

## Reply from a Neighboring Village

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When I lived in a village in Ethiopia, the people were hospitable and caring, but they warned me that the people in the next village were liars and thieves. When I visited the dangerous village, however, I found the people hospitable and caring, and they warned me to watch out for the liars and thieves of the first village.

. . . Just as it is natural to think that the other village's ways are untrustworthy, so too is it natural to think that the valuation ideas from another discipline are nonintuitive, ad hoc, not compelling. This bias often leads to superficial dismissal.

I suspect that the only complete way to overcome culture-boundedness in ideas is to "forget" one's own disciplinary heritage, become an intellectual child again, and grow up in the neighboring discipline's village for a while. (Page 1992: 99; reprinted by permission of Island Press)

I am flattered that Hetherington, Daniel, and Brown (1994) took the time to respond to a pre-publication version of my article in the form of a commentary piece. They have raised a number of interesting and relevant issues and, despite their criticism of methodological pluralism, they have provided an example of one limited approach to methodological pluralism (critical multiplism). In the short amount of space available for my reply, I am unable to respond to every point raised. Instead, I will focus on the fundamental differences between the approach to studying environmental values that they advocate and my approach. The differences run deep, because we live in different philosophical and disciplinary villages.

Although they do not state it explicitly, the approach of Hetherington et al. is based on utilitarianism and positivism. Utilitarianism is their moral philosophy or theory of "the good" and positivism is their philosophy of science. From a utilitarian perspective, the value of a forest ecosystem stems from its utility for achieving human ends, where the ultimate end or goal is maximizing preference-satisfaction.<sup>1</sup> Utilitarian-based approaches to studying values are reductionist—all of the ways in which people value nature (or at least all that are relevant to and useful for policy) can be reduced to preferences. Hetherington et al. repeatedly state their view that the domain of forest value studies should be restricted solely to preference-related value, leaving little doubt about their utilitarian moral philosophy.

Utilitarianism is, of course, only one of several major traditions in Western philosophical ethics. Another tradition is the rights-based or Kantian tradition, which focuses

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on rights and duties. Hetherington et al. characterize the rights-based approach as concerned with "universal laws . . . dogmatically maintained," although few 20th-century moral philosophers insist on the universal validity of moral rules. Many contemporary environmental philosophers propose a rights-based approach to environmental decision making and policy. But a rights-based approach is not just an arcane perspective held by a few philosophers—many environmentalists, animal rights supporters, and average citizens hold this view, and the Endangered Species Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and state animal protection laws are viewed by many as, in part, a recognition of the rights and intrinsic value (or, using Kant's term, dignity) of nonhuman animals.

A third stream of thought in moral philosophy is the pluralist tradition. There are many approaches to moral pluralism (Wenz, 1993), just as there are many varieties of utilitarian and rights-based approaches. Briefly, however, moral pluralists claim that no single theory of "the good," no overarching principle (e.g., utilitarianism's "greatest good for the greatest number" or Kant's categorical imperative) is able to guide us through all moral decisions.<sup>2</sup> Rather, there are ". . . many kinds of principles and various sorts of responsibilities" that cannot be simplified without distortion (Brennan, 1992, p. 22). Aldo Leopold's land ethic has been characterized as falling in this philosophical tradition, although some would place it in the rights-based camp.

From the perspective of moral or value pluralism (which is my perspective), a utilitarian-based approach to studying environmental values is too narrow. It fails to capture the full range of meaning associated with the environment. Focusing on preference-related value is appropriate for studying the instrumental values of nature, but many of the ways in which people value the environment go well beyond preferences and instrumental values. In a recent paper (Bengston, 1994), I argued that there are four broad and distinct categories of forest values, or ways in which people care about forest ecosystems: economic, life support, aesthetic, and moral. The first two categories are instrumental values (i.e., valuing something as a means to an end), and the last two categories are noninstrumental values (i.e., valuing something as an end in itself). Preference utilitarians such as Hetherington et al. argue that all four categories can be reduced to preferences.

The case that many people value nature noninstrumentally as well as instrumentally and that reductionist approaches are unable to comprehend both of these distinct types of value has been made by environmental philosophers and others (Brennan, 1992, McQuillan, 1993, Sagoff, 1988, Wenz, 1988). But such arguments are not convincing to those who maintain the reductionist position. This is quite understandable, because there can be no final proof of either the reductionist or pluralist position—the nature of value is a transcendental question that philosophers have been arguing about for thousands of years and will still be arguing about thousands of years from now. Nevertheless, how we respond to the question of value reductionism or pluralism as social scientists has profound implications for the types of questions we ask, the methods we employ, and the conclusions we draw.

Positivism is the philosophical doctrine contending that the methods of the natural sciences are the only valid source of knowledge about the world and that facts are the only possible objects of knowledge. It opposes ". . . any procedure of investigation that is not reducible to scientific method." (Abbagnano, 1967, p. 414). Despite their claim that this is not their intent, Hetherington et al. denigrate information obtained by means other than the scientific method as "speculative knowledge or opinions," that is, unreliable and inaccurate. According to them, only information obtained through methods comparable to the natural sciences are relevant to forest policy. Their positivist approach can be clearly seen in the following passage: "Most federal and state land management agencies seek to employ scientific methods to ascertain relevant biophysical interrelationships, rather than relying on speculative knowledge or opinions. We maintain that public values relevant to

forest management policy can and must be articulated through a comparable scientific methodology" (Hetherington et al., 1994, pp. 536–537).

Positivism is, of course, only one approach to the philosophy of science.<sup>3</sup> But it has had a powerful grip and profound influence on forest management and science. McQuil-  
lan (1993) has argued that scientific positivism fits well with traditional utilitarian-based forest management, but that forest ecosystem management—based on a Leopoldian environmental ethic rather than a utilitarian moral philosophy—requires a broader methodological approach. Positivist science is insufficient for the broader meanings, goals, and strategies associated with ecosystem management. For example, adaptive management is often identified as a key strategy for implementing ecosystem management, but Norgaard (1989) has pointed out that a positivist approach to science is in many ways inconsistent with adaptive management.

I argue that some form of methodological pluralism is a more appropriate approach. Hetherington et al. correctly point out that extreme versions of methodological pluralism (e.g., "anything goes") may be unfruitful or even counterproductive. Rather than advocate anarchistic methodological pluralism, I assert that any single framework of analysis for studying and understanding environmental values is necessarily incomplete and therefore insufficient. Studying environmental values is analogous to the tale of the blind men who encounter an elephant: One feels the leg and declares that the elephant is like a tree, another feels its side and insists the elephant is like a wall, and yet another feels the trunk or tail and claims it is like a rope. We need to combine these perspectives to get a more complete understanding of an elephant. Similarly, we must combine diverse disciplinary approaches, frameworks of analysis, and ways of knowing to gain a more complete picture of the complex ways in which people value the environment.

In summary, the fundamental differences between the approach of Hetherington et al. and my approach boil down to pluralism versus monism in the study of environmental values. Pluralism is the belief that no single explanatory system or view of reality can account for all the phenomena of life. Value pluralism denies that all environmental values can be reduced to and expressed in terms of preferences or any other single measure (e.g., dollars). Methodological pluralism denies that all aspects of complex systems or phenomena can be understood by any single methodology.

A positivist-utilitarian approach to studying forest values, as proposed by Hetherington et al., has its place in helping us better understand one very important dimension of forest values, namely, the instrumental value of forests. But this approach has been extensively employed in past studies, due to the strong positivist-utilitarian world view of many natural resource managers and scientists. Schroeder (1994) recently noted that the values that a positivist-utilitarian approach ignores are the very values that are critical for understanding the human dimensions of ecosystem management, because they help explain why many people care so passionately about environmental issues:

Experiential values that do not lend themselves to this kind of measurement and valuation (for example, sense of place and spiritual values) have often been disregarded. Yet it is precisely these kinds of values, rooted in intuitive and emotional experiences, that have motivated many people to take legal and political action against forest managers. For ecosystem management to truly include humans as a part of ecosystems, these kinds of values must be recognized and dealt with in managing forests (p. 3).

I agree. To understand the diverse ways in which people value forest ecosystems—all of which are relevant for public forest management and policy—we need to look beyond the positivist-utilitarian approach.

## Notes

1. The goal of classical utilitarianism is maximizing pleasure or happiness. Contemporary utilitarianism and mainstream economics focus on the goal of maximizing preference-satisfaction (Sagoff, 1988; Wenz, 1988).
2. Moral pluralism should not be confused with moral relativism. See Stone (1988).
3. Logical positivism is the main contemporary form of positivism. See Norgaard (1989) for a discussion of the key assumptions of logical positivism and the perils of a narrow methodological base.

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