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Searching for Sustainability: Interdisciplinary Essays in the Philosophy of Conservation Biology, by Bryan G. Norton

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International Labor Organization and the International Maritime Organization with regard to workplace and maritime safety, respectively.

Judge Posner also considers the concept of an international bioweaponry agency to be housed within the present WHO. According to Posner, such an agency could be responsible for enforcing worldwide security against the threat of bioweaponry. In lieu of its placement in the WHO (not known for a police-oriented philosophy), Posner posits that Interpol could be a good alternative for such a bioweaponry security agency and program. Additional measures, some admittedly controversial, that could be brought to bear on the catastrophic risk problem range from mandating congressional catastrophic risk review of future projects to limiting science study at the collegiate level for some foreign students that meet pre-selected risk criteria. Posner also considers the tension that exists between civil liberties and police actions designed to fight terrorism and the potential that computer hackers can have on national and global security.

In an explanatory style reminiscent of the author's earlier works, Judge Posner's *Catastrophe: Risk and Response* serves as a valuable contribution to the study of risk control and management. In many ways, Judge Posner has challenged the legal profession and academy to take note of the significant risks that catastrophic events bring to our world. Despite the criticism that the Law and Economics School receives from newer schools of jurisprudence, Judge Posner demonstrates, with clarity and reason, the various nuances that are presented through a more comprehensive and flexible law and economics approach to the catastrophic risks that are ever-present in our world.

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An unbridgeable gap separates anthropocentric and nonanthropocentric perspectives on environmental protection. To bridge this gap, philosopher Bryan Norton presents the "idea of sustainability" as the foundation for a normative theory of environmental protection. In *Searching for Sustainability*, Norton explains that the gap arises because the anthropocentric perspective values economic entities, whereas the nonanthropocentric perspective values ecological entities. Both perspectives must shift to embrace and protect natural *processes* as the source of all values. Just as these natural processes can be modeled as

complex, hierarchical, adaptive systems, so too should environmental policy making be understood as an adaptive process in which an “epistemological community” creates multiple policy options to achieve sustainability, which includes preservation of both ecological and social systems.

These conclusions are not just the musings of an ivory tower philosopher. Norton has worked extensively with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). There he facilitated communication and policy development among scientists scattered about EPA’s disciplinary silos and helped to develop the first EPA protocols for ecological risk assessment. Norton is currently a professor at the School of Public Policy at the Georgia Institute of Technology, works with the Atlanta zoo, and serves on the boards of national environmental groups.

Searching for Sustainability presents 27 of Norton’s essays, written from the late 1980s to the early 2000s. They trace the development of his thought, in which he finds the roots of environmental philosophy in pragmatism and defines sustainability at the intersection of philosophy, economics, ecology, and public policy. The collection concludes with his recommendations for how community policy makers can identify and choose among different paths to sustainable development.

The opening essays find the philosophical foundations for a theory of sustainability in Aldo Leopold’s admonition to “think like a mountain.” Leopold meant that we must step outside the narrow spatial and temporal confines of human experience to view the world from the more expansive space and time occupied by a mountain. Norton argues that Leopold’s intuition was correctly rooted in the ideas of pragmatists such as C.S. Peirce and John Dewey. Leopold asserted that “truth is that which prevails in the long run” and believed, as one of his contemporaries wrote, that “[s]urvival is not merely the characteristic of right; it is the test of right.”

This pragmatic approach to environmental ethics is the means by which adherents of the two perspectives on environmental protection will find common moral ground. The anthropocentric “Economist” perspective is utilitarian and sees nature as instrumental to human objectives. The nonanthropocentric “Deep Ecologist” perspective finds inherent value in elements of nature, independent of their relationship to humans. Despite these differences, Deep Ecologists and Economists share an approach to morality that is monistic and reductionist; both believe that values derive from a single principle. But because they do not agree on this principle, they will fail to find common ground from which to derive common answers to moral questions.

Norton argues that we should sidestep debates about underlying principles; abandon the search for a unified, monistic environmental philosophy; and look instead for common values through a pragmatic epistemology. As pragmatic philosopher C.S. Peirce argued, truth and objectivity arise from the self-correcting process of scientific inquiry. From that inquiry, we can establish alternative values that will compete successfully in policy making with the utilitarian values of welfare economics.

From that inquiry, too, comes a definition of sustainability and its relationship to human values. The resilience of healthy ecosystems is the foundation for nature's creativity, its capacity to dissipate energy, to maintain structure, to repair damage—in short, to remain productive. Preserving this capacity, Norton says, is the essence of sustainability, which, in turn, is the basis for human opportunity, freedom, and creativity. Thus, the capacity to live sustainably is ultimately the source of human values.

To Deep Ecologists, this link between nature and human values is anathema because it appears to create just another instrumental view of nature. Norton's rebuttal is threefold. First, he argues that both Economists and Deep Ecologists incorrectly adopt an "entity orientation." Both groups count things to measure value. Economists count consumers' preferences for one thing or another; Deep Ecologists count ecological elements such as genes, species, or habitats. Norton rejects both approaches. Not only are natural systems and processes the *source* of value, but "the extent to which the creativity of a natural system serves, and is served by, human creativity" is the proper *measure* of value. Second, suggests Norton, this perspective can be universally agreed upon because it rejects monism, which creates a false dichotomy between instrumental and inherent values. Third, this perspective typically generates policies similar to those that emerge from the Deep Ecologist's inherent value perspective.

In addition to accommodating instrumental and non-instrumental values in the present, a successful theory of sustainability must accommodate trade-offs between present and future generations. To do so, Norton draws on Edmund Burke's definition of society as a partnership between those who are living and those yet to be born. The key question here is how to convert the Economist's notion of "weak" sustainability, in which all that is owed to the future is a bequest of economic wealth no less than we have today, into "strong" sustainability, in which the economic bequest is accompanied by preservation of non-economically defined "natural" capital, such as gene pools or natural habitats. The answer, Norton explains, is not to preserve natural resources because of their inherent value, but to adopt a

modified "safe minimum standard" rule of conservation in which natural resources should be preserved when costs of doing so are not merely reasonable but "bearable" and doing so preserves freedom and options for future generations.

With these arguments, *Searching for Sustainability* describes what it means to "think like a mountain." Norton closes the collection by explaining how communities can collectively think like a mountain to create and implement workable environmental policies. Workable policies will arise from adaptive political processes that are guided by sound philosophical principles and that are analogous to adaptive natural processes. The policy-making process should seek neither to reach consensus on underlying values nor to reconcile competing values with technical methods. There simply is no principled way to do so. Instead, an effective process will create an epistemological community of policy makers who share an approach to understanding questions and problems. The process will deliberately bypass the search for consensus and instead identify concrete indicators of long-term development paths that reflect multiple values. The search for sustainability lies in evaluating these development paths: a community lives sustainably when it preserves, for itself and future generations, options that maintain ecological integrity and social identity.

Readers frustrated with polarized and polarizing policy debates between Deep Ecologists and Economists will find guidance and optimism in Norton's essays because he shows that these disputants can work together in a principled process that defines "sustainability" and creates workable policy. Norton thus successfully defines sustainability as a policy goal.

Because the collection documents the evolution of Norton's thought, the essays often rework the same ground. Readers, therefore, may first want to read the introductions to each section to get the lay of the philosophical land that Norton explores and then sample essays in each section. There will remain much to gain by carefully re-reading in the order assembled.

In his preface, Norton expresses hope that his work will pave the way to less contentious, more focused policy making and implementation. His ideas and recommendations deserve close attention and thoughtful application. They would be more accessible to a larger audience if presented more concisely. Even so, *Searching for Sustainability* provides a good start down a difficult road.

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