on improper use of theory, each providing similar arguments to Robinson's against evidence and theory based policymaking because of these models undervalue and even omit the practical and therefore normative significance of people's beliefs, values, and motivations.

one can convince others to (not) do. From the Pragmatic tradition, EP borrows the functional understanding of philosophy and a wariness of how philosophy can create problems rather than help solve problems.

2. Environmentalism or Pragmatism?

For scholars like Okke Loman, EP is a contradiction in terms, with the Pragmatist's commitment to open-minded inquiry necessarily being at odds with presupposing any values, including Environmental values.²⁵

Focusing on Norton's account of EP, Loman notes that Norton embraces the Pragmatic idea that the correct action is born out of open-minded debate and deliberation, with a focus on using philosophy to help find a workable solution.²⁶ Loman then presents a scenario where a Nortonite is engaging with a climate change sceptic (CCS) with incompatible beliefs and values to environmentalism.²⁷ Loman notes that Norton may say that the CCS lacks the necessary deliberative powers for discourse and philosophising, providing Norton with parameters for who and what ideas the Environmental Pragmatist does (not) need to accommodate.²⁸ However, as Loman then notes, this would be incompatible with the Pragmatic tradition. As Loman notes, Norton recognises that accommodating conflicting views allows for more open-minded philosophising and dispute resolution, believing that these conditions are necessary to (eventually) achieve consensus on (environmental) values and policies. There is, therefore, a Pragmatic and an Environmentalist argument for tolerating the CCS and not one for prioritising one's environmental values over the beliefs and values of one's critics.

Loman goes on to present how Norton Justifies assigning environmental values normative power via his Sustainability Principle.²⁹ This is the idea that values

should be compatible with the necessary conditions for their continued existence. The problem here is that the Sustainability Principle is achieved via non-Pragmatic thinking and applied in a manner akin to METHOD 1. Returning to the CCS, Loman presents Pragmatism as at odds with the Sustainability Principle regarding the source of normativity, a problem Loman generalises to an EP which starts with Environmental convictions before engaging with Pragmatic reasoning.

Campos and Vaz endeavour to respond to this issue by presenting a way to go from a Pragmatic commitment to open-mindedness to having ecological values via, what they refer to as, Justified Moral Pluralism (JMP). JMP embraces the Pragmatist's position that philosophy is for decision making and that decision-making should be reactionary to avoid the problems associated with deference to theory. Within JMP, one's initial responsibility is to understand the practical logistics of one's scenario including the beliefs, values, and motivations of the relevant stakeholders, including those of the users.³⁰

Open-mindedness and fact-sensitivity are presented as essential within JMP for testing the validity and soundness of one's beliefs and values, both moral and non-moral, and for determining how one can best accommodate the various beliefs and values in each scenario. Non-moral facts, like the progressing climate emergency, therefore, gain normative significance, not because of some pre-selected moral values, but because people hold ecologically relevant values and because these non-moral facts are relevant to one's (in)actions.³¹ For example, assume that one has a CCS who assigns great value to their family. Within JMP, one must balance the non-moral fact that is climate change does exist and balance this with the CCS's values concerning their family. In this instance, to not push for ecological policies would be to do a disservice to this individual's family values.

So long as there are people with Environmental val-

²⁵ Loman, O., (2020)

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 295-297

²⁷ Ibid, p. 302

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 302-303

³⁰ Campos and Vaz, 2021, pp.751-752

³¹ Ibid

ues and so long as the environment is relevant to their values, Pragmatists therefore have a Pragmatic rationale for treating environmental values as normatively significant. Assuming one is an Environmentalist, JMP, therefore, allows the individual to arrive on the scene with their environmental values so long as they are prepared to reflect upon them and their application given, amongst other things, the specifics of the situation, including the beliefs and values of others. If after these reflections they still see reason to hold their environmentalist beliefs and values, they can, as a Pragmatist, justify assigning these beliefs and values normative significance.

Though sympathetic to both Environmental Pragmatism and Campos and Vaz's efforts to defend it, Erik Rydenfelt is unconvinced that JMP solves the issue with combining Environmentalist values with Pragmatic ideals. Rydenfelt's main concern is that JMP does not do enough to present EP as immune from challenges of Relativism.³² Within JMP, the appropriate course of action will be subject to the beliefs, values, and motivations of others, independent of how valid and/or sound they are, as this will determine what is ultimately feasible. As Rydenfelt notes, this means that what is morally justifiable is subject to the beliefs, values, and motivations of others, regardless of the validity and/or soundness of these beliefs. This presents the "right course of action" as synonymous with the most accommodating course of action. When it comes to favouring environmental values, Rydenfelt then questions how a theory that gives normative power to public opinion regardless of soundness and validity can then justify favouring ideas because of their soundness and validity.

Rydenfelt concludes his paper with Norton's optimism that these problems will cease being practical problems because people's beliefs and values regarding the environment will converge.³³ Norton's assumption was that as evidence becomes increasingly overwhelm-

ing and education increasingly accessible, more and more people will adopt ecological perspectives and even agree on specific environmental policies.³⁴ Though this would solve the practical problems for the Environmental Pragmatist, it still leaves the philosophical questions unresolved as it is still unclear how one can both embrace Pragmatic open-mindedness and a commitment to specific (environmental) values.

3. An Environment for Pragmatism

To respond to Loman and Rydenfelt, it is important to note that Pragmatism does not entail an absence of normative values. Pragmatists value philosophy and, by proxy, the necessary conditions for philosophy. It is this sentiment that fuels their antagonism towards differential uses of philosophy as counterproductive to the open-mindedness and responsiveness necessary for philosophical inquiry.³⁵ Pragmatists, therefore, assign intrinsic value to philosophy and instrumental value to the necessary conditions for philosophy.

In this section, I build upon these sentiments by exploring the necessary conditions for philosophy, providing a schema for going from Pragmatic values to Environmental values as well as an outline for relating to one's environmental values without compromising one's Pragmatic credentials.

The first and most obvious necessary conditions for open-minded inquiry are the necessary requirements for an organism to engage with open-minded inquiry. Human cognitive development and performance are tied to numerous environmental factors, like, for example air quality.³⁶ This immediately gives the Pragmatist cause to

³⁴ Norton, B.G., (2003), pp. 237-243

³⁵ Rorty, R., (1985)

³⁶ Thompson, R., Smith, R.B., Karim, Y.B., Shen, C., Drummond, K., Teng, C. and Toledano, M.B., 2023. Air pollution and human cognition: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Science of The Total Environment*, 859, p.160-234; Shehab, M.A. and Pope, F.D., 2019. Effects of short-term exposure to particulate matter air pollution on cognitive performance. *Scientific reports*, 9(1), p.8237.

³² Rydenfelt, H., (2023), p. 4

³³ Ibid, p.10

be open to assigning instrumental value to environmental factors currently proven necessary for and/or conducive to human cognition. Pragmatists therefore cannot be indifferent to the environmental variables that necessary for and/or conducive to human inquiry.

To retain their Pragmatic credentials, Pragmatists must then approach these beliefs and values prepared to debate them and open to the possibility that they may be erroneous. Keeping with the example of “clean air is good”, the Pragmatist must first best determine if both having this belief is conducive to the necessary conditions for philosophy.³⁷ This requires them to engage with the multitude of contradictory beliefs and values as opportunities to learn, validate, and falsify various positions to identify the optimal way forward for the sake of the future of philosophy.

It also requires them to make the context dependent decision as to whether pushing for the belief now is most conducive to the necessary conditions for philosophy. Assigning instrumental value to a phenomenon does not mean that one’s actions should always prioritise the given phenomenon. Returning to the clean air example, as a Pragmatist one should only prioritise promoting cleaner air when doing so would be consistent with valuing open-minded inquiry. Two variables may lead the Pragmatist away from prioritising clean air:

1. When doing so would be at the expense of some other option that would be more conducive to open-minded inquiry
2. When doing so would undermine the necessary conditions for open-minded inquiry.

Focusing on 1, suppose that a Pragmatic politician has done all the first stages of Pragmatic thinking and identified two options: supporting an initiative for clean air or one for improving nutritional regulations. Their ra-

tionale for the two are the same: that clean air and a nutritious diet have been positively linked to cognitive development and performance. Unfortunately, this politician only has enough funding for one of the initiatives. Assume that the two policies enjoy equal and sufficient support from the public, but not enough that they would accept tax rises for both initiatives. The context is normatively significant because it forces the politician to choose between two options, impacting the normative significance of these options.³⁸ If the politician could support both measures, the choice to not would be different. The fact that they must choose one means that by not choosing the other they are not rejecting the idea that the other is also valuable, just not always prioritizable. Now, suppose the politician concludes that the food initiative is more beneficial to human cognition. As a Pragmatist, they would have a Pragmatic justification for not supporting the clean air policy. This demonstrates a Pragmatic relationship with environmental values: ever subject to Pragmatic values and, therefore, only authoritative if, after Pragmatic thinking, they are determined as conducive to open-minded inquiry.

Moving to 2, this is where the topic of public opinion and validity become relevant to Pragmatic thinking. Open-mindedness does not just happen. As we saw with METHOD 1, humans have many epistemic foibles that can prevent them from greater open-mindedness. We can mitigate this problem by concerning ourselves with the validity and soundness of our beliefs as ways to test whether they are ones we should hold or reject.³⁹ This requires a mind open to the possibility of having erroneous or less valid beliefs and values, and this possibility is dependent upon the individual’s socio-political experiences and learning. For example, exposure to an environment hostile to unsubstantiated claims will likely make one more concerned with the validity and soundness

³⁸ Enoch, D., (2018); Herzog, L. (2012); Volacu, A., (2018)

³⁹ Kotzee, B., Carter, J. A., & Siegel, H. (2021); Tanesini, A., (2018); (2024)

³⁷ Campos, A.S., & Vaz, S.G., (2021), pp. 744-747

of their positions. Equally, exposure to an environment where valid arguments are dismissed can lead people to devalue these epistemic habits and disengage with the deliberative process, both mentally and publicly, which would be detrimental to open-minded inquiry and deliberation.⁴⁰ This leads the Pragmatist to a commitment to the necessary socio-political conditions for people to cultivate a value in validity and soundness and to ensure their actions reflect this Pragmatic commitment.⁴¹

It is this that allows Pragmatism to explain how both validity and public opinion can have normative significance within the same paradigm. The Pragmatist needs to be and seen to be committed to soundness and validity but only because this is necessary for socio-political conditions necessary for open-minded inquiry. They also need to recognise that humans are fallible, including their audience. And their audience's reaction will dictate what is in the interests of open-minded inquiry. For example, suppose a politician is engaging with an audience sympathetic to climate change scepticism. This politician has the executive authority to enact the clean air act despite their constituents' misgivings towards climate politics. As a Pragmatist, they have sought to understand their constituents' beliefs and values, finding them invalid and unsound. The politician has two options, each problematic for a Pragmatist:

1. They humour their constituents, undermining their credentials as someone committed to validity and soundness and subsequently undermining the socio-political conditions conducive for open-minded deliberation and inquiry.
2. They reject their constituents' beliefs and values as unsound and invalid. This risks cultivating greater

hostility toward ecological policies and, by rejecting their firmly held beliefs and values, it also risks their constituents disengaging in deliberation, both mentally and political, by demonstrating how their firmly held beliefs and values can be dismissed. This route, therefore, also comes with the risk of undermining the necessary conditions for open-minded deliberation and inquiry.

Public opinion is therefore only normatively significant to the Pragmatist because of its relevance to the future of open-minded inquiry.

The problem this still leaves is how this does not just lead to Relativism. Returning to Rydenfelt, his concerns with JMP were that public opinion can dictate what is morally justifiable, leading him to question how this is not just Relativism and, therefore, incompatible with any form of environmentalism.⁴² In the following section, I present this problem as arising from act-focused understandings of practical philosophy and how an agent-focused account of Pragmatism avoid these issues, allowing for a promising and philosophically tenable understanding of what it means to be Environmentally Pragmatic.

4. Virtue Theory and Environmental Pragmatism

In his critique of JMP, Rydenfelt argues that the spectre of Relativism persists because the appropriateness of an action or policy can be subject to beliefs and values of the agents, regardless of how valid or sound these beliefs and values are. This is a common criticism lobbied at EP, and Pragmatism more generally, one that fuels the idea that Pragmatism entails Moral Relativism and, therefore, EP is self-contradictory.

This argument, however, is contingent on the premise that the ethics of the act should be determined independently of the context, including how the beliefs

⁴⁰ Levy, N. & Alfano, M., 2020

⁴¹ Ferkany (2019) presents this as the moral limits of open-mindedness whilst Battaly (2018) presents going beyond these parameters as a moral failing in their defence of the position that some close-mindedness demonstrates epistemic virtues because they are necessary to be able to process information logically, clearly, and fairly.

⁴² Rydentfelt, 2023, p.4

and values of the involved agents influence the context. This, however, goes against all three traditional ethical theories once we transition from theory to application.⁴³ For example, Kant famously said that for something to be an obligation, it must be possible, meaning that the individual's relative agency, as determined by their context, will shape their moral responsibilities.⁴⁴ Consequentialists, meanwhile, oblige one to pursue the optimal consequences, which will be determined by the context they find themselves in. Finally, in Virtue Ethics, context determines how a virtue manifests, for example, courage is not necessarily demonstrated by someone who overcomes their fears and faces a threat but by someone who responds to a threat appropriately, given the context.

Already we have seen the problems Deontologists and Consequentialists face when it comes to EP, with scholars like Campos and Vaz highlighting how preconceived rules or ideas regarding acceptable outcomes compromising the individual's open-mindedness and capacity to Pragmatically.

What sets Virtue Ethics apart from the other two traditions is that virtue ethics does not attempt to pre-empt debate by providing guidance on the right kinds of actions or consequences but, instead, guidance on how one should approach their decisions.⁴⁵ The criteria for good decision-making varies greatly within the Virtue Ethics canon, but there are a few common features.⁴⁶ The first is prudence, specifically prudence over one's options and their probable outcomes. Second is humility, specifically over our epistemic and cognitive shortcomings, with Virtue Ethicists cautioning individuals to be wary of their lack of omnipotence and how their beliefs, values, and emotions may influence both their perception and their reasoning.⁴⁷

Immediately, one can see similarities between Virtue Ethics and (Environmental) Pragmatism. Virtue Ethics'

Prudence can be compared to Pragmatism's Fallibilism, with both theories assigning value to engaging and understanding the beliefs, values, and motivations of others, at least to validate, falsify, and/or refine one's own beliefs and values.⁴⁸ In both, the ethics of the act is determined by how one approached the decision. Furthermore, the Pragmatist's commitment to the necessary socio-political infrastructure is there to enable others to engage in open-minded inquiry can be compared to the idea that the virtuous should best ensure others can also achieve virtue. In both theories, therefore, one's aim in a decision is to demonstrate good decision-making, with considerable overlap in how the two theories conceptualise good decision-making.

Let us now consider what it means to *be* a Pragmatist. Suppose we have two Pragmatic politicians contemplating an unpopular green policy. They have undertaken all the Pragmatic procedural checks and concluded that their values and this policy (in the abstract) are consistent with Pragmatic values. Let's assume that a major motivation for their perspective comes from Pragmatically re-validated ecological values. They must then consider if it would be Pragmatic to push for it. This leads them to the conclusion that pushing for the policy is justifiable iff it will lead to more ecological ends than not pushing for it. To answer this question, they now must consider how their electorate will react. The two disagree on answers to this question and have different conclusions regarding what they should do with the policy as Pragmatists. However, the two have satisfied the necessary and sufficient conditions to equally justify their contradictory positions as the Pragmatic answer.

Now, it should first be noted that the possibility of disagreements should not be considered a weakness for a theory when it comes to guidance in addressing uncertainty. As we saw with the Pragmatist's criticisms of non-Pragmatic theory, the fact that one's paradigm can give the

⁴³ Volacu, A., (2018)

⁴⁴ Kant, I., (2012), p.36

⁴⁵ Hursthouse, R., (2010), pp. 26-27

⁴⁶ MacIntyre, A., (2008), pp. 209-213

⁴⁷ Aristotle, 2009, pp, 114-117;

⁴⁸ LeBar, M., (2008), p.182: what LeBar refers to as "Aristotelian Constructivism"

user clear and certain guidance should not justify the use of it, given that this clear guidance could also be unsound and invalid. The strength of an agent-focused account of Environmental Pragmatism is that it can advise the individual on engaging with uncertainty *as* uncertainty.⁴⁹

Prima facie, we could attempt to avoid this issue with a comprehensive and definitive definition of what it means to be a Pragmatist. Keeping with our two politicians, this would, hopefully, allow one to tell the other that they are overstating or understating the situation concerning the electorate. However, there are no guarantees of this, if both are thoroughly convinced of their position and that they have better embodied the Pragmatic schema.

Furthermore, doing so would be fundamentally incompatible with Pragmatism, as it would prove detrimental to open-minded inquiry. MacIntyre responded to a similar problem with efforts to qualify what it means to be virtuous.⁵⁰ As MacIntyre noted, since Aristotle, philosophers have endeavoured to qualify what it means to be virtuous, many of them unjustifiably convinced that their conclusions were immune from cultural bias and ignorance. In response to this, MacIntyre concluded that so long as we lack omnipotence, part of human virtue must include an openness to the possibility that even one's most fundamental convictions may be erroneous, complementing the Pragmatist's rationale for Fallibilism.⁵¹ To be Pragmatic, therefore, entails an openness to the possibility that even one's conception of Pragmatism is flawed and a preparedness to defend one's conception via proactive reflection should a challenge come.

This does leave us with Pragmatism as a vague concept. Whilst this is an issue for the individual who wants philosophy to give them instructions, it is not an issue for those who want it to help them with making decisions, nor should it be viewed as a weakness for the theory.⁵²

A common criticism lobbied at Virtue Ethics is that virtuousness is too vague for ethical guidance. Rosalind Hursthouse accepted this. However, Hursthouse compared this to the imperative to "do good actions" for Deontology and "pursue good consequences" for Consequentialism, labelling both as equally vague, useless, and open to challenges of Relativism.⁵³ As Hursthouse notes, the first jobs of anyone embarking on moral philosophy is to outline and defend their understanding of their theory and its ideals before then explaining how these considerations led them to their conclusion on how they should act.⁵⁴

This sentiment can be applied to Pragmatism. The Pragmatist's first responsibility should always be to revisit how they understand Pragmatism before using the input from others to reflect and revise their Pragmatic and Ecological beliefs and values, both on Pragmatic terms. Next, they will explore the practicalities of their options, making their ultimate decision once they are confident that they could defend the epistemic steps they took from Pragmatism to their ecological decision.

In this formulation, the Environmental Pragmatist is first and foremost a Pragmatist who by accident may find themselves supporting Environmental values and policies but only because they align with their fundamental commitment to philosophy. This will justifiably appear rather mercenary to most Environmentalists. However, given the threat the climate emergency poses to the future of human existence and, by extension, philosophy, it does mean that the Environmentalist should often expect to find an ally in the Pragmatist. Should the Pragmatist diverge from the Environmentalist, they should also be prepared to explain how their position can be considered Pragmatic given the threat ecological collapse poses to their precious philosophy.

As Rydenfelt concluded, Pragmatism is not a philosophy for those looking for fixed views because that is not the aim of Pragmatism. Pragmatists understand philoso-

⁴⁹ Ansell, C., & Geyer, R. (2017)

⁵⁰ MacIntyre, A., (2007), pp. 212-214

⁵¹ Ibid, pp. 235-236

⁵² Rydenfelt, H., (2023), pp. 9-10

⁵³ Hursthouse, R., (1991)

⁵⁴ Hursthouse, R., (1991), p.245

phy as a tool used by imperfect minds looking for guidance in unprecedented and imperfect situations. What the Pragmatist took from these observations was the folly of trying to pre-empt debate and the benefits, both philosophical and practical, to a perpetual openness to debate, deliberation, and learning. Within this open-ended project we can include the Environmental Pragmatists, charged with the responsibility to explain how they went from their conception of Pragmatism to their environmental values, undertaking the necessary epistemic steps to ensure their positions remain valid and sound. Environmental Pragmatism, therefore, can offer a philosophically tenable approach to practical decision making, but only with considerable epistemic legwork to avoid the challenges of self-contradiction, Relativism, or crude instrumentalization of philosophical rhetoric.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented how one can arrive at Environmental values through Pragmatic reasoning and how one should, as a Pragmatist, relate to these values once one has adopted them. In doing so, I presented a Pragmatist that is fundamentally committed to the continuation of philosophy and capable of assigning environment an instrumental value via its current necessity for philosophy. This, I argued, allows us to arrive at a conception of an Environmental Pragmatist that does not invite challenges of contradiction, because their environmental values originate from their Pragmatic convictions and not from some independent, non-Pragmatic reasoning.

This version of Environmental Pragmatism can offer a philosophically tenable position to defer to and help make decision regarding the environment when we are confronted with unideal options often made worse by the beliefs, values, and motivations of others. However, I concede that to avoid the contradiction one should be prepared to undertake considerable epistemic legwork. However, this should only prove an unsatisfactory con-

clusion for those uninterested in best ensuring their beliefs and values rest upon justifiable foundations.

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