Environment & Society

White Horse Press

Silencing Philosophers: Minteer and the Foundations of Anti-foundationalism

J. BAIRD CALLICOTT

Department of Philosophy and Religion Studies
University of North Texas
Denton, TX 76203, USA

ABSTRACT: In 'No Experience Necessary: Foundationalism and the Retreat from Culture in Environmental Ethics', Ben A. Minteer forgivably misconstrues my critique of moral pluralism. Contrary to Minteer's representation: I do not accuse moral pluralists of 'moral promiscuity'; nor do I posit a 'master principle' to govern all human action respecting the environment; and although I offer conceptual foundations for environmental ethics, I do not claim that they rest on certain, *a priori*, and non-empirical intuitions. Rather, the conceptual foundations I offer for environmental ethics are largely scientific. Contrary to Minteer's representation: I do consider a multiplicity of contexts in which ethical actions are situated; and I do respectfully attend to and creatively engage a variety of cultural points of view, both western and nonwestern, in constructing environmental ethics. Anti-foundationalists, such as Minteer and Bryan G. Norton, ironically pose an insidious threat to democratic discussion and debate of environmental values, because they themselves posit, but do not frankly acknowledge, foundational beliefs.

KEYWORDS: Foundationalism, anti-foundationalism, environmental ethics, pragmatism, culture

In 'No Experience Necessary? Foundationalism and the Retreat from Culture in Environmental Ethics', Ben A. Minteer (1998) raises some profound questions about the business of environmental philosophy. Minteer cites and characterises a bit of my work, along with that of others, as an example of what environmental philosophy should *not* busy itself with – foundations. Here I defend foundationalism in environmental philosophy. Before doing so, however, I would like to clarify those views of mine on which Minteer touches, because he is not alone in misunderstanding them. Abstract ideas are difficult to state clearly, and it seems that I did not succeed the first time around. Minteer is not to be faulted for misrepresenting me. On the contrary, it seems I am guilty of obfuscation, compounded by a proclivity to modify what I think in response to critical discussion and debate.

J. BAIRD CALLICOTT

The *natural* interpretation of 'moral pluralism', my critique of which is the focus of much of Minteer's dissatisfaction with my approach to environmental ethics, would surely be on analogy with cultural pluralism. Many of us, me included, think that a culturally plural society is richer and more desirable than a culturally monotonous one. Similarly, a plurality of moral points of view would, by parity of reasoning, be richer and more desirable than only a single moral point of view. Certainly, I agree. My well-known objection to moral pluralism is limited to the particular sense of it given by Christopher D. Stone in *Earth and Other Ethics: The Case for Moral Pluralism*. Why then should I have publicly objected to it all? Only because I was invited to be a critic on an author-meets-critics panel, at an American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division meeting, celebrating Stone's book. I felt obliged to live up to expectations and criticise the book – which is a wonderful book in many ways, but indeed I think it is not unexceptionable.

Accordingly, what I criticised under the rubric 'moral pluralism' was what Stone (1987) meant by it: viz., that *each* moral agent should select among a suite of ethical *theories* the one that seems best suited to deal with the particular quandary the agent faces at that particular moment. Thus, to take Stone's own examples, if the agent is a member of the United States Senate and the quandary is one of public policy, the theory-of-the-moment should be utilitarianism; if one of private morality, the theory-of-the-moment should be Kantianism; if of the treatment of animals, animal-rights theory; if of the environment, the Leopold land ethic; etc. My main criticism of moral pluralism, *so defined*, is that it would compel a moral agent to hold simultaneously or in rapid sequence mutually inconsistent moral philosophies, that is, mutually inconsistent notions of what is right and good – mutually inconsistent philosophical *foundations* of ethics, in other words, to connect the main theme of that discussion with the main theme of this one. In a subsequent discussion, I call this 'intrapersonal moral pluralism' (Callicott 1994a).

I did not intend for my critique of Stone's very peculiar notion of moral pluralism to be construed to criticise two other quite natural senses of moral pluralism. On the one hand, I did not intend to criticise the view that different moral agents might well and rightfully be inclined toward one or another moral theory, some toward utilitarianism, some toward Kantianism, others toward animal rights, still others toward the Leopold land ethic. In a subsequent discussion, I call this 'interpersonal moral pluralism' (Callicott 1994a). Nor did I mean to suggest that different moral philosophers ought not to defend their preferred ethical theory, utilitarianism, Kantianism, animal rights, the land ethic, some other familiar ethical theory, or one of their own devising. I did not intend, that is, to stifle diversity and debate in moral philosophy – certainly not.

On the other hand, neither did I intend to criticise the possibility that a single moral agent might apply several different moral *principles* in different circum-

stances, so long as such principles were mutually consistent and united by whatever single foundational moral theory that was congenial to that particular agent. Thus, for example, a Judaeo-Christian moral agent might apply the principle, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness' in one circumstance, and 'thou shalt not commit adultery' in another, confident that these two principles are mutually consistent (indeed complementary, since adultery is almost necessarily accompanied by false witness). Further, these two principles are united by a common moral theory – a foundational moral philosophy – that ethics is both given and sanctioned by a good and wise God.

Nevertheless, I really should have anticipated that the specific target of my critique, Stone's special sense of 'moral pluralism', would not be universally known and that, as its infamy spread, my critique would be construed to apply to the other less specialised senses of the term. So I apologise to Minteer and others who have taken me to be attacking moral pluralism as one would more naturally understand it for needlessly exercising their laudable sense of righteous indignation.

Moreover, I might have taken pains to express my critique of moral pluralism (*sensu* Stone) in a more accessible style. My style of expression was apparently so convoluted that it invites not only misunderstanding but misquotation. According to Minteer (1998: 338, emphasis added) I wrote, 'Attempting to act upon inconsistent or mutually contradictory ethical principles results in frustration of action altogether or in actions that are either *irrelevant* or mutually canceling.' In fact, I wrote, '… or in actions that are either *incoherent* or mutually canceling' (Callicott 1990: 110, emphasis added).

By indulging in dialectical discussion, I am surely also unfair to contemporary scholars, all of us stretched too thin to follow the twists and turns of that antique argument form. Minteer (1998: 338) thus reaches the conclusion that 'Callicott accuses moral pluralists of an unprincipled "moral promiscuity" in their rigging of a situation where individuals may choose those moral programmes that suit their self-serving preferences from a catalogue of potential ethical principles.' This is what I wrote in the paper Minteer cites: 'Pluralism may supply a scoundrel with another sort of rationalisation for ducking his or her responsibilities, but moral philosophy generally – monistic no less than pluralistic – is indeterminate and, in the hands of a skilled, but unscrupulous, advocate can be made to justify all manner of action or inaction.… One might argue, by parity of reasoning, that the ethical lives of sincere persons of good will are proportionately enriched and empowered by moral pluralism, thus offsetting the invitation to abuse that pluralism inadvertently affords persons less noble of character' (Callicott 1990: 112). I think I could have put my point more straightforwardly. In any case, the point is that moral pluralism creates the *opportunity* for self-serving choices among alternative ethical theories (again, not principles), rather than that moral pluralists are themselves, by virtue of their

J. BAIRD CALLICOTT

commitment to pluralism, self serving. *And*, by the same token, it can afford pluralists of good will a wider range of opportunities for performing virtuous actions.

Minteer (1998: 338) continues, 'In Callicott's view, our moral judgments regarding nature must ultimately be derived from a basic epistemological position which respects the integrity of the ecological community – the "master principle" formulated through his own reading of Leopold's land ethic'. Respect for the integrity of the ecological community appears to me to be a *moral* position, not an *epistemological* one, but that's not the issue here. Rather, the important issue is the lamentable way that I have made my words available to the interpretation that respecting the integrity of 'the' (is there only one?) ecological community is a 'master principle' to which I subscribe and which I would, had I the power to do so, impose on other agents. Because Minteer is not the first person to reach this conclusion, I tried more clearly to articulate my views on the matter of multiple (plural) moral principles in a subsequent essay (Callicott 1994a). But alas, that essay was published in a very out-of-the-way place, the *Journal of Philosophical Research*, and so did not of course come to Minteer's attention. In any case, there I wrote that to the contrary: 'I do not insist upon deriving our duties to family members and foreigners, to our fellow Americans [please forgive the parochialism here] and to old-growth forests from a single "master principle" – Leopold's summary moral maxim ["A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community; it is wrong when it tends otherwise" – similar to Mill's principle of utility or the Christian Golden Rule]. Rather I argue that a single moral agent should, for the sake of intellectual consistency, settle on a single moral *philosophy* and ethical *theory*. And in my own case, I have settled on a communitarian philosophy and a theory in which multiple [that is, plural] duties and obligations are generated by community membership and grounded in a variety of distinctly moral sentiments. I do not argue that all our actions should be guided by a single *principle* of conduct' (Callicott 1994a: 54, emphasis in original).

The concept of a 'master principle' is, as far as I am aware, original with Peter Wenz (1988, 1993), with whom I disagree on the matter, and whom I quote for critical purposes. As I go on to note, 'the main fault I find with Wenz's otherwise fair and well-informed discussion [of my critique of moral pluralism] is his assumption that what is at issue is pluralism at the level of principle instead of pluralism at the level of theory'. Wenz 'is quite right to say that "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"' (Callicott 1994a: 55).

The history of Western ethics, however, has accustomed us to expect a single moral philosophy to support an ethical theory that generates a single moral principle. After all, one finds but a single 'master principle' in utilitarianism, the greatest happiness principle. Kant claims that there is only one categorical

imperative – which for present purposes we can regard as a 'master principle' – while offering, nevertheless, three, rather distinct 'formulations' of it. I suppose Kant expects us to understand this unity in triversity by analogy with the Holy Trinity, in which there are three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – yet but one divine substance. And, of course, mention of the Holy Trinity may remind us that in the popular Christian ethic, all morality is expressible in but one master principle, the Golden Rule. For Plato there is one form of the Good, though I cannot imagine how it might be expressed as a principle. One finds a multiplicity of moral virtues – which could, I suppose, be expressed as principles, such as 'Be Just', 'Be Temperate', 'Be Brave,' and so on – in Aristotle's ethics. All the several virtues, however, Aristotle unites by a *single* abstract formula – a single principle, if we allow ourselves to take a certain liberty with the meaning of the term – the Golden Mean between the extremes of excess and defect. So, as we see, although there may have been some examples of pluralism at the level of principle in familiar Western ethics, the overall tendency is toward monism, not only at the level of philosophy and theory, but also at the level of principle. Hence, Minteer and others might quite naturally suppose that anyone, such as I, who criticises pluralism – however narrowly the critique may have actually focused on one particular version of it, Stone's – must extend his or her critique to the use of a plurality of principles as well as to the adoption of a plurality (of mutually inconsistent) moral philosophies and ethical theories.

Actually, in a very early, and since repudiated essay of mine, 'Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair', I flirted with moral monism at the level of principle, but soon cut the relationship off when it was pointed out to me that the principle I there endorsed, the golden rule of the Leopold land ethic – again, 'A thing is right when it preserves the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community; it is wrong when it tends otherwise' – has monstrous implications, if it is the only moral principle one recognises (Callicott 1980). Subsequently, I argued that the land ethic is better understood as an addition to – not a substitute for – human-to-human ethics; and that the golden rule of the land ethic should be regarded as but one principle among several that we ought to recognise (Callicott 1987, 1999). In doing so, however, I try to be quite careful to avoid pluralism of the sort I criticise Stone for advocating, pluralism at the level of theory. Accordingly, I try to show how a single ethical theory – that community membership generates duties and obligations – embedded in a single moral philosophy, communitarianism, provides for a multiplicity (that is, a plurality) of moral principles. How the many moral principles one recognises may be 'prioritised' (if this barbaric neologism can be excused) is another matter – which I shall not attempt to address here, but which I have addressed elsewhere (Callicott 1999).

A final word, however, on Minteer's interpretation of my ill-fated critique of moral pluralism. After quoting John Dewey, Minteer (1998: 339) writes, 'Callicott, of course, is not willing to make these kinds of contextual distinctions

between the varying norms and judgments at play in particular situations'. I guess that would follow if it were true that like most familiar Western ethicists, I insist upon a single 'master principle' as one might naturally suppose anyone who criticises moral pluralism would. But here is what I write: 'We must operate effectively within a multiplicity of moral spheres – family obligations, the duties associated with our professional lives, our public lives, our interspecies, and ecosystemic and biospheric relationships' (Callicott 1990: 120). The moral spheres indicated here are not 'particular situations,' but they are certainly contexts. And in some of my published discussions of moral pluralism I do occasionally reach particular situations. For example, in the context of a conflict between our professional and personal obligations I discuss, without naming names, the particular agony of rendering a negative tenure decision in the case of a less-than-brilliant probationary member of my academic department who is also a friend (Callicott 1994a). In such a situation, one finds oneself a member, simultaneously, of two communities, the one professional, the other personal. Both generate duties and obligations, which can be formulated as principles: 'maintain academic standards'; 'help thy friends'. And sometimes, as in this case, they conflict. What to do? I know what I did in the actual case at hand, and I can say that to have had a single philosophical framework in which to cast the dilemma and a common vocabulary – that of community – in which to articulate it helped me reach a decision. In response to some prodding by Kristin Shrader-Frechette (1996), I try to specify two complementary 'second-order principles' to adjudicate among (prioritise, if you will) the various first-order principles generated by various community entanglements that may be at play – and at odds with one another – in a given situation (Callicott 1999).

Minteer's discussion of my critique of moral pluralism serves his more general claim – that I am a 'foundationalist'. And that I do not deny. Indeed, I confess that I am frankly engaged in the business of offering a foundation for environmental ethics. One of the papers of mine that I think is among my best is titled, 'The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic'. But just what is foundationalism? According to Minteer (1998: 336), it comes to this: 'Moral justifications are foundational if they posit the existence of certain basic or privileged beliefs which are supported non-inferentially. Such premises are generally claimed to be *a priori*, self-evident, or directly justified in some manner; they do not depend on other beliefs for their support'. Therefore, 'if someone were to disagree with those [foundational] principles, for whatever reason, there could be no further rational or intuitive appeal on the basis of which to resolve the dispute: one either does or does not believe' (Kirkman 1997: 205), quoted approvingly by Minteer (1998: 343).

About the only moral theory that I can think of which would answer to this characterisation (and caricature) of foundationalism is G. E. Moore's theory of non-natural moral qualities. Both Rolston, another inveterate foundationalist exposed by Minteer, and I elaborately and richly support our very different

theories of environmental ethics by appeal to the natural sciences; in my case, especially ecology and the theory of evolution, which are hardly *a priori* or self-evident. As I write in the paper of mine just mentioned:

> Here in outline, then, are the conceptual and logical foundations of the land ethic: Its conceptual elements are a Copernican cosmology, a Darwinian protosociobiological natural history of ethics, Darwinian ties of kinship among all forms of life on Earth, and an Eltonian model of the structure of biocoenoses all overlain on a Humean-Smithian moral psychology. Its logic is that natural selection has endowed human beings with an affective moral response to perceived bonds of kinship and community, the biotic community; and that, therefore, an environmental or land ethic is both possible – the biopsychological and cognitive conditions are in place – and necessary, since human beings collectively have acquired the power to destroy the integrity, diversity, and stability of the environing and supporting economy of nature (Callicott 1987: 195).

I quote this summary not to suggest that it is, by itself, cut away from the elaboration of the points it summarises, very compelling or persuasive. Rather, I quote it to show that at a great many points it makes contact with a great many empirical beliefs for its support. In a word it is fallible, to employ a term of art in Pragmatism, the foundational philosophy to which Minteer subscribes. So fallible, indeed, that I have been compelled, in light of paradigm shifts in ecology and evolutionary biology over the last quarter century, to reformulate the conceptual foundations of the land ethic and substantially revise its practical indications (Callicott 1996a).

Minteer (1998: 344) also insists that foundationalism in moral philosophy is a 'quest for ethical certainty' and names me as an environmental philosopher on such a quest. Here again, my published words – in the essay, that he most frequently quotes – contradict his claim:

> We have given up on Truth (with a capital T). To mirror nature with the mind has been a common ambition of philosophers from Thales to Russell in the Western tradition. Past Western philosophers hoped to arrive at and guarantee the truth by inductive/empirical methods or by deductive/rational methods, or by a judicious combination of the two. Through centuries of error, they kept the faith that we would eventually arrive at a conceptual model that would correspond, point for point, to reality (with a capital R). That dream has become more elusive now than ever. Newton seemed at last to have grasped Reality by the tail and to have put a lock on Truth. But then along came Planck, Einstein, and finally Heisenberg. *Uncertainty* is now a cornerstone of foundational physics (Callicott 1990: 119).

And if of physics, I might here add, it goes without saying of ethics and metaphysics – though say it I must because Minteer claims that I think otherwise. I go on to recommend what is in essence a Pragmatic epistemology, which Minteer also recommends:

J. BAIRD CALLICOTT

> Though we may not hope to marry Truth to Reality, we may hope to find an intellectual construct that comprehends and systematises more of our experience and does so more coherently than any other. That's exactly what [Christopher] Stone [1972] meant in [*Should*] *Trees* [*Have Standing*?], when he urged us not to make a final assault on Reality and Truth, but to seek a new 'myth' – 'one that can fit our growing body of knowledge' (Callicott 1990: 119).

Here, incidentally, I am pointing out that in his pre-pluralism work, Stone had suggested just the sort of post-Cartesian-certainty epistemology that I am struggling, evidently with little success, to express. But how, one may wonder, can I gainsay, yet another of Minteer's interpretations, one involving my phrase 'moral truth'. Here is his interpretation in full:

> [I]n a recent essay, Callicott writes that even though we might appeal to nonphilosophers' (specifically the general public, but presumably also applying to fellow *academics*) religious and intellectual commitments in fostering environmental protection, we should not expect such beliefs to comprise the 'truth' in these instances. The 'real reasons' for protecting nature – i.e., the epistemic foundations of some sort of intrinsic value theory for the environment – are the sole purview of philosophers, Callicott says, and anything else is a lesser form of knowledge that, while useful to environmental philosophers in serving their own agendas, does not get at the heart of the matter when it comes to 'correctly' valuing the natural world (Minteer 1998: 343, emphasis added).

The phrase 'moral truth' is mine, I admit. To conclude from this, however, that I take the position that philosophers alone have a privileged access to the moral truth and the real reasons for valuing the environment is hasty. Here is what I go on to write in the passage Minteer (1998: 343) cites:

> Most people, of course, do not turn to philosophers for something to believe – as if they didn't at all know what to think and philosophers can and should tell them. Rather philosophers such as Thoreau, Muir, Leopold, and Rolston give voice to the otherwise inchoate and inarticulate thoughts and feelings in our changing cultural Zietgeist (Callicott 1995: 24).

Note that three of the four philosophers named here are amateur, not professional philosophers. My understanding, that is, of who philosophers are is not narrowly *academic*, as Minteer seems to assume. Moreover, my understanding of what philosophers do in relationship to the 'general public' is a far cry from what Minteer here supposes I think they do. Indeed, it rather agrees with his own notion that 'moral judgments are fundamentally social; as part of intricate cultural systems constructed within communities, they are built, refined, and transmitted through the process of communication and education – the lived experience of individuals within a moral universe' (Minteer 1998: 340-341). The

role of philosophers is not to dictate to 'nonphilosophers', it is, rather, clearly to state, to articulate, changing social and cultural values – for 'cultural systems constructed within communities' are not static.

What about my 'appeal to nonphilosophers' … religious and intellectual commitments'? Here is what I write: 'Granted, we may not have the leisure to wait for a majority to come over to a new worldview and a new nonanthropocentric, holistic environmental ethic.' Please note that this sentence follows immediately the ones I just quoted. Hence this 'new worldview etc.' is not something that we philosophers just dream up based upon our allegedly *a priori personal* intuitions, it is the articulation we are trying to give to the otherwise inchoate collective thoughts and feelings in our changing '*cultural* Zeitgeist.' And by use of the first person plural, I affirm that we philosophers are part of the culture, the community, in which we live and on behalf of which we work. I go on straightaway to the crucial comment concerning the religious and intellectual commitments of nonphilosophers:

> We environmentalists have to reach people where they are, intellectually speaking, right now. So we might persuade Jews, Christians, and Muslims to support the environmental policy agenda by appeal to such concepts as God, creation, and stewardship; we might persuade humanists by appeal to collective enlightened human self-interest; and so on (Callicott 1995: 24).

This is an essentially Pragmatic exercise, thus one would expect Minteer to approve of it. Contrary to Minteer, I think that philosophers should indeed be engaged primarily in the business of articulating foundations, but not *ex nihilo*. Such foundations lurk in the inchoate, but not yet fully formulated – that is what I say is among the social services we philosophers perform, the service of articulation – thoughts and feelings in *our* changing cultural Zeitgeist. Meanwhile, meanwhile, we try, like good Pragmatists, to avoid the policy impasses to which a focus on foundations can lead and show how already fully formed and well-articulated older cultural beliefs support the same policies as these nascent new cultural beliefs and values that we are in process – and it may be a long process – of helping to bring to birth. In short, this is a permutation of the 'Convergence Hypothesis' proposed by Bryan G. Norton (1991), an environmental philosopher whom Minteer very warmly endorses. Older cultural worldviews can be shown to support environmental attitudes and values that *converge* on the same policy agendas as the new cultural world view that is currently taking shape. Incidentally, I have devoted a whole book to this eminently Pragmatic project (Callicott 1994b).

Indeed, appealing to prevailing religious and intellectual commitments pluralistically to support environmental policies is consistent with, if not identical to, 'metaphilosophical pragmatism' as characterised by Andrew Light, another philosopher whom Minteer warmly endorses. According to Light:

the pragmatist should not be concerned in public with the outcome of some debates among environmentalists and ecologists within a certain range of issues.… [S]ome questions should be shelved for now, such as: What is the *intrinsic* value of species that fuels a duty to insure their diversity? What is *the* ontological relationship between humans and non-human animals? Does technology *necessarily* exercise a pejorative influence on humans or is it a natural development of human cognitive evolution? In all these cases the environmental pragmatist searches for answers to these questions in private while publicly pursuing the best possible solutions to practical environmental questions (Light 1996: 174).

Consider the following example of a practical environmental question, Should we try to bring the California condor back from the brink of extinction? Light's metaphilosophical pragmatist would not publicly debate the foundational issues that the practical question might raise. Is the condor one of God's creature's, which we have no right to exterminate as we adversely alter its habitat? Or, alternatively, is the condor vital to the health of its ecosystem and the integrity of its biotic community? Or is the free-living condor instead mostly just an occasion for an awe-inspiring human experience of the sublime in nature? These issues the metaphilosophical pragmatist wrestles with in private, presumably among fellow philosophers. In public, the metaphilosophical pragmatist devotes his or her intellectual energies to pointing out that whatever your foundational beliefs, they more or less support condor conservation.

According to Minteer, 'Norton's approach is one of the few projects in environmental ethics that doesn't dismiss the value systems of human experience out of hand'. Minteer could not have known that for the past three years I have been engaged with five other researchers, none of whom are professional or academic philosophers, in re-envisioning fishery management policy in the North American Great Lakes. Part of my role in this project was, precisely, to discover the 'value systems' that have in the past, do now, and might in the future drive fishery management in the Great Lakes. That the Great Lakes and their fishes have intrinsic value was actually expressed, in exactly those terms, by several groups, including the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). Norton (1995), however, has declared a virtual jihad on the concept of intrinsic value in nature. So, contrary to Minteer's claim here, Norton does indeed dismiss a 'value system', arising out of the 'human experience' of non-philosophers, quite out of hand – the intrinsic-value-in-nature value system. Incidentally, the method of our research, sponsored by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, was 'content analysis' of documents, not survey questionnaires. The intrinsic value of the Great Lakes and their fishes was spontaneously expressed in a MDNR management plan, as well as in other documents generated by other groups – with no prompting, by means of a tendentiously worded survey or questionnaire, from me or any other foundationalising philosopher.

However, the most insidious aspect of Minteer's and Norton's anti-foundationalism is the implicit and unacknowledged foundations that such philosophers presuppose.

Norton (1995) placed a paper titled 'Why I am Not a Nonanthropocentrist' and subtitled 'Callicott and the Failure of Monistic Inherentism' in another journal. I dealt with the particulars of the subtitle in a retort in the journal in which Norton's paper appeared (Callicott 1996b). Here I deal with the particulars of the title. The last time I looked at a logic book, ~~P = P. So for whatever reasons Norton declares himself to be not a nonanthropocentrist, he is, by immediate inference, an anthropocentrist, positively put. Further to matters of logic, between P and ~P a middle term is excluded. Thus nonanthropocentrism covers the universe of possible -centrisms other than anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism is the doctrine that all and only human beings are morally considerable. Anthropocentrism (or not-nonanthropocentrism) excludes various and sundry wider-than-anthropocentrisms, such as zoocentrism (a.k.a. animal liberation), biocentrism, and ecocentrism. It also excludes various and sundry narrower-than-anthropocentrisms, such as egocentrism and ethnocentrism. So much, then, for Norton's vaunted pluralism; his commitment to anthropocentrism excludes an indefinite number of 'value systems' – all that are other than anthropocentric! Such a doctrine, in any case, once nakedly stated, cannot be simply assumed, as if every level-headed person would agree. Contemporary social contract theorists, such as John Rawls (1971), believe that only egocentrism is 'rational'. The 'value systems' manifest in popular 'human experience' are often ethnocentric, as a glance at any newspaper will confirm, however little philosophical defence of ethnocentrism one can find. In light of this plurality of alternatives, one wants to know not only why Norton is not a nonanthropocentrist, but also why, more positively, he is an anthropocentrist.

While pretending to eschew altogether the concept of intrinsic value as a 'tainted term', Norton slips in its equivalent, 'noninstrumental value', sub rosa: 'Note that Callicott', he writes, 'puts natural values on an equal footing with the noninstrumental value [i.e., intrinsic value] we accord human persons' (Norton 1995: 347). Who is this 'we' to whom Norton refers? Not the people in the former Yugoslavia, most of whom appear to be militantly ethnocentric. Not the social contract theorists, and all their greed-is-good fellow travellers, who are openly egocentric. I am sure that Norton has his reasons for rejecting egocentrism and ethnocentrism, as well as zoocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism, and for espousing anthropocentrism. And doubtless these reasons can be traced to mainstream Modern Western moral philosophy, to Kantian deontology or Millian utilitarianism. But whatever the specifics – for which Norton owes us an account – they *are* foundations. Unless wholly arbitrary, the belief that all and only human beings possess noninstrumental value, as Norton expressly affirms, and thus are exclusively morally considerable, must rest on some foundation.

J. BAIRD CALLICOTT

Minteer's foundationalism is revealed by his repeated appeals to democracy. Here are several instances:

'I believe that there are additional reasons to be concerned about the implications of foundational environmental ethics for discussions about environmental policy and the place of environmental ethical inquiry in the *democratic* community.... Foundationalist approaches, it seems, discourage open discussion and serious moral inquiry, making *democratic* debate over the moral dimensions of policy a complete non-starter' (Minteer 1998: 342-343, emphasis added). Fostering public debate over the moral dimensions of policy, by the way, is just what Light (1996) says we should avoid. The metaphilosophical Pragmatist avoids engaging in serious moral inquiry precisely because doing so provokes divisiveness and thwarts policy consensus among parties subscribing to mutually inconsistent foundational beliefs.

'At the very least, Callicott's design denies the contributions of other disciplinary perspectives in elucidating the character of public environmental commitments. Perhaps more distressingly, it demonstrates an apparent disrespect for *democratic* values as well' (Minteer 1998: 343). As to denying other disciplinary perspectives, few people in environmental philosophy have given more attention to the disciplines of ecology and evolutionary biology than I. The context, however, suggests that the other disciplines to which Minteer refers are those of the social sciences, and I admit that I have paid little attention to the contributions of those disciplines. Alas and lackaday, life is short; there is so much to learn, and so little time to learn it; one just has to be selective, I fear – but back to Minteer's repeated affirmations of the value of democracy.

'Therefore, we need to be confident in our ability as cultural selves and citizens to discuss and argue about the meaning of our moral traditions and the resources they provide for respecting both natural and human communities. To the extent we are able to do so *democratically*, I believe that the returns of this sort of interpretive moral inquiry will be culturally revealing and practically significant' (Minteer 1998: 345, emphasis added). This, again, is what I call 'interpersonal pluralism,' and it is something that I am on record as fully and expressly supporting (Callicott 1994a). Minteer seems to cleave to the quaint view that philosophers, like social scientists, should be objective and value-neutral, as if that were ever possible. I consider us philosophers to be, rather, a part of one or another moral tradition – that of Hume, Darwin, and Leopold, in my own case – on the basis (foundation) of which we variously advocate 'respecting both natural and human communities'.

Finally, Minteer (1998: 345, emphasis on 'democratic' and 'undemocratic' added) writes:

> Not only is a pragmatic environmental ethics *philosophically* attractive, as I have tried
> to partly demonstrate in this essay, but it is more *politically* desirable, inasmuch as it
> fosters a *democratic* disposition in the justification of moral claims and arguments.

SILENCING PHILOSOPHERS

This dual moral and political quality of the pragmatist project, most fully elaborated in the thought of Dewey, is an especially valuable intellectual inheritance for environmental pragmatists. Indeed, I would argue that it offers the greatest potential for avoiding the troubling philosophical and *undemocratic* vices that result from foundationalist thinking in environmental ethics.

Just as Norton wants us to believe that his anthropocentrism is both universal and foundation-free, Minteer also assumes a universal commitment to democracy and democratic values, and he also wants us to believe that such a commitment is foundation-free. Personally, I agree with Winston Churchill who once quipped that 'democracy is the worst form of government except for all the others'. Which reminds us that there *are* others, and therefore that commitment to democracy and democratic values is not universal. Many in the Islamic world seem committed to theocracy. The government of China, representing a fourth of the world's population, is routinely criticised for suppressing democratic values. To which apologists for the Chinese government just as routinely reply that democracy is embedded in (i.e., *founded* on *beliefs* indigenous to) a Western world view that is foreign to the Chinese. And indeed, the historical and cultural facts lend credence to this contention. Democracy emerged in classical Greece and then re-emerged in Modern Europe. It is a Western phenomenon founded on Western ideas about human nature (individualism) and the nature of human society (an aggregate of autonomous individuals). According to Minteer, most environmental philosophers, Rolston and I especially, are foundationalists; he of course is not. But these repeated expressions of commitment to democracy and democratic values expose Minteer's foundationalism, which is the more insidious and disingenuous because it is cryptic. Furthermore, Minteer's own foundationalism evidently comes down to *a priori* intuitions, because it is axiomatic – that is, undefended. No reasons are offered for a commitment to democracy. And, from all one can gather from what Minteer writes, his commitment to democracy 'does not depend on other beliefs'; 'one either does or does not believe' in democratic discussion and debate.

Minteer's effort to purge foundationalism from environmental philosophy is, in my opinion, tantamount to an effort to silence philosophers, who play an important role in public and, yes, in democratic debate. As part of that role, philosophers expose the conceptual foundations of conventional assumptions. Some do so straightforwardly by asserting conventional assumptions – universal human rights, for example – and providing foundational justifications for them. To pursue the present example, universal human rights might be founded on a limited suite of different foundational beliefs – salient among them, that all human beings are created in the image of God, à la the Bible, or that all human beings are autonomous, à la Kant. Some philosophers expose the conceptual foundations of conventional assumptions indirectly by asserting unconventional propositions – universal animal rights, for example – and providing foundational

J. BAIRD CALLICOTT

justifications for them. We nonanthropocentric environmental philosophers do something of that sort of thing on behalf of nature, more broadly.

Here, I am exposing the foundations of anti-foundationalism, simply by pointing them out. Norton rails against nonanthropocentric foundationalism, while at the same time tacitly endorsing the foundations of anthropocentrism. And Minteer assumes that democracy and democratic values are unquestionably good things, but, in pretending to eschew foundations, he slyly puts the foundations of democracy and democratic values beyond discussion and debate. Norton and Minteer are Pragmatists, they claim. And Pragmatists, they claim, subscribe to no foundations. The ironic and insidious effect of such a posture, given their stated commitment to pluralism and democracy, is to privilege their own cryptic foundational beliefs and forestall any critical discussion of them or the proposal and justification of any alternatives.

Disciplinary rivalry is an undercurrent in Minteer's polemic against foundations. I have already quoted his allegation that I ignore the contribution of other disciplinary perspectives than those provided by academic philosophy. The claim is false if 'disciplinary perspectives' include the natural sciences, but true enough, as I already admitted, if the perspectives meant are those of the social sciences. In Minteer's parallel attack on my fellow foundationalist, Holmes Rolston, the issue of disciplines comes up again: 'Rolston's analysis of the "worldview" of citizens of the [Pacific] Northwest [United States] is incredibly simplistic and one-sided; it is difficult to imagine that any social scientist would attempt to get away with such a breezy and generalised characterisation of community life' (Minteer 1998: 338). Rolston (1998) has already defended himself against Minteer's assault, so I shall add nothing more on his behalf. In a more recent paper, Minteer touts the value of social science research for environmental ethics and disparages the value of what he contemptuously refers to as 'monistic prescriptivism' (Minteer & Manning 1999). Because Minteer raises the question, let me suggest just what the role of philosophy in comparison with that of the social sciences should be in forming public policy and informing democratic discussion?

Given the great influence of the social sciences in these domains, the fact that philosophers, if Rolston and I are indicative, ignore the social sciences should be of little concern. As Mark Sagoff (1985, 1988) often laments, one social science – economics – wields virtually unlimited power in forming public policy. Policy makers consult economists today as the ancients once consulted their oracles. The enigmatic utterances of one high priest of this particular social science, Alan Greenspan, chairman of the United States Federal Reserve Board, can, depending on their interpretation by other devotees of the discipline, cause stock markets the world over to rise or fall. Some even fear that a carelessly chosen word from Greenspan may have the potential to plunge the global economy into deep depression. One of the main arts of sociology is public opinion polling. I do not know how influential polls are in the politics of the United Kingdom and

other European countries, but in the United States, politicians use them, some virtually on a daily basis, to assess the temper of the electorate (and often to tailor their policies to the prevailing mood of the moment). US President Bill Clinton withstood the effort of his adversaries in the Republican Party to remove him from office, primarily because his approval rating remained high, and theirs low, as determined by pollsters employing the methods of assessing public opinion developed by social scientists. Given the prestige and influence of at least two of the social sciences – those most involved in democratic discussion and policy making – their being ignored by environmental philosophers should be of no concern at all.

In comparison with Johnny-come-lately disciplines like economics, sociology, and political science, which, as such, have been around scarcely a century, philosophy is an ancient discipline that goes back 2,500 years or so. For most of that time, philosophers constructed great systems of thought integrating an epistemology, ontology, ethics, and politics into a coherent whole. Or at least that was the goal. These grand philosophical systems were often quite unconventional, denying, as many did, the full reality of the world as most of their contemporaries experienced it. Nevertheless, philosophers defended their weird philosophies, often to the point of absurdity. For that reason, few, including the philosophers themselves, ever took such intellectual constructs seriously enough to base public policy on them. Plato is the only philosopher I can think of who seems actually to have proposed that he and his ilk should rule their communities and impose their bizarre foundational notions on their fellow citizens. But for the same reason, these unconventional conceptual constructs of the Ancient, Medieval, and Modern philosophers expanded the minds of their contemporaries and subtly undermined conventional ideas because, as I just noted, they presented an alternative point of view.

Here is another important part of the role that philosophers play in public democratic debate. Some of the at-first-bizarre ideas proposed by philosophers worked their way into the community Weltanschauung and transformed it. The idea that the physical world is composed of unseen atoms, that the earth is a planet, that the human body is inhabited by an immortal, rational soul, were all originally madcap speculations of philosophers. Today the Western Weltanschauung is being colonised by ideas that were first articulated by (frankly) foundational environmental philosophers. Again, I say first 'articulated', not invented, because philosophers are members of their communities and, to employ a Socratic metaphor, are more like intellectual midwives, who bring to light ideas that are gestating in some mysterious way in the dialectic of cultural discourse, than like quasi-divine demiurges who invent them *ex nihilo*. The idea that nature has intrinsic value is a case in point. Despite Norton's efforts to exterminate it, this idea is cropping up, spontaneously, in all manner of contemporary cultural discourse, in the proposed Earth Charter, in the MDNR Great Lakes management plan, in literature of the Wilderness Society, the

J. BAIRD CALLICOTT

Nature Conservancy, and the Sierra Club, in nature programs on the Discovery Channel.

Finally, I address the most important difference between the roles of philosophy and the social sciences in public, democratic discussion and debate. The social 'sciences' are – or at least classically claim to be – descriptive. Moral philosophy is not only frankly foundational, it is also frankly normative. I will not tire readers of this journal with all the familiar and well-rehearsed postmodern critiques of the classic claims of science, social as well as natural, to be 'objective' and 'value-free', which are collateral to the claim that science accurately describes natural and social realities. By now we are all keenly aware that the sciences, social as well as natural, are as cryptically normative as anti-foundationalism is cryptically foundational. Honestly normative moral philosophers, in any case, do not pretend to characterise things as they are, but as they ought to be. And they develop foundations to justify their normative prescriptions. In a democracy, once more, philosophers are in no position to dictate their ideals to the public. Rather, among the other services they render, the normative discourse of philosophers provides the body politic proposals and arguments for alternative ways of thinking and living, which can be tried in the crucible of experimentation, public discussion, and democratic debate. Though certainly it remains moot, Minteer may be right to say that we environmental ethicists ignore the social sciences and their putatively objective, value-free, descriptions of people's actual environmental values, but I am aware of no philosophers who are attempting to silence social scientists, and stop them from doing what they do, as Minteer is trying to silence us philosophers and stop us from doing what philosophers have done for two and a half millennia.

The worst thing that environmental philosophers could do, therefore, is to follow Minteer's advice and abandon normative environmental ethics and the exploration of the foundations of such ethics. With the possible exception of Plato (and, come to think of it, Marx) philosophers do not try to impose their ideas on any one else, by any means other than reasoned persuasion. Far from stifling democratic debate, they enrich it. Over time, some even transform it, as the contemporary advocates of intrinsic value in nature have demonstrably done. The greater danger to democratic debate is posed by anti-foundationalists who actually espouse foundations, the foundations of anthropocentrism and democracy in the cases here discussed, but who pretend not to. Pretending to come to democratic policy debates as neutral parties without foundational baggage, they may stealthily succeed in imposing their own foundations on the unwary. And that – cryptic foundational philosophy masquerading as anti-foundationalism, not to mention social science masquerading as a descriptive, objective, and value free knowledge – is, I submit, the real academic threat to democratic discussion.

REFERENCES

Callicott, J. Baird 1980. 'Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair', *Environmental Ethics* **2**: 311-339.

Callicott, J. Baird 1987. 'The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic', in J. Baird Callicott (ed.) *Companion to* A Sand County Almanac: *Interpretive and Critical Essays*, pp. 186-217. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Callicott, J. Baird 1990. 'The Case Against Moral Pluralism', *Environmental Ethics* **12**: 99-124.

Callicott, J. Baird 1994a. 'Moral Monism in Environmental Ethics', *Journal of Philosophical Research* **19**: 51-60.

Callicott, J. Baird 1994b. *Earth's Insights: A Multicultural Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Callicott, J. Baird 1995. 'Environmental Philosophy *is* Environmental Activism: The Most Radical and Effective Kind', in Don E. Marietta, Jr. and Lester Embree (eds) *Environmental Activism*, pp. 19-35. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield.

Callicott, J. Baird 1996a. 'Do Deconstructive Ecology and Sociobiology Undermine Leopold's Land Ethic?' *Environmental Ethics* 18: 353-372.

Callicott, J. Baird 1996b. 'On Norton and the Failure of Monistic Inherentism', *Environmental Ethics* **18**: 219-221.

Callicott, J. Baird 1998. '"Back Together Again" Again', *Environmental Values* **7**: 461-475.

Callicott, J. Baird 1999. 'Holistic Environmental Ethics and the Problem of Ecofacism', in J. Baird Callicott, *Beyond the Land Ethic: More Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, pp. 59-76. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Kirkman, Robert 1997. 'The Problem of Knowledge in Environmental Thought: A Counterchallenge', in Roger S. Gottlieb (ed.) *The Ecological Community*, pp. 193-207. New York: Routledge.

Light, Andrew 1996. 'Compatibilism in Political Ecology', in Andrew Light and Eric Katz (eds) *Environmental Pragmatism*, pp. 161-184.

Minteer, Ben A. 1998. 'No Experience Necessary? Foundationalism and the Retreat from Culture in Environmental Ethics', *Environmental Values* **7**: 333-347.

Minteer, Ben A. and Manning, Robert E. 1999. 'Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics: Democracy, Pluralism, and the Management of Nature', *Environmental Ethics* **21**: 191-207.

Norton, Bryan G. 1991. *Toward Unity Among Environmentalists*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Norton, Bryan G. 1995. 'Why I am Not a Nonanthropocentrist: Callicott and the Failure of Monistic Inherentism', *Environmental Ethics* **17**: 341-358.

Rawls, John 1971. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Rolston, Holmes III 1998. 'Saving Nature, Feeding People, and the Foundations of Ethics', *Environmental Values* **7**: 349-357.

Sagoff, Mark 1985. 'Fact and Value in Ecological Science', *Environmental Ethics* **7**: 99-116.

J. BAIRD CALLICOTT

Sagoff, Mark 1988. 'Some Problems with Environmental Economics', *Environmental Ethics* **10**: 55-74.

Shrader-Frechette, K. S. 1996. 'Individualism, Holism, and Environmental Ethics', *Ethics and the Environment* **1**: 55-69.

Stone, Christopher D. 1972. 'Should Trees Have Standing – Towards Legal Rights for Natural Objects', *Southern California Law Review* **45**: 450-501.

Stone, Christopher D. 1987. *Earth and Other Ethics: The Case for Moral Pluralism*. New York: Harper and Row.

Wenz, Peter S. 1998. *Environmental Justice*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Wenz, Peter S. 1993. 'Minimum, Moderate, and Extreme Moral Pluralism', *Environmental Ethics* **15**: 61-74.