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Evaluating Callicott's Attack on Stone's Moral Pluralism[1]

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ABSTRACT

J. Baird Callicott is well known in environmental philosophy for his attack on Christopher D. Stone's moral pluralism. Although his attack has drawn attention from critics and has been labelled problematic for various reasons, I argue that it fails entirely. Each of Callicott's three distinct criticisms proves to be not only weak on its own terms, but, perhaps surprisingly, as effective against Callicott's own communitarian position as it is against Stone's pluralist one. I show that Callicott's attack is not only wholly ineffective in targeting Stone, but that even if it were so effective it would on every count be just as effective in targeting its own originator.

KEYWORDS

J. Baird Callicott, Christopher D. Stone, moral pluralism, communitarianism, ethical monism, environmental ethics.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental ethics, perhaps more than any other branch of moral philosophy, has stretched and strained the boundaries of our moral consideration. In so doing, it has caused some environmental philosophers to consider whether or not all of the varieties and objects of moral concern can be captured under one ethical theory. Christopher D. Stone has argued that a monistic theory is unattainable, and has suggested that we accept a pluralist theory instead, one which incorporates a variety of ethical theories at the same time. J. Baird Callicott has recoiled at the thought, and has insisted that we instead take up one form or another of ethical monism. Callicott's criticism of Stone's pluralism has taken three forms:

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he has argued that such a pluralism has no way of weighing or balancing contrary duties, will tempt unscrupulous agents to make agentive decisions according to their selfish whims, and cannot provide us with a coherent moral philosophy that is free of contradictions and that seems true.

The interesting thing about Callicott is that, in attacking Stone's unabashed pluralist position, he contrasts it against a position that, as far as monistic positions go, is quite pluralistic itself. Although Callicott maintains that he is in favour of any monistic theory over any pluralist one, the communitarianism that he actually endorses seems a potentially problematic position to measure Stone's pluralism against. In this paper, I intend to alternate between two tasks. First, I shall examine Callicott's attack on Stone's position, and show that all three of Callicott's criticisms of Stone's position turn out to be weak criticisms in their own right. Second, I shall evaluate Callicott's resistance to his own criticisms, and show that his own communitarian position is just as vulnerable as Stone's to each of them. This leads to an interesting result: not only do Callicott's criticisms of Stone all fail, but even if they succeeded, they would apply equally well to Callicott's own position.

THE HISTORY

Christopher D. Stone, in his 'Moral Pluralism and the Course of Environmental Ethics', presents a paradigm case for moral pluralism in environmental ethics. He argues that no single moral theory can sufficiently handle our moral concerns for conscious human beings, sentient animals, and for non-sentient organisms, species, and ecosystems. This is not only because the various kinds of things that warrant moral consideration are radically unlike one another, but because morality involves several distinguishable activities, including choosing how to act, praising and blaming moral agents, and evaluating institutions (Stone 1988: 145). Stone claims that, in order for moral agents to act rightly, they need to appeal to the moral theory most appropriate for each situation. As situations change, and different objects of moral concern come into play and different moral activities are performed, the relevance of the different available moral theories shifts. Although his position may seem necessarily relativistic, Stone insists that he can avoid moral relativism:

> There may be 'really right' and not just relatively right answers, but the way to find them is by reference not to one single principle, constellation of concepts, etc., but by reference to several distinct frameworks, each appropriate to its own domain of entities and/or moral activities (evaluating character, ranking options for conduct, etc.) (Stone 1988: 146, note 5)

Stone explains that under moral pluralism conflicts between decisions would be neither necessary nor frequent. First, we would often have no need to appeal to

more than one ethical theory at a time, and so conflicts would not even come up. Second, even when more than one theory needs to be appealed to, the various theories will often lead to the same moral conclusion. It is only the third possibility, where different theories must be appealed to and indicate contrary duties, that is potentially worrisome, but Stone downplays this concern by explaining that we have no reason to expect such conflicts to be common and, more importantly, that it is too much to ask of a moral philosophy that it provide single unambiguous answers to every moral dilemma. For Stone, only moral pluralists fully appreciate and acknowledge the complexity of our moral concerns, and because of this environmental philosophers ought to embrace it.

J. Baird Callicott is arguably the environmental philosopher most opposed to moral pluralism, and, in 'The Case Against Moral Pluralism' and then more clearly in 'Moral Monism in Environmental Ethics Defended', he gives us three reasons why we should reject it. First, a pluralist has no way of mediating between the contradictory dictates that his position will clearly at least sometimes yield. When the various moral theories enveloped by the pluralist simultaneously command and forbid a certain course of action, the pluralist is handcuffed because the contradictory commands would each carry equal weight. The pluralist has no means of deciding, for instance, whether or not to save a bison trapped in a frozen river, because animal welfare ethics indicate that we should free it from the ice and ecocentric environmental ethics indicates that we should avoid interfering with non-humans and let natural selection take its course. Since the pluralist who subscribes to both theories subscribes to them equally, and since the theories both seem to apply if either of them does, the pluralist has no way to make a decision. Second, pluralism tempts the unscrupulous person to allow convenience or self-servingness to be the deciding factor in moral dilemmas. Because moral pluralism offers a variety of theories to appeal to and no clear formula for how to choose between them, Callicott worries that it might provide a 'sophisticated scoundrel with a bag of tricks to rationalize his or her convenience or self-interest' (Callicott 1990: 111). In the given example, the pluralist's desire not to get wet might end up being the deciding factor in his decision to apply the ecocentric theory and let the struggling bison drown. Third, and most important, pluralism ignores our need to have a coherent and consistent moral philosophy, one that remains constant and contradiction-free and offers a continuous foundation. According to Callicott, ethical theories are necessarily embedded in moral philosophies:

> When an agent adopts an ethical theory, an ethical 'intellectual framework' as Stone defines his neologism, he or she adopts a moral psychology, a notion of the supreme good, a criterion of moral considerability, among other foundational ideas (Callicott 1994a: 52).

Although he uses the terms 'moral theory' and 'moral philosophy' somewhat ambiguously, Callicott's general point seems clear enough. When we adopt and

constantly reprioritise sets of contradictory ethical theories, we create an unacceptable and untenable moral philosophy. According to Callicott, a moral agent 'wants a coherent outlook – the one that seems true' (Callicott 1994a: 52), and can tolerate neither a state of on-going moral contradiction nor a state of continual rearrangement of moral theories. Pluralism, in short, is psychologically repugnant. Thus, not only does pluralism fail to provide a means for mediating between conflicting theories and tempt weak moral agents to allow selfish motives to sway their moral considerations, but it also requires us to adopt a distasteful and unbelievable moral philosophy. As a result, pluralism should, in Callicott's opinion, be rejected in environmental ethics.

If pluralism is unacceptable, what theoretical options does that leave us in environmental ethics? According to Callicott, any theory that hopes to ethically enfranchise human beings, sentient animals, and non-sentient natural entities such as plants, species, and ecosystems needs to be coherent and must be embedded within a moral philosophy that rings true. Though pluralism is ruled out because it fails to meet these criteria, Callicott believes that there are many possible alternative theories. He cites, for instance, the conative theories advanced by such philosophers as Holmes Rolston III or Robin Attfield as fairly plausible and coherent, and the Self-realisation theories advanced by deep ecologists such as Arne Naess and Warwick Fox as similarly worthy candidates. Callicott's preferred alternative, however, is a form of communitarianism. According to this theory, our membership in various communities generates duties and obligations to other members of those communities. As a member of a family, a society, a nation, a species, various biotic communities, and various mixed communities, we have multiple and overlapping duties to family members, fellow members of our society, nation, and species, various individual plants and animals, and various species and ecosystems. Callicott's moral philosophy is rooted in sentiments, and the completeness that this monistic philosophy provides him allows Callicott to have differing ethical principles for the different community memberships he holds without having to deal in more than one ethical currency. This means that while conflicts may arise between the ethical obligations generated by our many community memberships, the conflicts are not serious because all of our duties are expressed in a common vocabulary and so are commensurable. Even though Callicott does not provide us with an actual calculus for settling conflicts between duties, he gives us a moral philosophy where the settling is at least plausible since the conflicts are all described in similar moral terms.

For clarification, Callicott points out that although he is not an *intra*personal pluralist, he is nevertheless an *inter*personal pluralist. In other words, while he believes that each of us should subscribe to some version of monism in ethics, he also believes that every one of us should decide for ourselves what we think is the most acceptable moral philosophy. Though Callicott believes

communitarianism is the best available alternative, he encourages us to think for ourselves, and to choose the philosophy we each find most convincing. He explains:

> Indeed, for persons of good will who still find intrapersonal pluralism tenable ... I uphold their right to choose to suffer from the intellectual equivalent of a multiple personality disorder if that is what they think is best for them. (Callicott 1994a: 54)

Callicott is committed to a philosophical atmosphere of healthy disagreement, where various positions are contrasted and defended and where philosophers remain open-minded and willing to change their mind should they encounter a persuasive enough counter-position. He believes that 'intelligent people of good will should eventually reach agreement if they take the time to thrash out their initial differences' (Callicott 1994a: 54), and so he only wants the plurality of positions to shrink in environmental ethics if it is the result of reasoned persuasion. When Callicott attacks pluralism, he is attacking only the intrapersonal version, where an agent appeals to various ethical theories and subscribes to multiple and conflicting moral philosophies, and he is attacking it only in the interest of getting at the 'true' moral philosophy. He offers his communitarian alternative simply because he thinks it is true, and he attacks Stone's intrapersonal pluralism simply because he thinks it is false. Interpersonal pluralism, therefore, is not at issue, and the two sorts of pluralism should not be confused.

EVALUATING CALLICOTT'S ATTACK

How crippling are Callicott's three criticisms of Stone's moral pluralism? Let us examine them one at a time, and see first how damaging they really are. No criticism seems so weak as the second. Callicott's claim that interpersonal pluralism should be shunned because it will allow unscrupulous people to let convenience or self-interest prevail in their moral decision-making seems simply unwarranted. In order to make the second criticism work, Callicott would have to convince us that there is some kind of link between corrupt character and pluralism. Regardless of whether or not pluralism is flawed for other reasons, I do not think it is fair to say that it noticeably attracts or encourages the development of shady character. If one is concerned about ethics but, like Stone, simply cannot subscribe to just one moral philosophy, then I see no reason why the original concern with being ethical will falter, and I cannot believe that unethical people will flock to the position with the intention of pretending to be ethical. As I see it, Callicott's only hope of convincing us that his second criticism is warranted would be to argue that good people would unknowingly be led astray by selfishness more often as pluralists than as monists of some sort.

This claim, however, is questionable. Pluralists like Stone seem painfully aware of their moral deliberations; their difficulties only heighten their attention to their reasons for pursuing one moral course over another. Stone himself seems an extremely honourable, non-shady person, one who sincerely wills to do the right thing but who does not believe the right thing is always formulable from within one ethical framework. Callicott's accusation seems to rely on an equivocation of 'pluralism' with 'amoralism', one which I can see no reason to adopt. Thus, I believe that Callicott's second criticism of Stone's moral pluralism is wholly unwarranted.

In addition to its being unwarranted, Callicott's second criticism also seems to apply equally well to his own communitarian position as to Stone's pluralist one. Looking at the two positions, I can see no reason why one should incite or attract any more shadiness than the other. Pluralists like Stone have no more and no less opportunity to customise their moral deliberations than communitarians like Callicott, since both theories allow more than enough room for corruption and tainted reasoning. If an agent is going to act selfishly, I do not see how it could make any difference whether he corruptly chooses one theory over another in a pluralist repertoire or whether he corruptly prioritises membership in one community over membership in another. Moreover, neither theory can claim to have a special purity of good will in its moral agents. As Callicott himself admits, 'all ethical theory requires that agents act with good will' (Callicott 1994a: 52),[2] and since the issue of corruption seems to hinge entirely on the agent's good will and not on his pluralist commitments, it hardly seems fair for Callicott to accuse Stone's position as harbouring shadiness. Communitarians would seem just as vulnerable to temptations as pluralists, and I can see no reason to think that either one will be more tempted to let a bison freeze to death out of a selfish desire not to get wet. Any correlation between the issue of moral integrity or honesty and the issue of monism/pluralism seems doubtful, and so an attack on Stone by Callicott on this issue seems not only unwarranted but entirely unfair. As a result, Callicott's second criticism of interpersonal pluralism falls quite flat and should be discarded.

Callicott's first criticism, too, seems ineffective and selective. It is ineffective for two reasons. First, claiming that a pluralist has no way of mediating between the inevitable contradictory dictates of his theory ignores the fact that Stone clearly does believe that we do have a means for deciding between conflicting moral imperatives, namely by appealing to our intuitions. Second, the argument has controversial underpinnings, since it is questionable whether it is reasonable to expect a theory to provide either non-conflicting indications or even a method for resolving conflicts between indications.

In the first place, saying that Stone gives us no means for solving moral conflicts seems simply untrue. Callicott portrays Stone as 'facilely' appealing to various moral theories and as possibly even endorsing contradictory doctrines

'with the same ease and frequency as he or she changes clothes' (Callicott 1994a: 52), but I think this is a mischaracterisation. Although he does not give us a typical monist method for ordering or comparing our moral obligations, I believe that Stone clearly believes we have an identifiable, if perhaps mysterious, way of mediating between contradictory dictates. I believe that Stone, though he does not embrace or even use the actual term, is clearly a type of moral intuitionist. It is by appealing to our moral intuitions that we decide on courses of action where different moral theories indicate conflicting dictates. For Stone, moral deliberation is a personal, often emotional and at times extraordinarily difficult process. In his opinion, no single method for resolving conflicts is available to us, no matter how attractive such a method would be. That does not mean, however, that ethical thinking is not well-grounded. According to Stone, intuitive reflection, 'a process of analysis that leads to a right-feeling judgement, but one for which, even after the conclusion, we cannot offer any proof, perhaps not even specify the premises' (Stone 1988: 152, note 17), grounds the entire process. Stone's intuitionism is not meant to be a kind of scepticism or relativism but instead a kind of brute foundationalism, below which no rational enquiry can make further progress.

> Even when we are not seeking or cannot find 'the right answer,' moral discussion may clarify thought and intuition for another day, contributing to a community of perception and feeling, and developing what an earlier generation would have unembarrassedly called 'the moral faculties.' I do not see how we can get away from it. (Stone 1987: 244)

Though foundational, our moral intuition is not inflexible or innate; rather, it is malleable and even challengeable. Stone believes that our moral views, or what he calls our 'planar commitments' (Stone 1987: 257), can change, not only by rational consideration but by having certain experiences and even by reading fiction. Also, our intuition is not fundamentally mysterious. Although intuitions are often treated as the brute product of mysterious faculties, Stone believes they promote rather than end moral discussion:

> We do not have to dismiss as 'intuitive' the way we handle issues like these, where intuition is regarded as a conversation stopper, the introduction of a barrier that further analysis cannot penetrate. It is just that these 'big' questions lie outside the province of academic and legal philosophy, which are more at home working *within* or talking *about* planes. (Stone 1987: 256)

I believe it is precisely this threat of ending conversation that stops Stone from actively presenting his position as an intuitionist one. Still, even though he avoids the subject, I believe Stone is clearly an intuitions-based environmental ethicist. Now, whether or not Stone's intuitionism is itself acceptable or unacceptable is another issue, and I will not explore the topic here. My point is

simply that Callicott's first criticism of Stone's position seems misguided since the accusation that Stone has no way to settle moral conflicts is, at least on my interpretation, plainly false.

In addition to being misguided, Callicott's attack on Stone seems especially controversial in its assumption that a moral philosophy should provide us with non-conflicting indications, or, failing that, a method for resolving conflicts between indications. After all, you cannot attack a pluralist for having no way to mediate between contradictory dictates unless you first assume that this requirement is a reasonable one to make on an ethical position. This assumption, even amongst monists, is by no means widely accepted. Callicott himself seems to acknowledge how controversial this assumption is by saying that 'contradictory practical indications sometimes arise within univocal ethical theories – Kant's notoriously' (Callicott 1994a: 52), but it is important to stress this point and to note that other prominent monists would also reject the requirement that an ethical theory be able to avoid or else formally resolve conflicts. An excellent example would be W. D. Ross,[3] who believed in a univocal theory based on moral intuition but insisted that conflicts between *prima facie* duties are unavoidable and not easily resolved. Callicott's desire that a moral theory provide us with a way to mediate between conflicting dictates is certainly understandable, but it is by no means generally agreed, even amongst monists, that such a theory is possible. Callicott's attack on Stone's pluralism is grounded in a contentious assumption about what a moral theory can be expected to provide us, and so his first criticism is not only misguided but based on a controversial premise.

On top of these first two difficulties, Callicott's first argument against Stone is again selective, since the argument once more can be made against Callicott's communitarianism as easily as against Stone's pluralism. Although Stone clearly encounters difficulty at times when different ethical theories that he subscribes to indicate conflicting courses of action, Callicott seems to encounter the same difficulty to the very same degree when his different communal memberships lead to similar conflicts. The meat of Callicott's criticism is that moral pluralists cannot make decisions when they have conflicting simultaneous duties, but it would seem that communitarians experience similar conflicts and are similarly handicapped. As Gary Varner explains, Callicott 'has yet to supply even an outline of how these conflicts could be resolved without appealing to some consideration other than communal relatedness' (Varner 1991: 177). Without some sort of bridging principle for dealing with conflicts between different communal obligations, Callicott seems just as handcuffed as the pluralist he attacks. When a moral agent sees a bison trapped in a frozen river, it makes no difference whether he is a pluralist or a communitarian. In each case, if the agent is to make a decision at all, he is left to struggle through his conflicting obligations largely on his own, with little or no help from his moral theory. It

would seem, then, that the 'hard choice between contradictory indications' (Callicott 1990: 109) is no less hard for Callicott than for Stone.

On this last point Callicott has attempted to reaffirm the difference between the two positions by claiming that his own lack of a master principle for resolving moral conflicts is irrelevant. The real issue, he asserts, is not that Stone lacks a master principle for resolving conflicts between various moral impetuses but instead that the impetuses themselves are not commensurable. Callicott admits that he himself does not offer any formalised process for the weighing and balancing of our various communal duties, but he dismisses this pluralism at the level of principle as being unimportant. The important issue with regards to the monism/pluralism debate, he insists, is not pluralism at the level of *principle* but pluralism at the level of *moral philosophy*. Even though his communitarianism fails to provide any kind of master principle for resolving conflicts, it does provide principles all guided by a single 'common denominator' (Callicott 1994a: 55), the community concept, and all cashed out in a single type of currency, moral sentiments. In the end, Callicott believes, this is what really matters, and this is precisely what the pluralist cannot offer.

Interpreting Callicott's reaction is somewhat difficult. On the one hand, he seems to be saying that the reason why the commensurability of his ethical principles makes them more appealing than a pluralist's principles is because the commensurability seems to reflect an accurate moral picture. In other words, one thing that Callicott might be relying on in the defence of his first original criticism is the claim that, because his moral principles all deal in the same moral currency, balancing them against each other does not seem artificial or false, making his communitarian theory more coherent and seemingly true than a pluralist theory. However, the extent to which this is the case is the extent to which Callicott really cannot defend his first original criticism as a distinct criticism. If the only reason why pluralism cannot resolve conflicts between contradictory dictates is because moral pluralism does not seem coherent or true, then the first criticism dissolves into the third, and we really only have one criticism of moral pluralism rather than two. If Callicott is taking this line, then his first criticism should really be disregarded.

There is a second way to interpret Callicott's rebuttal. In claiming that the real issue is the commensurability of principles rather than the existence of a single master principle, Callicott might be implying that the resolution of our moral conflicts will be simpler or at least more obtainable if all of the principles involved are commensurable. In other words, the reason why the Achilles heel is really the pluralist's alone is because the commensurability of Callicott's principles puts him in a relatively superior position to resolve moral conflicts. Callicott certainly believes that one moral currency makes conflict resolution easier. He explains in an earlier work that since animal liberation and environmental ethics 'may be embraced by a common theoretical structure, we are

provided a means, in principle, to assign priorities and relative weights and thus to resolve such conflicts in a systematic way' (Callicott 1989a: 59). On this interpretation of his rebuttal, Callicott, even though he cannot offer a master principle, offers what he considers a close runner-up, and as a result it is really only the pluralist who suffers a serious inability to choose between conflicting moral duties.

Even this interpretation of Callicott's rebuttal seems problematic. This is because his claim that the commensurability of his communitarian principles makes conflicts easier to resolve in principle is contentious. Even if we grant that the structure of our obligations to the different communities of which we are part is similar, it is not at all clear that this would simplify or promote in any way the weighing or balancing of conflicting duties. If my second interpretation is correct, Callicott believes that, because his communitarian theory uses only the currency of sentiments, we should expect there to be *some* way to balance and compare sums of that currency. I simply do not see why this would follow. How is the resolution of the conflict between leaving the bison freeze and rescuing it made any easier if our ties to sentient animals and to ecosystems are both based on sentiments? Callicott is particularly perplexing on this point, and his own words seem to sap rather than build our confidence in there being a method for the communitarian to ever discover:

> ... the outer orbits of our various moral spheres exert a gravitational tug on the inner ones. One may well deprive one's children of a trip to Disneyland or give them fewer toys at Christmas in order to aid starving people on another continent. Similarly, one may well make certain sacrifices oneself or impose certain restrictions on the animal members of one's mixed community for the sake of ecological integrity. (Callicott 1989a: 59)

True, one may do these things and feel the tug of one sphere on another, but when this is the case, how is it that the actions or the tug are any more clear, ordered, or justified than the actions or the intuitive tugs of a moral pluralist like Stone? Callicott's communitarian principles simply do not seem more commensurable than Stone's pluralist ones, and so his first criticism seems highly selective. If it is a good criticism, then it is a good criticism of Callicott's as well as Stone's position.

Jim Cheney seems to share my intuitions about Callicott's communitarian theory. He points out that unless we can structure our various communities into a single super-community, a sentiments-based moral philosophy is no better off than a pluralist one in terms of resolving moral conflicts. He explains:

> Callicott's account itself implies that no theoretical means of resolution is forthcoming without the addition of a strong (and apparently unwelcome) assumption: *if* our obligations are determined by the nature and organisation of the communities of which we are a part, then we can resolve conflicts due to our

> membership in more than one community *only if* these communities are themselves components of a higher-order community from which either priorities among the conflicting obligations or overriding obligations can be derived. Although it is not clear exactly how we should unpack Callicott's metaphor of '*nested* communities,' it does not seem that he would be willing to unpack it as referring to some sort of super-community from which the prioritization of obligations is ultimately derived. (Cheney 1991: 315)

I believe Cheney is exactly right. Without some kind of super-community, the resolution of conflicts in our moral deliberation is impossible. Such a super-community would, of course, seem extremely counter-intuitive given that our various communal obligations seem so genuinely and notably distinct and difficult to order, and I think that Callicott is wise to avoid adopting the concept.[4] Still, it seems that without such a super-community true commensurability of our sentiments is impossible. At the end of the day, I do not believe that there is any viable way, even in principle, for the communitarian to balance conflicting ethical duties any better than the pluralist.

TACKLING THE THIRD CRITICISM

Since Callicott's first and second criticisms of moral pluralism ultimately fail, his entire attack rests on the shoulders of his third criticism, that only a monist philosophy can satisfy our need for a coherent, consistent, and seemingly true moral philosophy. This is a provocative argument, one which is not so easy to tackle. Nonetheless, I believe that it too is both flawed and equally damaging to his own position. Let us examine its flaw first.

Callicott arguably mischaracterises what it is we are seeking in a moral philosophy, especially as environmental ethicists. Callicott insists that we require and are looking for a coherent ethical theory that will be embedded in a moral philosophy that *seems true*. Although this seems accurate at first glance, I do not think it is. Instead, I believe what we primarily seek as environmental philosophers is to know first of all whether there *is* a coherent ethical theory that can provide a corresponding moral philosophy that seems true. Callicott explains that the mature moral agent 'wants a coherent outlook' (Callicott 1994a: 52), but I believe what the mature moral agent really wants is to know whether or not it is *possible to obtain* a coherent outlook, especially given the broad range of moral concerns that we seem to have. The difference, though small, is utterly paramount, and we can only agree with Callicott's claim if we first agree with this more basic and fundamental claim. Although Callicott clearly assumes that the more basic issue is either settled or else not important, Anthony Weston, for one, disagrees. In Weston's opinion, it is highly contentious that a univocal theory exists, and, moreover, it is extremely hasty this early in the emerging field

of environmental ethics to assume that we generally share the belief that one exists. He explains:

> Callicott ... insists that we attempt to formulate, right now, a complete, unified, even 'closed' (his term) theory of environmental ethics. Callicott even argues that contemporary environmental ethics should not tolerate more than one basic type of value, insisting on a 'univocal' environmental ethic. In fact, however, ... originary stages are the worst possible times at which to demand that we all speak with one voice. Once a set of values is culturally consolidated, it may well be possible, perhaps even necessary, to reduce them to some kind of consistency. But environmental values are unlikely to be in such a position for a very long time. The necessary period of ferment, cultural experimentation, and thus *multi*-vocality is only *beginning*. Although Callicott is right, we might say, about the demands of systematic ethical theory at later cultural stages, he is wrong – indeed wildly wrong – about what stage environmental values have actually reached. (Weston 1996: 151)

Thus, Callicott's third criticism arguably misrepresents what it is we are seeking in an environmental philosophy, assuming that we want to know *which* monist theory is true rather than whether *any* monist theory is true.

Callicott, in his own defence, denies that we are really so unsettled in our more basic convictions. He charges that Weston misrepresents him, and responds by stressing his clarification that although he is an intrapersonal monist he is an open-minded interpersonal pluralist. In the main, Callicott's reaction focuses solely on the charge that he is trying prematurely to shut the door on further discussion, but I believe that Weston's important claim is not that Callicott is unjustifiably trying to end discussion but that he is unjustifiably assuming that we as environmental ethicists share a common set of base-level assumptions about ethical theory that many of us in fact do not. Callicott is not shutting the door on further discussion as much as trying to frame the discussion in contentious base level assumptions, thereby curbing the range of potential alternative theories without actually openly dismissing any. This is made clear, I believe, by what Weston says immediately prior to the previous passage:

> the process of evolving values and practices at originary stages is seldom a smooth process of progressively filling in and instantiating earlier outlines. At the originary stage we should instead expect a variety of fairly incompatible outlines coupled with a wide range of proto-practices, even social experiments of various sorts, all contributing to a kind of cultural working-through of a new set of possibilities. (Weston 1996: 151).

I believe Weston's point is not that Callicott is an interpersonal monist – surely he recognises that Callicott is not. Instead, Weston seems to be focusing on Callicott's unjustified assumption that later work in environmental philosophy

will inevitably 'fill in and instantiat[e] earlier outlines'. The outline in this case seems made up of the assumption that *some* monist theory must be correct, and the filling in seems made up of the search for and identification of the right monist theory. Weston believes too much has been assumed here, and I believe his concern is valid. What we really want to know, especially at this originary stage, is whether monism is appropriate in the first place. For Weston, this pivotal assumption of Callicott's is highly contentious, and I cannot help but agree that Callicott's endorsement of it places his position on highly contestable ground.

Not only is Callicott's monist assumptional framework contentious, but it is also potentially counter-productive. In his *Earth's Insights: A Multicultural Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback*, Callicott thoroughly surveys various environmental traditions from around the world. Although very informative, the work nevertheless contrasts each tradition against Callicott's own communitarian theory and its monist framework. The way Callicott puts it, he provides us with 'a Rossetta stone of environmental philosophy to translate one indigenous environmental ethic into another ... to avoid balkanizing environmental philosophy' (Callicott 1994b: 186). Though technically still conforming to interpersonal pluralism, since Callicott never claims in any sense that his communitarian theory is certainly right, he nevertheless evaluates all other theories against a contestable monist framework without ever recognising the contestability of that framework. The reason why Callicott takes this approach is quite simple. In his opinion, 'we want a genuine multicultural network of environmental ethics, rather than an eclectic and conflictive patchwork' (Callicott 1994b: 187). Again, I admit that it would be *nice* to have such a network, but it strikes me that the more important and genuinely unsettled question is whether or not such a network is possible to obtain, and Callicott's challengeable assumption that *it is* seems potentially damaging. As Andrew Light points out,

> using the version of nonanthropocentric holism which Callicott distils from Leopold's work as a yardstick for all environmental philosophy ... draws more lines toward balkanization than does a metatheoretical tolerance of a multiplicity of approaches. (Light 1996: 289)

It leads Callicott, for instance, to conclude something as divisive as that 'Africa looms as a big blank spot on the world map of indigenous environmental ethics' (Callicott 1994b: 158). Such statements, ground in a contentious monist assumptional framework, do not seem likely to promote, as Callicott believes, eventual agreement through 'reasoned persuasion' (Callicott 1994a: 54), but instead just the opposite. Thus, we can charge Callicott with not only basing his position on a contestable assumptional framework but with doing so in a particularly unproductive way.

SEEING CALLICOTT AS A MODERATE PLURALIST

Not only does Callicott's third original criticism seem flawed, but it again seems unfair, given the position that he himself endorses. This is because Callicott and Stone actually embed similar amounts of pluralism into their respective theories, making it seem simply unjustified to attack one theory and not the other on the grounds that the theory's pluralist nature leaves our thirst for a coherent and seemingly true theory unsatisfied. The best way, I believe, to show just how similarly pluralistic Callicott and Stone really are is to draw on Peter S. Wenz's terminology in his 'Minimal, Moderate, and Extreme Moral Pluralism' and show first that Callicott is actually himself a moderate pluralist and second that the differences between Stone's extreme and Callicott's moderate positions are actually quite minimal. The first step, showing that Callicott is a moderate pluralist, has already been taken by Wenz, and I will follow his lead in my analysis. The second step, showing that the moderate and extreme positions are really quite similar, is terra nova and certainly runs completely counter to Wenz's interpretation. In fact, the bulk of the work in this second step will be in showing just how weak Wenz's assertion to the contrary really is. Let us turn to the first step: interpreting Callicott as a moderate pluralist.

Peter Wenz outlines a position he calls moderate pluralism, one which he believes is not as extreme as Stone's position but which nevertheless is still pluralistic. His moderate position is pluralist 'only in the sense that it contains a variety of *independent* principles, principles that cannot all be reduced to or derived from a single master principle' (Wenz 1993: 69). Using Callicott's terminology, Wenz defends a single moral philosophy and a single ethical theory that includes a plurality of principles. According to Wenz, his position differs from Stone's in two significant respects. First, whereas Stone endorses a plurality of ethical theories, Wenz endorses 'only a plurality of principles (in a *single* theory)' (Wenz 1993: 69). In other words, while Stone freely alternates between 'radically different metaphysical perspectives' (Wenz 1993: 66), Wenz stays locked onto a single metaphysical perspective, one that happens to incorporate a set of non-combinable and radically dissimilar principles. Second, whereas Stone compartmentalises the moral life, believing ethics to be analogous to the hard and soft sciences where compartmentalisation is commonplace, Wenz does not. For Wenz, the sciences are radically unlike morality. In the sciences, questions can be dealt with in relative isolation from one another. In morality, however, 'judgements about conduct are ideally made only after all relevant matter have been considered' (Wenz 1993: 68). The ethicist, says Wenz, 'is expected to take ethical considerations into account wherever, and in whatever combinations, they appear' (Wenz 1993: 68). Because of this, he believes his theory is coherent despite its plurality of principles. The moderate

pluralist position is therefore distinct from the extreme position in two ways: it takes the form of a single theory rather than of a plurality of theories, and it views morality as essentially non-compartmentaliseable.

After describing his moderate position Wenz then goes on to argue that Callicott himself is actually a moderate pluralist. Wenz explains that, much like himself, Callicott upholds a single ethical theory that 'contains a variety of *independent* principles' that do not reduce to or derive from 'a single master principle' (Wenz 1993: 72). Although Callicott's theory is communitarian whereas Wenz's is unabashedly pluralist, and although Callicott's principles all take the form of obligations to co-members of some community whereas Wenz's principles have much less in common, these differences are in Wenz's opinion unimportant. What matters is that Callicott, just like Wenz, adopts a variety of non-orderable, categorically distinct principles in his ethical theory. As Wenz explains, Callicott

> has many moral principles, and they are not all derived from a single, master principle. Some moral principles concern which relationships are more important than which other, i.e., parenthood more than friendship, friendship more than citizenship, etc. Other principles concern the relative values attached to different kinds of outcomes, e.g., death is generally worse than dissatisfaction, at least where human beings are concerned. Still other principles are used to identify when the normal priorities do not apply, i.e., when citizen obligations override familial duties and the value of life so as to justify going to war. Callicott neither presents, nor claims to possess, any master rule or principle from which one can deduce uniquely correct moral conduct in situations of moral conflict. (Wenz 1993: 72)

Callicott clearly believes that 'How obligations ... may be weighed and compared is admittedly uncertain' (Callicott 1986: 412), and, as a result, Callicott is clearly a moderate pluralist as Wenz defines it. Because Callicott incorporates many distinct and dissimilar moral principles in his moral theory, leaving us not only with no master principle but little hope of ever achieving one, I believe that Wenz's characterisation of Callicott as a moderate pluralist is accurate and appropriate.

It is important to note that Wenz's argumentation is notably different from Gary Varner's, who, in his 'No Holism Without Pluralism', also claims that Callicott is a pluralist. Varner argues that since Callicott considers biotic communities to have direct moral standing, and since if biotic communities *are* to be plausibly given moral standing, 'it must be for a very different reason than is usually given for saying that individual human beings are directly morally considerable' (Varner 1991: 179), Callicott must be a pluralist. In other words, Varner reasons that since the only viable way to defend the standing of living

communities is by being a pluralist, Callicott must be a pluralist because he defends that standing. Wenz sees this as the unjustified reasoning that it is, and quickly dismisses it:

> Varner ... does not tell us what basis *Callicott* gives for maintaining that people are directly morally considerable. Varner merely refers to reasons that are *usually* given for maintaining that people are directly morally considerable. Whatever these usual reasons are, they may or may not be Callicott's. (Wenz 1993: 73)

Clearly, although Wenz and Varner both charge Callicott with being a pluralist, they give radically different reasons, and Wenz's substantive claim should not be grouped with Varner's weaker one.

Though I agree with Wenz that Callicott is a moderate pluralist, I disagree with him that there is a strong difference between moderate pluralism and Stone's extreme pluralism. This, admittedly, is quite a bold claim. After all, Stone clearly sets a tone that is highly anti-monist. Nonetheless, I believe that Stone's extremity is exaggerated, both by himself and by his critics. In order to see just how similar Stone, Wenz, and Callicott really are, it is helpful to return to Wenz's two original distinctions between his own and Stone's positions. Recall that, according to Wenz, Stone holds a multitude of metaphysical perspectives and compartmentalises the moral life whereas Wenz holds only one metaphysical perspective and does not compartmentalise the moral life. Although on the surface these differences might seem significant, on close examination this proves not to be the case. Let us examine these two differences more closely.

With respect to the metaphysical issue, I believe that the extreme and moderate positions, as Wenz characterises them, are much more similar than Wenz acknowledges. In particular, I believe that there is no essential metaphysical difference between Stone's, Wenz's, or even Callicott's position. According to Wenz, because the moderate pluralist endorses one ethical theory, even if it includes a variety of ethical principles, this puts him on more solid metaphysical ground than a philosopher like Stone since Stone endorses many ethical theories all at once. When this claim is examined carefully, however, there seem to be two difficulties. First of all, it is not at all clear that Stone, interpreted as an intuitionist, *is* on less solid metaphysical ground. If all of morality ultimately stems from our moral intuitions, even if it flowers into a plurality of distinct frameworks and theories, then metaphysically this seems on a level with the grounding that Wenz would likely give and that Callicott clearly gives. Just because Stone chooses to focus on the pluralist flowerings rather than the intuitionist foundation does not mean that he does not stand on reasonably solid, or at least well-charted, metaphysical ground. Second, it seems that Wenz's own claim involves some conceptual sleight of hand. In order to simultaneously endorse one ethical theory but many ethical principles, there would have to be a concrete difference between an ethical theory and the principles that make up

that theory. If there is no significant difference, then claiming to have a single ethical theory despite one's endorsement of a plurality of principles would amount to a simple linguistic trick. Although Wenz and Callicott both clearly believe that there is a concrete difference between theories and their constitutive principles, I for one have reservations. What, after all, *is* an ethical theory if not a body, collection, or set of composing principles? Moreover, what would conceptually distinguish 'single' theories like Wenz's or Callicott's from pluralist theories that incorporate the exact same set of ethical principles? I believe that Wenz's distinction between moderate and extreme moral pluralism is conceptually weak, and because of this I once more fail to see Stone's position as metaphysically inferior to either Wenz's or Callicott's. In the end, the metaphysical differences between the three positions seem fairly minimal, occurring as differences in flavour rather than in status. Really, the three philosophers seem to differ more in the way they recognise and embrace their metaphysical status than in what metaphysical status they actually have. As a result, the extreme and moderate positions do not seem to differ metaphysically.

On the issue of compartmentalising the moral life, I again do not see any significant difference between the extreme and moderate pluralist positions. Although Stone and Wenz seem to take very different stands on the issue of compartmentalisation in moral theory, I believe that the difference is both exaggerated and overrated by Wenz. According to Wenz, 'the moderate pluralist confronts all situations with the same ethical theory' and can 'entertain in any situation the full range of relevant principles' (Wenz 1993: 69). In other words, a moderate pluralist's principles are always potentially applicable, and no ethical situation is ever dealt with without considering any and all relevant principles. For example, if the principle of keeping promises is adopted by the moderate pluralist, then that principle is considered 'whenever and wherever he or she has the opportunity to keep or break a promise' (Wenz 1993: 69). According to Wenz, this non-compartmentalisation of morality is very different from what Stone endorses, and this difference sets the two types of theory clearly apart. For Wenz, 'subject matter, forum, and role do not affect [a] general principle' (Wenz 1993: 69), whereas for Stone, subject matter, forum, and role do potentially affect its application. Wenz 'meets all situations with the same set of moral principles', and because of this his 'ethical life is coherent' (Wenz 1993: 69). Stone, on the other hand, meets different kinds of situations with different subsets of principles, and this, presumably, makes Stone's ethical life incoherent. Wenz believes that the difference between his and Stone's attitude toward moral compartmentalisation is fundamental, separating their moral positions entirely.

How accurate is Wenz's portrayal? Certainly, his contrast between himself and Stone seems fair on the surface. Stone continually makes noticeably compartmental claims, and openly states that 'there may be different domains across which different rules apply' (Stone 1987: 142). He clearly believes that

different domains provide us with different kinds and levels of cardinal information about the relevant moral entities in given situations, and he asserts that moral frameworks can differ enormously, so much so that when we go from one moral domain to another we radically shift 'moral fabrics' (Stone 1987: 147). Stone makes countless comparisons with the compartmentalisation of the sciences, and states very clearly his belief that just as the rules of one science do not apply in the field of another science, so too the rules of one moral framework do not apply in the situations of another moral framework. As Wenz points out, Stone believes that we apply categorically different moral rules to animals and corporate bodies, to our friend's dilemmas and a stranger's dilemmas, and to the personal and professional responsibilities of senators. When it comes to compartmentalising morality, Stone certainly seems to maintain a position that is quite different from either Wenz's or Callicott's.

I am not sure, however, how distinct Stone's position really is on this issue. Despite Stone's own professions of extreme compartmentalisation, I am not sure if this is not unlike an optimist and a pessimist looking at the same glass of water. The key difference, if there is one, has to be on how Stone and Wenz cash out phrases such as 'whenever a principle applies'. Wenz seems to suggest that we constantly consider, on a situation by situation basis, whether or not each one of our given principles applies in each situation. Although this sounds potentially complex, I do not think that it needs to be, nor do I believe Wenz thinks that it needs to be. So long as we believe that certain features of moral situations will quite naturally call our attention to relevant or applicable principles, this kind of case by case moderate pluralism seems feasible. Now Stone clearly presents his understanding of phrases like 'whenever a principle applies' differently from Wenz. For Stone, whether or not a given principle applies to a situation is not determined by features of the situation but rather by features of the moral framework or domain of application that the person is currently working within. In Stone's own words, the way to find moral answers 'is by reference not to one single principle, constellation of concepts, etc., but by reference to several distinct frameworks, each appropriate to its own domain of entities and/or moral activities (evaluating character, ranking options for conduct, etc.)' (1988: 146, note 5). Thus, while Wenz endorses a situation-by-situation approach to moral decisions, Stone employs a domain-by-domain approach.

Although this difference between Stone's view and Wenz's view might seem significant, I do not believe that it is, and for two separate reasons. First of all, I do not believe that the structural aspects of Stone's and Wenz's points of view are at all different. Even when Stone does not consider a principle at all because it is not relevant to the current framework or domain, I believe that his decision is structurally indiscernible from Wenz's decision to discount a principle because it is not relevant to the current situation. In each case, a principle is simply being assigned null importance. More precisely, in both cases a similar (perhaps the same) set of moral principles is at work, and in both cases the

relevance of certain subsets of those principles are being nullified. Admittedly, the null values are being assigned in slightly different ways and perhaps even at slightly different times, but the structure is the same in each case. Once we see how similar they are structurally, it is difficult to maintain that the two positions are really all that different. When it comes down to it, Stone and Wenz seem to be making the same kinds of decisions in the same kind of way and with respect to potentially the same sets of ethical principles. They differ only in how they generalise about their assignment of null values to irrelevant principles. As a result, Stone's many ethical theories do the exact same work that Wenz's one ethical theory does, making the two theories structurally very similar, if not indiscernible. Once we see this similar structure, maintaining that Stone and Wenz have very different positions becomes immediately more difficult.

Second, not only are Stone's and Wenz's deliberations structurally similar, but they are similar in their justification as well. What I mean by this is that Stone and Wenz each apply and disqualify their various moral principles from given situations for precisely the same reason: because the principles in question seem or do not seem relevant to the given situation. That Stone believes and Wenz does not believe that situations can be grouped according to moral setting seems a side issue once this similarity in reasoning is made clear. The only justificatory difference between Stone and Wenz is the order of their justification: Wenz considers an individual principal every single time that it applies, and Stone first examines the moral domain to decide which principles apply and then considers those that do. This difference of outlooks is certainly not pivotal. Stone believes that we can accurately generalise about which principles will apply according to features of general situations and Wenz does not, but at the end of the day Stone and Wenz apply moral principles to ethical situations in the same way and for the same reasons. Because of this, I do not believe that their positions are essentially different, despite their apparent compartmental differences.

In terms of metaphysics and compartmentalisation, then, Stone's theory is not so different from Wenz's or Callicott's after all. As a result, Stone and Callicott can be shown to endorse essentially similar moderately pluralistic positions. Because of this, Callicott's original third criticism of Stone's position seems again unfair, since any charge of seeming incoherent or untrue would seem to apply as well to Callicott's as to Stone's moral theory. As a final comment on this point, I should point out that although I find Callicott's and Stone's positions very similar, I believe there are still noteworthy differences between them. For instance, Callicott might still be able to claim a kind of advantage over Stone or even Wenz because, for instance, his set of principles might be smaller.[5] The key point is that such foreseeable differences would not be *essential* differences. Stone's and Callicott's positions are similar enough that any attack on one by a supporter of the other on the grounds that some standard of coherence or truth-seeming has not been met seems inconsistent. Thus, though Callicott's position is different from Stone's, it is not different enough in terms

of its pluralist content that Callicott can justifiably attack the truth-seemingness or coherence of Stone's position without his own position seeming equally suspect.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have examined a pair of very narrow topics, whether or not Callicott's attack on Stone's moral pluralism is a valid attack and whether or not it would apply equally well to his own position. Stone's position may very well be flawed or unappealing, and we might be advised as environmental ethicists to avoid it. I only claim that if we come to this conclusion, it should clearly not be because we accept Callicott's criticism of it, and it most clearly should not be because we accept that criticism even while we endorse Callicott's own communitarian alternative.

NOTES

[1] I would like to thank Wesley Cragg, Anthony Weston, and an anonymous referee for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.
[2] This point is made, as Callicott acknowledges, by Eugene Hargrove 1985: 3–42.
[3] See W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*.
[4] It should be noted that Callicott, though he has always avoided the super-community concept, has in a work published since the writing of this paper offered a cross-community formula for resolving conflicts between a communitarian's various moral obligations (Callicott 1999, especially pp. 72–76). He now claims that priority should go to our more venerable and intimate communal members except when stronger interests are at stake with our less venerable and intimate communal members. I believe that Callicott's formula is as unhelpful as it is tardy because it is profoundly and multiply ambiguous. First, we are left to somehow rank our communal memberships. Although family will likely (but not obviously) place first, it seems quite difficult to determine the rest of the order, as is made clear by examples like the freezing bison. Worse, it is not even clear that our memberships *can* be ordered, making Callicott's formula at best of little use and at worst of no use at all. Second, in order to determine when our ranking is trumped, we must determine when an interest counts as a 'stronger' interest, a rather difficult task given the variety and kinds of interests that humans, animals, plants, species, and ecosystems have. As it stands, Callicott's formula clarifies neither of these crucial points, and so we are left with a formula that is painfully vague. It leaves a communitarian to rely on his intuitions just as much as before, and I believe it is for this reason that Callicott avoided giving anything like it in his earlier work. Callicott's formula can be viewed only as a promissory note, a placeholder for something more specific that thus far Callicott has been unable to provide.

[5] Even this concession to Callicott is contentious. First of all, it is not at all clear that his set of principles *would* be smaller than Stone's or Wenz's. As a matter of fact, there may be as many communal relationships to consider as extreme pluralist principles. Second, even if Callicott's theory does involve less principles, I cannot see how it will involve *that* much less, and because of this, I believe the difference cannot be significant. This issue, clearly, deserves further exploration.

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