Toward a Broadened Ethical Pluralism in Environmental Ethics:
From Bryan Norton's Discursive Ethics
to William James' Experiential Pluralism

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Toward a Broadened Ethical Pluralism in Environmental Ethics: From Bryan Norton's Discursive Ethics to William James' Experiential Pluralism

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Recent work by Piers Stephens has established axiological pluralism as the common element between various strands of theorizing in environmental ethics. However, a tension still exists in contemporary theories between the need for practical convergence among the values through rational argumentation and the experience of the motivational power of the value orientations in living human experience. The pragmatist phenomenological foundation for a pluralist environmental ethics developed in the philosophy of William James is consistent with the contemporary theories, while potentially solving some of their tensions. In particular, the proposed approach of James adds a deeper layer of experiential values, which are not always considered in the public discursive practices and which often mobilize non-scientific and not explicitly rational motivations and beliefs (including the environmental as well as the psychological, social, and cultural). In doing so, the phenomenological pragmatism of William James opens up an avenue for integrating experiential values into a broadened pluralist environmental ethics.

I. INTRODUCTION

The discussion of pluralism gained an important momentum at the end of the twentieth century in the context of the acceleration of economic and social globalization.[1] In this context, pluralism as the general idea that there is a radical heterogeneity of points of view is often approached through the issue of an increasing difficulty in critically engaging with otherness.[2] Such observations have led to several

[1] See Andrew Light, "The Case for a Practical Pluralism," in Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston, III, eds., *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology* (Malden, Oxford, and Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 229–47; Bryan G. Norton, *Sustainability: A Philosophy of Adaptive Ecosystem Management* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[2] Richard J. Bernstein, "Pragmatism, Pluralism and the Healing of Wounds," in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 63, no. 3 (1989): 5–18.

reflections on democratic theory related to a variety of concepts such as toleration, autonomy, or equality, and focusing on the implementation of an efficient public deliberation as the only way to deal with the pluralist social factor.

Nevertheless, these dominant deliberative approaches rely somehow on a "pessimistic" view of pluralism. They view pluralism as something that imposes "limits" on social interaction and tries to solve its core difficulty through the promotion of deliberative institutions. But it is also possible to understand pluralism less as a limit and more as an opportunity. When social actors face complex coordination problems, the fact that there is a diversity of conceptions of truth and validity increases the possibility of finding among these actors the appropriate frames for collectively finding solutions to practical issues. The idea of this more "optimist" approach to pluralism is then to promote experimentation as the pluralist gift to our learning and creative abilities.

The debate on environmental ethics has approached the fact of the diversity of valuations of nature from those two sides: for some, it is an issue that has to be solved through the definition of a monistic ethical principle, and for others, it is a chance to democratically test through trial and error diverse schemes of human-nature interaction.[3] Somehow, those two views have generated a dispute in environmental philosophy that tends to occupy the center of the attention. For the purposes of this paper, these two extremes may be personified by J. Baird Callicott, on the one hand, and by Anthony Weston and Bryan Norton, on the other hand.[4] For Callicott, it is essential to stand against theoretical pluralism and to formulate a coherent ethical theory that can accommodate an intrinsic value theory of nature. For Norton and Weston, along with other pragmatists such as Andrew Light, the focus and the effort that is needed reside less on the theoretical than on the practical side: environmental issues ask for global solutions, and we need to put aside our divergence of views to solve the urgent environmental issues as quickly as possible. The fast-evolving and global aspects of environmental issues call for a new ethical paradigm not built just on meta-principles, but rather on practical conditions for convergence on desirable action strategies.

As Piers Stephens has rightly pointed out and has demonstrated with reference to the pragmatism of William James,[6] Callicott and Norton's views are in fact not necessarily in conflict. In addition, we also believe that the tensions between their views may be relieved. But if pluralism is the only way to address the vast and diverse environmental challenges that humanity is facing, we believe that the shift toward practical problem solving is still missing a part of the equation. The Jamesian environmental philosophy proposed by Stephens, through its focus on experience and its particular notion of interest, indicates the nature of this lack: the incapacity

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[3] See Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston, III, eds., *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology* (Malden, Oxford, and Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

[4] See Bryan G. Norton, *Toward Unity among Environmentalists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[5] Andrew Light, "The Case for a Practical Pluralism," in Light and Rolston , *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 229–47.

[6] Piers H. G. Stephens, "Toward a Jamesian Environmental Philosophy," in *Environmental Ethics* 31 (2009): pp. 227–44.

to take into account motivational aspects that do not rely on discourse principles or on a rational "ethics of opportunities," but also rely on motivations stemming from living experience of nature. In this paper, we build upon these critical contributions of Stephens and attempt to further explore the experiential aspect of ethics articulated in James' pragmatism as a possible way to solve some of the tensions within and criticisms against contemporary environmental pragmatism.[7]

The specificity of the critical analysis of pluralism developed in this paper consists in the focus that is placed on the processes of convergence among value perspectives within pluralist environmental ethics. We describe three interrelated aspects corresponding to various aspects of this process: (1) nature as the source of a plurality of moral communities requiring a *discourse ethics* organizing fair and equitable deliberation for bridging the value perspectives of various communities; (2) nature as a common repository of "resources" for possible actions revealing a second normative aspect of proactive exploration of *ethics of action opportunities in an intergenerational perspective*; and (3) nature as the phenomenological realm of living experience opening to a third aspect of *experiential ethics*. In the first and second approaches, pluralist ethics focuses on public deliberation over a plurality of values within a moral community, while the third one gives access to a reflection in terms of "directions of expansion"[8] of experience. Indeed, the evolution of values is not just about "improvement" through common understanding or through organizing feedback from practical exploration, but also about expressing and communicating living experiences which may be interdependent in ways that we cannot simply guess, quantify or even make entirely explicit. We refer to this third aspect as an "experiential ethics" based on a form of "engaged pluralism" as proposed by Richard Bernstein.[9]

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section (section two), we analyze two extreme positions in the current debate, the positions of Callicott and Weston, with the view to show how the concept of pluralism can be accommodated in both of their versions of environmental ethics. In sections three and four, we build upon their insights on the role of a discourse ethics for bridging the various moral communities' perspectives, by addressing the question of a broad pluralism that can encompass the full scope of possible human experience. This question is first introduced through the pragmatism of Norton, and then deepened through the experiential ethics of William James. As we argue below, even though Norton already integrates a broad concept of nature as a source of possible action opportunities, for the present and for the future generations, his approach fails to address value-related motivations beyond such rationally articulated action opportunities. The experiential ethics of James opens up an essential complementary avenue for a broadened pluralism in environmental

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[7] Piers H. G. Stephens, "The Turn of the Skew: Pragmatism, Environmental Philosophy and the Ghost of William James," *Contemporary Pragmatism* 9 (2012): 25–52.

[8] Elise Springer, *Communicating Moral Concern*: *An Ethics of Critical Responsiveness* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013).

[9] Richard J. Bernstein, "Pragmatism, Pluralism and the Healing of Wounds," in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 63 (1989): 5–18.

ethics, by integrating the way new values are generated and enacted through lived experience.

II. PLURALISM AS THE BASIS OF CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSE ETHICS

If their approaches are radically opposed on the issue of the valuation of nature, Callicott and Weston share a focus on a community-determined plurality of ways to interact with nature. This aspect of the valuation process is essential because it both opens and constitutes the theoretical ground of the contemporary *discourse ethics* approach to pluralism, which focuses on the fair and equitable evaluation of various value perspectives in rationally articulated discourse.[10] Indeed, even for someone such as Callicott who believes in the necessity of valuing nature for itself, in a way which cannot be reduced to an anthropocentric point of view, it is difficult to deny the multiplicity of moral relationships with nature. Hence, the only way to deal collectively with environmental issues is by promoting a certain form of pluralist discourse ethics which can bridge the perspectives of various communities. As we argue below, both authors mobilize a discourse ethics as the way to arbitrate among the possible conflicts between the various community and/or practice-related environmental values. The point here is not to claim who, either Callicott or Weston, is right or wrong, but to indicate the commonalities in the nature of the pluralism that they defend. However, as we argue in sections three and four, a properly understood pluralist environmental ethics should not only be concerned with the evaluation of existing values, through rational argumentation, but also with the involvement of human actors in direct experience of nature, with the view to promote learning and active involvement with discovering fragile and less-well represented views.

(2.1) DUTIES TO MULTIPLE COMMUNITIES IN CALLICOTT'S INTERPERSONAL PLURALISM

One of the main options among ethicists relies on a radically nonanthropocentric vision of nature as an entity that requires protection for itself. Callicott is the author who has proposed probably the most backed-up version of such an intrinsic value theory of nature. Deeply influenced by the seminal ecocentric ethics of Aldo Leopold, Callicott is the best-known defender of a nonanthropocentric monistic environmental philosophy. His main focus is on the creation of a strong theoretical axiology in environmental ethics which can give a place to our duties to the global biotic communities to which we belong.

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[10] Our purpose in this paper is not to analyze discourse ethics as such, but to analyze the contribution of the experiential ethics to broadening the plurality of perspectives taken into account in public deliberation on environmental ethics. For an overview of strengths and weaknesses of various strands of discourse ethics, see John O' Neill, *Markets, Deliberation and Environment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

Acknowledging that we might have duties both to global biotic communities, but also to national communities, to our family, etc., Callicott initiates his reflection on pluralism by identifying an important insufficiency in the position of theoretical moral pluralism.[11] Such theoretical pluralism argues that the validity of ethical principles, such as the use of utilitarian ethics as compared to deontological ethics, for example, depends on the particular sphere of action at stake. In this perspective, the use of different ethical principles is justified by the changing nature of the situations in which these principles are used.[12] In addition to the problem that such theoretical moral pluralism leaves actors sometimes with the choice between inconsistent ethical principles, which invites "moral promiscuity" and promotes a self-interested rationalization, the essential flaw remains for Callicott that theoretical moral pluralism does not allow the creation of a unified moral world view, which "gives our lives purpose, direction, coherency, and sanity."[13] In other words, for Callicott, the main issue with this approach to pluralism is the fact that it might lead to a moral relativism, which relies on a loose philosophical approach that disables both theoretical coherency and persuasion. According to Callicott, only a monistic approach based on a single moral philosophy and a unique value theory can be at the basis of a coherent and functional environmental ethics, which nevertheless recognizes a practical pluralism of values related to our belonging to multiple communities.

In addition, in his study of the multiplicity of environmental insights developed by diverse traditions and religions over the globe, Callicott refers to the "one-many problem" as a second core tension within comparative environmental ethics.[14] How is it possible to address a coherent answer to an environmental crisis experienced differently through many cultures? It seems that only a pluralist approach, leaving space for idiosyncratic interpretations of nature and the selection of specific conducts toward it, will be able to address this challenge. What kind of axiological articulation can use Callicott in order to solve this "one-many problem"?

To solve these tensions, Callicott describes rather convincingly a third way, an ethical option that permits to combine a single univocal and non-relativistic moral theory with the integrative and flexible advantages of a practical pluralist approach in ethics. This is achieved through the integration of three theoretical approaches: the notion of moral sympathy as developed by David Hume and Adam Smith, the evolutionary approach to human moral behavior as theorized by Charles Darwin, and the notion of community

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[11] J. Baird Callicott, *Beyond the Land Ethic: More Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 153–56.

[12] The conception of moral pluralism to which Callicott refers is the one famously advocated by Christopher Stone. See Christopher D. Stone, *Earth and Other Ethics: The Case for Moral Pluralism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

[13] Callicott, *Beyond the Land Ethic,* p. 166.

[14] J. Baird Callicott, *Earth's Insights: A Multicultural Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 11–13.

described in the work of Aldo Leopold. Through natural evolution, the natural moral sentiments toward our fellow family members have been expanded to other spheres of belonging, corresponding to the various communities in which we exercise moral sympathy. As stated by Callicott, through this theoretical integration,

> We have before us then the bare bones of a *univocal* ethical theory embedded in a coherent world view that provides, nevertheless, for a *multiplicity* of hierarchically ordered and variously "textured" moral relationships (and thus duties, responsibilities, and so on) each corresponding to and supporting our multiple, varied, and hierarchically ordered social relationships.[15]

Callicott defends the peculiarity of his proposition, which gives a central place to possibly conflicting duties generated by our multiple community memberships. On the one hand, his approach distinguishes between competing community entanglements at various scales from family relations to local, working, global humanitarian, and finally global biotic relationships. On the other hand, these competing community entanglements are ruled by a unique sentimentalist conception of morality articulated around an expanding feeling of community belonging within an evolutionary concept of human nature. In this context, if the ethical obligations along familial, local, working, global, and biotic memberships may conflict, "since all our duties—to people, to animals, to nature—are expressible in a common vocabulary, the vocabulary of community, they may be weighed and compared in commensurable terms."[16] For instance, as illustrated by Callicott, in situations of lack of financial means, a duty to the family community might outweigh a duty to provide donations to vulnerable populations for which we care, as members of the global humanitarian community. In another example of possible conflict, care for an endangered species as a member of the global biotic community might outweigh a concern for preventing temporary job losses at the national levels because these are situated in sectors that are causing more societal harm than societal benefit in the long term.

We psychologically commit ourselves along diverse levels of implication according to the "community" we are confronted with, but we nonetheless use the same normative system expressed by a moral sentiment, which also applies to our belonging to the global biotic community (as one of the community belongings generating moral sentiments). The universal vocabulary of the community and its multiple syntaxes is then the starting point to organize a public discussion with fellow community members (interpersonal pluralism). Such discussions takes place within a coherent sensitive approach where each individual member gives a place in his value system to intrinsic values for the whole of the living world (intrapersonal monism).[17] As a result, while staying on the ground of an intrinsic value theory of nature as the basis of the global environmental consciousness, the Hume-Darwin-Leopold communitarianism

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[15] Callicott, *Beyond the Land Ethic*, p. 168 (emphasis in the original).
[16] Ibid., p. 173.
[17] Ibid., p. 175.

proposed by Callicott leaves space for an evaluation of conflicting duties, where the various demands generated by our multiple community memberships are compared.

(2.2) DISCUSSING A RELATIONAL WEB OF VALUES IN WESTON'S PRACTICAL PLURALISM

In a seminal article called "Beyond Intrinsic Value, " Anthony Weston develops key argumentation in favor of philosophical pragmatism in environmental ethics, showing the inadequacy of the concept of intrinsic value. Weston debated with Callicott on some occasions about these issues and the nonanthropocentric vision of the latter.[18] The purpose of our discussion of "Beyond Intrinsic Value" in this paper, however, is not to review these debates, but to highlight how the rational discussion over the plurality of values is envisioned in the context of a philosophical position that explicitly takes into account a pragmatist perspective in environmental ethics.

Weston's argument highlights a set of misunderstandings about philosophical pragmatism. A first misunderstanding is related to instrumentalism. Philosophical pragmatism maintains an intrinsic connection between facts and values. However, this connection does not solely consist in a human-centered instrumentalism focusing on the practicality of short-term objectives.[19] Rather, this connection is related to the idea of a practical moral pluralism, as pragmatism recognizes a multiplicity of appropriate ways to practically sustain our moral relationships with various living beings.

Second, we highlight in the discussion of William James' experiential ethics below, some pragmatist authors give a central place in their epistemology to the process of valuing as an activity of human consciousness. However, doing so does not necessary lead to a radical anthropocentrism. [20] If valuing is indeed an activity of human consciousness, the resulting value can still be attributed to nonhumans. This remark is essential because it shows how pragmatism goes beyond the highly dividing distinction between anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism. Pragmatist thought is actually characterized by its capacity to question strong dichotomies and to find a *via media* between sterile oppositions. The most famous dichotomy which Charles Sander Peirce, William James, and John Dewey have been standing against is the Cartesian subject/object separation. Somehow, pragmatism is an astute interpellation of any kind of transcendentalism. Weston's critic of intrinsic value follows that tradition.

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[18] Anthony Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics," in Light and Rolston, *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 307–18. For the debate between these two main figures, see Anthony Weston, "On Callicott's Case against Moral Pluralism," *Environmental Ethics* 13 (1991): 283–86, and the reply by Callicott in *Beyond the Land Ethic*.

[19] Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[20] If Jamesian pragmatism puts a higher focus on subjectivation processes for its elaboration around the concept of "stream of thought," Deweyan pragmatism is more referred to as a form of contextualism. For an interesting conceptualization of a noninstrumentalist position from a Deweyn perspective, see Ben A. Minteer, "Intrinsic Value for Pragmatists?" *Environmental Ethics* 23 (2001): 57–75.

Addressing the question "Does nature have an intrinsic value?" Weston critically analyzes the three traditional requirements that taken together specify the reference of the concept of "intrinsicness" as formulated by George Edward Moore. To speak about intrinsic value you have to refer to a property of a good independently from its relations to other goods (self-sufficiency), which tends to monism (abstraction) and which requires a transcendentalization (special justification to provide a foundation for the independence). The self-sufficiency requirement is linked to a first value argument, which states that a concept of intrinsic value is necessary to understand the relational notion of instrumental value. However, for Weston, such justification is obsolete. Indeed, referring to intrinsic values to evaluate means and ends, the notion of intrinsic values creates some sort of hierarchy between values, which is unnecessary in Weston's view. Adopting the image of a web, "we should prefer a conception of values which ties them to their contexts and insists not on their separability but on their relatedness and interdependence."[21] This idea of an organic network of values is also at the basis of the critique of the abstraction requirement. In sum, according to Weston, intrinsicness is strictly speculative. We concretely rely on a pluralistic system of desires that makes us valuing things always in relation to something else and not for what they are in themselves.

Considering this line of argumentation, it becomes clear that the task of developing a pluralist ethics from the pragmatist point of view advanced by Weston will not be a transcendental one, but will be based on a constant evaluation and reevaluation of the interdependencies between various justifications of values.

> For assessment and choice . . . we need to know how to articulate, to ourselves and to others, the relation of these values to other parts of our system of desires, to other things that are important, and to the solution of concrete problems.[22]

By insisting on those two ideas, i.e., the interrelatedness of a plurality of values and the constant practical criticism from problem solving, as the way to situate the values and to adjudicate their conflicts, Weston has remarkably articulated two pragmatist principles for the rational discussion over the plurality of values.

III. TOWARD AN ACTIVE PROMOTION OF EXPERIMENTATION WITH VALUES

Through the use of concepts such as "moral evolution" and "multiple communities," the axiological discourse of Callicott ends by sharing some key similarities with the approach toward pluralism developed by Weston's philosophical pragmatism.[23] In particular, in both approaches some principles for rational discussion on the plurality of justifications are proposed to conduct the comparison among possibly

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[21] Anthony Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value," p. 312.
[22] Ibid., p. 314.
[23] J. Baird Callicott, "The Pragmatic Power and Promise of Theoretical Environmental Ethics: Forging a New Discourse," *Environmental Values* 11 (2002): pp. 3–25.

conflicting value positions. This approach of evaluation through rational discussion of the plurality of value perspectives fails, however, to resolve a major tension. Indeed, the focus on the argumentation over rational justifications tends to discard human experiences which are not articulated in rational arguments, but which play a crucial practical role in reaching sustainability. In particular, the role of human experience in broadening the set of acceptable values that have strong motivational value for social actors is not accounted for. The environmental ethics of Norton, because of its coherent elaboration of a more pro-active and experimentalist pluralist position in environmental ethics, is an appropriate starting point to analyze this tension.

(3.1) Beyond Discourse Ethics: Promoting Learning through Adaptive Management

Against a strong anthropocentric approach, which states that values are determined on the basis of felt preferences (any unquestioned desire or need stemming from the human experience), Norton presents weak anthropocentrism as the evaluation of the degree of satisfaction of considered preferences:

> A considered preference is any desire or need that a human individual would express after careful deliberation, including a judgment that the desire or need is consistent with a rationally adopted world view—a world view which includes fully supported scientific theories and a metaphysical framework interpreting those theories, as well as a set of rationally supported aesthetic and moral ideals.[24]

While strong anthropocentrism can lead to a strictly consumptive and instrumental perspective toward nature based on felt preferences, without any means to criticize these preferences, weak anthropocentrism takes the evolution of the preferences into account and replaces the instrumental perspective with a critical process of dialogical confrontation with other felt and rationally constructed preferences. As in the propositions of Weston and Callicott, the idea is to organize the debate on the plurality of values through an adjudication of the preferential disputes.

Norton has further sharpened his thought about pluralism in his famous essay *Sustainability*.[25] For Norton, "what is needed to improve environmental policy discourse is a system of bridge concepts that can serve to link the various scientific disciplines and to relate environmental science with social values in the search for rational policies."[26] Such a non-essentialist approach of environmental ethics requires an "adaptive management,"[27] a constant dialogue between science and democracy in order to reduce uncertainty and to maintain the capacity to (inter)act. Because truth

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[24] Norton, *Sustainability: A Philosophy of Adaptive Ecosystem Management,* p. 164.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., p. xii.
[27] Bryan G. Norton, "Ethics and Sustainable Development: An Adaptive Approach to Environmental Choice," in Giles Atkinson, Simon Dietz, and Eric Neumayer, eds., *Handbook of Sustainable Development* (Cheltenham and Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2007), pp. 27–44.

is hypothetical, the only rule must be the one of confrontation with experience, and the deliberation, animated by diverse and sometimes conflicting values, is the place where one must encourage "creative leaps." Based on this clarification, as also underlined by Light, it appears that the real difference between the kind of pluralism proposed by Callicott and the one defended by Norton lies in the way they interact with the pluralist fact: if Callicott tolerates pluralism, Norton is promoting it.[28]

According to Norton, adaptive management is the key to a successful pluralism, leaning on the learning capacity of social actors. If scientific inquiry is essential, it is not its role to identify what is important to sustain or even what it means to sustain: only actors in direct confrontation with the issue can successfully operate such identification and evaluation processes. Values must be discussed in view of the factual contingencies, and environmental science must be understood as non-neutral in terms of value. This is why norms and scientific results have to be constantly tested in the face of expanding experience. A pragmatist discourse ethics requires then for Norton the active confrontation of values in social practices as the best way to potentiate the creative leaps required to gain access to sustainable solutions.

(3.2) AN ETHICS OF OPPORTUNITIES BASED ON SUSTAINABILITY

The accent on intergenerational values at stake within a community constitutes the second, more substantial level of the pragmatist ethics in the work of Norton. While the first level consists in a discourse ethics that specifies the process of convergence among the values present in the life world, Norton elaborates a second level in terms of an *ethics of opportunities*. Various communities define the concept of sustainability itself in different ways, and the trick in building the substantial part of his environmental ethics is to create a definition able to integrate such diversity. Norton elaborates then a schematic definition in which the specification of the components is open to interpretation: "sustainability . . . is a function of the degree to which members of a future community experience no diminution of opportunity freedom in comparison to the opportunities open in earlier generations."[29] This ethical focus apprehends nature as a common repertoire of "resources" not strictly understood in an economic way: a resource in this sense constitutes a complex concept of interactional options between humanity and nature. And an evolution of values that reduces the opportunities that are offered by such a repertoire would constitute a moral deterioration. In order to exemplify such an idea, Norton describes the story of a rich sexist widower who bequeaths his daughters an excellent income for life on condition that they not seek an education. Though the daughters are financially affluent, harm is done to them through narrowing their range of developmental

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[28] Light, "The Case for a Practical Pluralism," p. 235.
[29] Norton, *Sustainability: A Philosophy of Adaptive Ecosystem Management*, p. 516.

opportunities. Norton tries to defend protecting nature in a similar way to how one would defend education in this example.[30]

The ethics of opportunities developed by Norton integrates the pluralist requisite at the core of the concept of sustainability, through the reference to the various opportunities offered to different communities and human experiences. In order to do so, Norton finally adopts an evolutionist stance, where the key to sustainability is the preservation of both the integrity and the resilience of the environment that the community inhabits as a repertoire of resources for further future actions and experimentations.

IV. JAMES' EXPERIENTIAL PLURALISM

The example of Norton's ethics of opportunities in an intergenerational perspective as developed in *Sustainability* clearly indicates the benefit of integrating proactive experimentation with environmental values in addition to public deliberation, with the view to capacitate communities to act along their own environmental concerns with a regard for a global and long-term perspective. However, as we argue in this section, this elaboration still needs to be taken one step further. Indeed, an ethics of opportunities risks giving too much consideration to rationalized and scientifically articulated values and to lose contact with the experiential ground of the values that are mobilized and the felt preferences of civil society and individuals promoting concrete social innovations. This does not mean that we need to go beyond intergenerational sustainability ethics as a general framework for rational deliberation, but it means that we have to articulate it with a complementary approach focusing on commitments of environmental actors resulting from the lived experience with environmental values. This experiential dimension of values often mobilizes non-scientific and not explicitly rational (not only environmental but also psychological, social and cultural) motivations and beliefs.[31] As we argue in this section, the experiential approach to ethics proposed by William James gives access to a particular level of ethical consideration of these more sensitive and fragile values—an *experiential ethics,* while at the same time remaining consistent with the basic strands of the pluralist orientation in environmental ethics considered throughout this paper.

Originally a psychologist, James continuously and incrementally built his philosophical thought on the basis of his reflection on consciousness. Adopting a resolute empiricist point of view that became one of his trademarks, James states in its seminal chapter "The Stream of Thought" that "consciousness, from our natal day, is of a teeming multiplicity of objects and relations, and what we call simple sensations are results of

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[30] Bryan G. Norton, "Ecology and Opportunity: Intergenerational Equity and Sustainable Options," in *Fairness and Futurity: Essays on Environmental Sustainability and Social Justice* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 118–50.

[31] See Tom Dedeurwaerdere, Jeroen F. Admiraal, Almut Beringer, and Jose Luis Vivero Pol, "Combining Internal and External Motivations in Multi-actor Governance Arrangements for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services," *Environmental Science and Policy* 58 (2016): 1–10.

discriminative attention."[32] Against the mainstream psychological methodology that starts from sensations to synthetically reconstructed thoughts, the inversion made by James perfectly indicates the key idea of his vision: there is a constant connection between the world and the mind that creates a stream, which is nothing less than the substratum of everything. This idea of a "stream of consciousness" carries on the radical overcoming settled by Charles Sanders Peirce of the Cartesian dualism of mind and body, and it consists in a complete breaking down of any transcendental intention by constantly situating ideas and concepts inside the immediacy of the experience. What James has been elaborating throughout his career is nothing less than a complex, non-reductionist and non-strictly anthropocentric concept of "environmentally interactive consciousness."[33]

(4.1) Nature as the Experiential Realm: The Weak Anthropocentrism of William James

To experience nature amounts to valuing it in some way. The experience may not necessarily be positive: a nocturnal walk into a black and deep forest could be a scary moment, calling back the human primal fears when nature was far more dangerous for the human species. Whatever the reassuring reasons we can come up with in such a situation, the tingle of fear is the proof that something slips out of our control, and doing a nocturnal walk is based on nothing else than the faith that we will find our way out unharmed. In a pragmatist understanding, the value is always linked to something else. In our example, we are valuing nature in direct relation to our own vulnerability. This relational aspect of the value process is radically empirical and helps to go beyond the dichotomous thinking that states that values are either transcendental or relative. Values are plural, which means that they are experiential as the results of idiosyncratic interactions with unique qualitative aspects of the experience. This is how the phenomenological pragmatism based on a relational ontology presented by James permits us to go beyond the intrinsic versus instrumental values dichotomy. Environmental values do not exist independently of us but are the results of our routine and unquestioned interactions with it.

If our example of the venture into a dark forest is based on a stressful activity, James also described as for him soothing experiences with nature—for example, in a letter to his wife in which he describes a particularly meaningful hike in the Adirondack Mountain.[34] In his paper, "Toward a Jamesian Environmental Philosophy," Piers

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[32] William James, "The Stream of Thought," *The Principles of Psychology*, in John J. McDermott, *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 21.

[33] Piers H. G. Stephens, "The Turn of the Skew: Pragmatism, Environmental Philosophy and the Ghost of William James," p. 30.

[34] William James and Elisabeth Perkins Aldrich, *As William James Said: Extracts from the Published Writings of William James* (New York: Vanguard, 1942), pp. 75–78.

Stephens precisely explains how the emphasis made by James on a "quiet dimension of experience" radically distinguishes him from the more problem-solving oriented account of the experience developed by Dewey.[35] Where Dewey was insisting on the social consistency and the usefulness of the experience for important epistemological claims, James' phenomenological description of the experiential realm was more focused on introspective and non-instrumental aspects of it. For Stephens, the specificity of these almost romantic descriptions is to allow the definition of an ontological sphere that avoids both monistic naturalism and social constructivism.[36] As we have shown, by insisting on the co-influence and co-rooting of the organism with the environment, James completely deflates the human-nature dichotomy. In doing so, he proposes an understanding of nature in which its valuation goes through an experiential process based on the feeling, on the sense of our presence in nature, of our simple attachment to it, and of our determination by it.

At this point it is possible to better understand the Darwinian influence on James: the idea that "consciousness evolves in environmental interaction"[37] explains the evolutionary process of adaptation as the capacity for a species to perceive the dependence of its relation with nature. A crucial distinction in this context, as also highlighted by Stephens, is the distinction between the attitude "to be interested" and "having an interest."

> To be interested is not necessarily to have an interest in an item for further appropriative or transformative purposes, and if we say that interested consciousness is useful to a species in its evolutionary development, the instrumentality of "usefulness" attaches to the evolutionary function of consciousness rather than equally and indiscriminately to the objects perceived.[38]

This idea is essential because it precisely indicates how James develops his own version of a non-instrumental anthropocentrism that Norton was also looking for. When our attention is drawn to or by a nonhuman natural object, its interest to our consciousness is not necessarily defined in terms of usefulness, as a mean to an end. We are first and foremost struck by the experiential element of our confrontation with nature, and it is only in a second step that we are able to articulate a cognitive appropriation of it in an instrumental manner. This idea of simply being interested helps to understand what is lost through the instrumentalization process: the primacy of the experience as something that goes beyond human appropriation and that will always resist any form of anthropocentric reduction. As also stated by Stephens:

> A use-value is defined in argument, its use is valued for something which we have categorized and can specify in advance, whereas the point about interested consciousness is

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[35] Stephens, "Toward a Jamesian Environmental Philosophy," p. 232; referring to Milton Mayeroff, "A Neglected Aspect of Experience in Dewey's Philosophy," *Journal of Philosophy* 60 (1963): 146.

[36] Piers H. G. Stephens, "Nature, Purity, Ontology," *Environmental Values* 9 (2000): 267–94.

[37] Stephens, "Toward a Jamesian Environmental Philosophy," p. 237.

[38] Ibid., p. 240.

precisely that its fluidity contains elements which cannot be predefined or squeezed happily into a means-ends ledger. Being interested in the way described is not the same as having an interest, and whilst it may eventually produce a "useful"application, it is not of itself a use.[39]

The argument against the relativist and instrumentalist stance of pragmatism advanced by Callicott becomes obsolete through such a more in-depth reading of James. There is no need to theoretically struggle anymore about proving the intrinsic value of nature: the issue is only at a language level and not anymore at the ontological and cognitive levels. Nature is valuable in a non-instrumental way by its experiential relation with consciousness. More precisely, environment has to be firstly approached in a non-instrumental way if we want to be able to manage and to harvest it in a second time:

> Such a recognition of nature's worth, framed by Jamesian pragmatist naturalism, with its stress on natural sensory experience, also harmonizes with the intuitions that staunch anti-pragmatist Rolston tries to capture via intrinsic value theory: the view "that nature is an originating source of value first, and only later and secondarily a resource."[40]

Hence, the intuitions of environmentalists against instrumentalism are justified in James' account without using a too demanding intrinsic value theory. The reduction at stake through the instrumental perception of nature is explained as a shift in the rationale of the interested consciousness. Such a shifting operation goes from an open disposition to the natural qualities, as something that has not yet been predefined by human purposes, to their instrumental reduction by the economic spirit. This is how nature can be valued as a source along the lines of the weak-anthropocentric approach such as the one promoted by Norton, but also how we can justify and explain the instrumental process as a necessary reduction of the experiential complexity.

(4.2) TOWARD AN EXPERIENTIAL ETHICS

We have now the conceptual resources to perceive both the richness and the adequacy of a Jamesian ethics in order to tackle environmental issues in a broadened pluralist framework. This framework includes both the pluralist ethos of the publicly discussed values according to general rational principles, such as the preservation of future action opportunities in Norton's framework, and the engagement and motivation that comes from the web of deeper-felt, context-specific experiential values.

In this context, Bernstein uses the concept of "engaged fallibilistic pluralism" to describe

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[39] Stephens, "The Turn of the Skew," p. 38.
[40] Stephens, "Toward a Jamesian Environmental Philosophy,"p. 244.

such a pluralistic ethos [that] places new responsibilities upon each of us. For it means taking our own fallibility seriously—resolving that however much we are committed to our own styles of thinking, we are willing to listen to others without denying or suppressing the otherness of the other.[41]

Following this conceptualization, an "engaged pluralism" such as the one defended by James offers an eloquent defense of a melioristic ethos that calls for a constant effort to internalize social issues[42] and to enlarge the responsibility circle of agents (to global and intergenerational aspects) through participation in public discourse.

An experiential ethics based on such engaged fallibilism is therefore able to inherit the principles stated within the discourse ethics approach to pluralism developed in different ways by Callicott and Weston and within the substantial ethics of opportunities developed by Norton. The first aspect of dialogical confrontation is essential because we cannot escape the plurality of points of view. The second aspect of intergenerational moral concern has to be taken into account because an important reduction of opportunities for future generation would constitute an anti-melioristic development that goes against natural evolution. Finally, and essentially, through the lens of an engaged pluralist questioning of ethical experiences, the experientially driven approach developed by James gives a proper place to the criticism of "invaluable" beliefs, which claim to be founded in certain key values of the relevant communities. With James, the idea that the respect of communal values necessarily constitutes an improvement is replaced by a fallible perspective on these values, based on a reference to the repertoire of experiential values in the first place. Such values are often difficult to quantify or even understand, and constitute heterodox experiences that may have a proven experiential validity, in spite of them being perceived as a risk for what makes the community basis.

As we have said, James was first and foremost a humanist, condemning any form of imperialism and the reduction of freedom that it implies. This anti-imperialist motive that drives his thought is at the basis of his reluctance with the monistic consistency of absolute idealisms because "they don't leave room for genuine freedom, novelty, and chance."[43] Actually it is on the basis of the same humanist perspective that James has built a radical empiricism, avoiding the Humean empiricism and its tough-minded approach where the objective world determines the subjectivity.[44] And it is also on this basis that his experiential ethics helps us to understand why a complementary level of ethical concern to the various discourse ethics approached developed in contemporary environmental ethics is important: a "critical responsiveness" [45] has to

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[41] Richard J. Bernstein, "Pragmatism, Pluralism, and the Healing of Wounds," *Proceedings and Addresses of American Philosophical Association* 63, no. 3 (1989): 15.

[42] Ibid., p. 336.

[43] Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, p. 61.

[44] William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York: Barnes and Noble Library of Essential Reading, 2003), p. 5.

[45] Springer, *Communicating Moral Concern*.

be established toward some fragile values that cannot be perceived by political and scientific communities as opportunities *sensu* Norton because of their radically sensitive and non-instrumental nature.

V. CONCLUSION

We have argued that the experiential foundation for a pluralist environmental ethics which we can extract from the philosophy of James is consistent with the main ideas defended by prominent contemporary pragmatists, while potentially solving some of their axiological tensions. The Jamesian experiential ethics constitutes a coherent moral theory able to take into account a multiplicity of duties and obligations toward nature. It relies on a practical pluralism that insists on the inherent relatedness of values. However, it adds a deeper layer of experiential values which are not yet mobilized in current discursive practices, but which nevertheless are part of the deeper motivations of the actors. The discursive level in ethics, as developed explicitly among others by Norton and Weston, essentially specifies the process of value convergence and does not necessarily focus on the issue of the incapacity for some values to be taken into account in the first place in the public debates. The focus on the values evolving on the fringe of rational, scientific, but also ethical discourses requires the elaboration of complementary ethical concern to their exclusion and their oppression.

The phenomenological pragmatism of William James opens up an avenue for integrating these experiential values into a broadened pluralist environmental ethics. The experiential level focuses on the protection of these particular sensitive experiences that have not gone yet through the social sieve, and hence may still conceal purely non-instrumental insights of nature that may help us to understand things along another point of view. In other words, some heterodox experiential values can carry on new ethical promises, new sustainable opportunities, that may not resist the usual social learning process because of the fragility of their nature. Yet, such values may be raw material from which a totally new ethical direction will be built, a new way of seeing things that could initiate change. An engaged fallibilist pluralism moves us to take into consideration such practical and experiential visions as the sources of potentially radically alternate understandings of our ecology of values.