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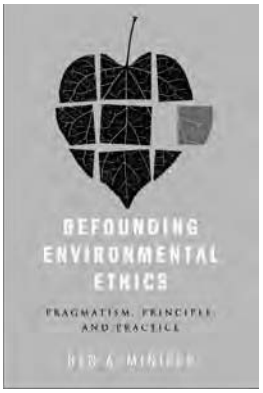
Reconstruction in Environmental Philosophy

Refounding Environmental Ethics: Pragmatism, Principle, and Practice. Ben A. Minteer. Temple University Press, 2011. 212 pp., illus. $27.95 (ISBN 9781439900840 paper).

Ben A. Minteer's *Refounding Environmental Ethics: Pragmatism, Principle, and Practice* is a sustained critique of contemporary environmental ethics. In addition, it is the best articulation and defense of environmental pragmatism to date. In this book, Minteer, an associate professor of environmental ethics and policy in the School of Life Sciences and senior sustainability scholar in the Global Institute of Sustainability at Arizona State University, argues that the twentieth-century field of environmental ethics has been largely irrelevant to policymakers and scientists, and to rectify this, it should follow philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey's lead and become pluralistic, contextual, and naturalistic.

In traditional ethics—developed by luminaries such as John Stuart Mill, Immanuel Kant, and Aristotle—theories have routinely been articulated in which our actions and character are dictated as morally right or wrong, virtuous or vicious. In the 1970s, the field of environmental ethics arose with the idea that this standard approach to ethics was incomplete. Specifically, traditional ethical theory was almost always anthropocentric. Environmental ethicists argued that the Earth was home to more than humanity and that an attempt should be made to develop nonanthropocentric ethical theories. Thus began ethical extensionism. For example, consider the property of being sentient. Nonhuman animals experience pleasure and pain, and if these qualities confer moral standing, humans are not the only living things with moral standing. From these humble beginnings, environmental ethicists have controversially argued that plants, populations, species, and even ecosystems have interests that can be furthered or thwarted. As such, these interests must have moral standing and deserve moral consideration.

The early environmental ethicists were motivated by their objection to anthropocentrism, but they were also influenced by the various countercultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In their view, modern philosophers should not merely grapple with the abstract, metaethical questions but should also provide relevant guidance regarding current issues of race,



gender, class, and the environment. However, what is striking about this area of applied ethics is just how theoretical it has been. The question *Does nonhuman nature have intrinsic value?* has been at the core of this field, yet answering this question has become tantamount to addressing the objective or subjective nature of values. Therefore, in pursuit of a distinctive nonanthropocentric ethical theory, environmental ethicists have consequently less and less to say about pressing environmental problems.

In light of this predicament, Minteer urges philosophers to "refound" environmental ethics on pragmatic footing. Specifically, he urges that we follow John Dewey's lead when thinking about ethical decisionmaking. According to Dewey, ethical questions arise when we find ourselves in a problematic situation in which we simply do not know what to do and in which our decisions affect the well-being of others. Contrary to traditional ethical theory, Dewey argued that moral principles are provisional hypotheses regarding what is valuable and cannot be applied in an algorithmic manner. For example, the content of principles crucially depends on the circumstance in which these principles are applied. Dewey provides a procedural view of ethical decisionmaking: The right action is the one that intelligent participants would choose as the most reasonable option after discussion and evaluation of the alternatives. Dewey's pragmatic ethics is pluralistic, since it reflects a variety of values; it is context dependent, since no moral principle is always relevant; and it is naturalistic, since it does not require knowledge of divine will or transcendent truths.

What gives this book particular relevance is Minteer's articulation of how environmental pragmatism can be applied to twenty-first-century environmental issues. First, he argues on the basis of empirical fieldwork that stakeholders value the environment for a multiplicity of economic, recreational, aesthetic, and religious reasons, which are sensitive to different management contexts. True enough, some of these reasons are anthropocentric, but they are one group of values among many. Second, environmental pragmatism revives the notion of the public interest and uses tools such as dispute negotiation as a model of how environmental ethical reasoning can be made effective. Third, Minteer explicitly addresses the importance of what he calls *ecological ethics*—how biologists should make decisions

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regarding their own research projects. For example, should biologists use toe clipping to mark and recapture amphibians? Should assisted migration be used on thermally challenged species that attempt to migrate in light of global climate change? Should we restore degraded landscapes to historical baselines when endangered species are using them as habitat? Here, he calls on the environmental ethicists to provide a collection of moral heuristics to aid their decisionmaking.

In summary, *Refounding Environmental Ethics* is readable, and Minteer's challenge to his readers is important. He clearly identifies substantial problems in the way that environmental ethics is practiced, and he presents a powerful and pragmatic alternative that embraces tools from the social sciences, political philosophy, and conflict negotiation in service of this alternative. Two critical points are worth raising, however. First, I would argue that a cognitive division of labor is needed among this new school of philosophers. Distinguish those who are best at thinking about questions on the nature and objectivity of value from those who are best at thinking about how to evaluate novel moral challenges (e.g., assisted migration) in light of our best normative theories and from others who are best at working in interdisciplinary policy contexts and scientific working groups, providing valuable assistance in the articulation and evaluation of moral aspects of environmental decisionmaking. Of course, some philosophers can seamlessly move among all these areas, but we need not all be doing the same thing. Second, one can endorse a more pragmatic approach and still reject Dewey's particularism. Environmental ethics could embody and pursue a policy that is both relevant and independent of the tradition of American pragmatism.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Minteer's book is an important defense of environmental pragmatism and deserves a wide readership. Neopragmatist Richard Rorty once wrote, "Truth is what your contemporaries let you get away with" (1979, p. 176). Minteer, in this important work, refuses to let environmental philosophers get away with policy irrelevance.

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THE DINOSAUR CONSPIRACY

Riddle of the Feathered Dragons: Hidden Birds of China. Alan Feduccia. Yale University Press, 2012. 368 pp., illus. $55.00 (ISBN 9780300164350 cloth).

Considering that birds are an intrinsic part of modern daily life and culture, it is not surprising that their evolutionary origin has been the topic of significant interest and controversy. A rapidly growing body of evidence supports the hypothesis that birds are evolutionarily nested within theropod dinosaurs—a group that includes the iconic *Tyrannosaurus* and *Velociraptor* (Chiappe 2009). These data derive from osteological studies, as well as from information about sensory capabilities (Witmer and Ridgely 2009), reproductive traits (Zelenitsky 2006), growth patterns (Erickson et al. 2009), integumentary features (Norell and Xu 2005), and genomic size (Organ et al. 2007). Such overwhelming evidence has led to a broad consensus among evolutionary biologists, who today consider birds to be the descendants of Mesozoic dinosaurs. Any well-substantiated new view that allows us to step back and revisit this established hypothesis should stimulate research and be embraced with enthusiasm, but Alan Feduccia's *Riddle of the Feathered Dragons: Hidden Birds of China* does nothing of the sort. Instead, the book misleads its readers into believing that the theropod hypothesis hinges on scant evidence and is the empirical equivalent to Feduccia's vaguely presented alternatives.

The author begins by building a conspiracy theory in which the main villains are the cladists, who, like computational shamans, reveal what they see in their character matrices. He disdainfully equates dinosaur paleontology—and paleontology in general—with a second-rate scientific discipline more worthy of tabloids than respected journals. Recognized periodicals such as *Nature* and *Science*, together with their editors, are the alleged accomplices of the indoctrinated cladists, and virtually anyone connected with the view that certain theropods are the most immediate predecessors of birds is painted negatively.

Early in the book, Feduccia tells us that the most important issues are "whether birds are living theropods and whether flight evolved from the ground up rather than from trees down" (p. 23). However, for most researchers, and presumably for this audience, the more important questions are *Who are the closest relatives of birds?* and *How did these animals evolve flight?* This difference in scope sets the book's entire tone, because Feduccia is clearly more interested in disproving the theropod hypothesis than in providing support for an alternative.

We learn soon enough about the author's methodological strategy: "The possibility that one key synapomorphy, if falsified, would reduce all the other synapomorphies to the status of parallelism and hence irrelevant to the debate, should be a lesson to the more dogmatic cladists" (p. 21). This and other statements reveal Feduccia's precarious understanding of the methodology he so despises. Astonishingly, he argues that "cladistic approaches tend to group animals as ecological equivalents (ecomorphs) without any necessary regard to actual relatedness" and emphasizes that the "overarching problem in cladistic approaches has

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