

# Justificatory Moral Pluralism: A Novel Form of Environmental Pragmatism

Andre Santos Campos<sup>1</sup>, Sofia Guedes Vaz<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ifilnova, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Nova University of Lisbon,  
[andrecampos@fcsb.unl.pt](mailto:andrecampos@fcsb.unl.pt)

<sup>2</sup>Ifilnova, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Nova University of Lisbon,  
[sofiagvaz007@gmail.com](mailto:sofiagvaz007@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** Moral reasoning typically informs environmental decision-making by measuring the possible outcomes of policies or actions in light of a preferred ethical theory. This method is subject to many problems. Environmental pragmatism tries to overcome them, but it suffers also from some pitfalls. This paper proposes a new method of environmental pragmatism that avoids the problems of both the traditional method of environmental moral reasoning and of the general versions of environmental pragmatism. We call it ‘justificatory moral pluralism’ – it develops the intuition that normative ethical theories need not be mutually exclusive. This leaves room for important forms of pluralist environmental ethics that do not require a once-and-for-all prior commitment to an ethical theory when deciding about policies or courses of action related to the protection of the environment. Justificatory moral pluralism offers a viable solution to the recurrent conflicts between efficient environmental decisions and the need for moral reasoning.

**Keywords:** environmental pragmatism; justificatory moral pluralism; moral reasoning; moral pluralism; value pluralism; methodological pluralism

Moral reasoning typically informs environmental decision-making by considering the possible outcomes of available policies or actions in light of a preferred ethical theory such as consequentialism, deontology or virtue ethics. This method is, however, often problematic to environmental ethics due to its rigidity and, especially, to the fact that it presupposes a prior commitment to theoretical frameworks that are not easy to grasp and that hardly facilitate expeditious decision-making in favour of the environment. As an alternative, environmental pragmatists have argued that theoretical debates in environmental philosophy hinder the ability of the environmental movement to forge agreement on basic policy imperatives. The pragmatist setting aims to lead environmental philosophers away from such theoretical debates, and toward more practical ones. The basic tenet of environmental pragmatism is moral pluralism, which offers theoretical grounds for a minimum consensus in favour of efficient and timely environmental action. Environmental pragmatism, however, is often exposed to a series of problems levelled by moral philosophers, among which figures the apparent undervaluing of moral reasoning in environmental decision-making.

This paper proposes a new method of environmental pragmatism that avoids the problems of both the traditional method of environmental moral reasoning and of the general versions of environmental pragmatism. We call it ‘justificatory moral pluralism’ – it develops the intuition that normative ethical theories need not be mutually exclusive. This leaves room for important forms of pluralist environmental ethics that do not require a once-and-for-all prior commitment to an ethical theory when deciding about policies or courses of action related to the protection of the environment.

The paper is divided into five sections. The first describes monistic forms of moral reasoning in environmental ethics and the pluralist alternative provided by environmental pragmatism. The second presents a series of problems faced by the pragmatist strategy.

The third introduces ‘justificatory moral pluralism’ as a new method of environmental pragmatism. The fourth and fifth sections explain how this novel strategy avoids the problems identified in section two. In the end, it should be clear that justificatory moral pluralism adds value to environmental decision-making as it offers a viable solution to the recurrent conflicts between environmental decisions and the need for moral reasoning.

## MONISTIC AND PLURALIST MORAL REASONING IN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRAGMATISM

Disagreements in environmental ethics are often about values (Corner et al.: 2014), how to rank them, and how to prioritise them. The bulk of the literature on the normative aspects of certain instances of environmental ethics revolves around problems that arise in cases of value incommensurability, or when values cannot compete. The role of ethics consists then in searching for criteria that assess the legitimacy of policies. Environmental ethics can be paramount to decision-making in this context insofar as it provides evaluative tools about possible policies or courses of action to be adopted by different agents regarding the environment.

The typical way in which moral reasoning informs environmental decision-making consists in measuring the several possible outcomes of available policies or courses of action in light of a specific set of evaluative criteria determined by a preferred ethical theory such as consequentialism, deontology or virtue ethics. Let us call this METHOD 1. The agent can adopt environmental policies A, B, or C, according to criteria determined by the ethical theory of her choice. The ethical theory operates in an all-inclusive and all-or-nothing fashion with regard to agents and situations; in that sense, it is a guide to action. Different ethical theories might lead to different actions by applying

different evaluative criteria. For instance, deontology might support policy A as the most legitimate, whereas utilitarianism endorses a cost-benefit method that legitimises policy B. Once the ethical theory is established, finding the right action is a top-down procedure.

METHOD 1 is often problematic because, if rightness is to be a meaningful concept, then conflicting positions cannot be both valid at the same time. The (morally) right policy is either A or B or C; but whereas deontologists maintain that policy A is the morally right one, utilitarians maintain that policy B is the right one. The all-encompassing nature and the exclusive character of each ethical theory entails that the prior commitment to one theory determines unchangeably the values applicable to available responses to environmental problems. Such rigidity can be frustrating to environmentalists, especially when legitimacy differs from efficiency. For instance, an individual person may identify A as the most legitimate course of action in light of her preferred ethical theory (for instance, utilitarianism) in matters concerning climate change mitigation, even though the course of action B (considered legitimate by a different ethical theory, such as deontology) would be far more efficient in motivating her to engage in actions favouring mitigation. And a political institution may identify B as the most legitimate policy in light of the adopted ethical theory (for instance, deontology) in matters concerning climate change mitigation, even though policy A (endorsed as legitimate by utilitarian considerations) would be far more efficient in producing overall mitigation.

The main problem here lies not in the apparent divorce between morality and efficiency – as problematic as that may be, given that ethics would seem then more of a hindrance, rather than a contributor, to productive decision-making in environmental politics – but in the apparent unsuitability of monistic forms of environmental ethics.

A strategy that aimed to avoid the attrition between morality and efficiency in environmental ethics by rejecting the commitment to monistic forms of moral reasoning was ‘environmental pragmatism’, which appeared in the mid-1980s, but developed strongly from the 1990s onwards. Realising that ‘theoretical debates were hindering the ability of the environmental movement to forge agreement on basic policy imperatives’ (Light & Katz: 1996), environmental pragmatists such as Anthony Weston (1985; 1992), Erik Katz (1987), Bryan Norton (1991; 2005), Ben Minteer (2001; 2012), Andrew Light (1996; 2002), Kelly Parker (1996), Daniel A. Farber (1999), Aristotelis Santas (2003), Keith Hirokawa (2002), Peter Wenz (2003), Sandra Rosenthal and Rogene Buchholz (Rosenthal & Buchholz 1996), wanted to demonstrate that philosophers could contribute to the practical resolution of environmental problems. Environmental philosophy should look into the meaning, the causes and the possible solutions for the environmental crisis, avoid locking itself into theoretical discussions. Environmental ethicists should help ‘the environmental community to make better ethical arguments in support of the policies on which our views already largely converge’ (Light 2002: 443).

Not all environmental pragmatists defend the same concepts such as stances in relation to the intrinsic value of nature, non-anthropocentrism or the importance of following American pragmatism. Nevertheless, one characteristic that stands out as common to all self-proclaimed environmental pragmatists is their vindication of moral pluralism and the adoption of an ‘ends-in-view’ approach to environmental ethics. Although monistic theories, such as consequentialism, deontology or virtue ethics, might be theoretically incommensurable, it is still possible to reach consensus. For example, one can accept the moral consideration of animals, either using a criterion of sentience or a criterion of respect for the teleological centre of life. They are theoretically distinct, but their purpose – the moral consideration of animals – is the same. Environmental

pragmatists regard philosophy as a real contribution to finding viable solutions to environmental problems rather than a discipline delaying possible solutions because of theoretical incompatibilities.

The three central aspects of environmental pragmatism are therefore to accept moral pluralism, to reduce the importance of theoretical debates and to consider that practical matters allow us to arrive at a political consensus more quickly. Overall, environmental pragmatism seems to reject the idea of absolute knowledge or metaphysics and focuses on the importance of real-life experiences. It highlights the search for values in their multiple, complex and indeterminate dimensions as the basis for the analysis of environmental philosophy problems. Environmental pragmatism sees individual organisms as part of their environment and acknowledges the continuity theory between biological creatures and nature. Thus, it dismisses the recurring dualisms or dichotomies, such as anthropocentrism versus non-anthropocentrism, individualism versus holism, intrinsic value of nature versus instrumental value, which are regarded as disruptive to constructive dialogues.

Pragmatism attempts above all to agree on different philosophical assumptions for specific environmental problems. The urgency of the ecological crisis requires a form of meta-theoretical compatibilism between conflicting theories appealing to tolerance and a joint commitment to solving environmental problems by developing a more public philosophy that focuses on arguments ‘that resonate with the moral intuitions that most people carry around with them on an everyday basis’ (Light 2002: 444).

## PROBLEMS WITH THE PRAGMATIST STRATEGY

Several lines of criticism have been levelled against environmental pragmatism. For instance, some maintain that the pragmatic approach conflates with economism, utilitarianism, and political expediency (Rolston 1988; Callicott 2003; Eckersley 2002) and that the non-anthropocentric view is a necessary baseline of environmental ethics (Katz 1997; Callicott 1999). With regard to the alternative strategy of moral reasoning that environmental pragmatism aims to introduce to overcome the gap between morality and efficiency, there are certain problems worth noting.

First, environmental pragmatists tend to rely on a misconception of moral pluralism. The expression ‘moral pluralism’ generally refers to the view that there are many different moral values making it synonymous with ‘value pluralism’. The question about value pluralism is whether different values (e.g., liberty, happiness, etc.) may be equally fundamental and yet in conflict with each other. Value pluralism, as opposed to value monism, argues that occasional conflict between values is to be expected in individual lives and social affairs, and in many instances, it cannot be mediated by appeal to a higher standard. Ethical theories can be either pluralist or monist about value, and it is perfectly possible to be a value pluralist without being a pragmatist (Moriarty 2006).

In other words, value pluralism can cut across different sorts of ethical theory. For instance, the question of whether a deontological theory is pluralist is a question about how many fundamental principles there are. Certain deontologists can be described as monists, arguing that there is one overarching principle (Kant 1948), whereas others are pluralist insofar as they believe there is a plurality of *prima facie* duties (Ross 1930). Consequentialists, by contrast, regard the question of pluralism in terms of determining how many fundamental goods there are. Consequentialist value monists understand happiness or pleasure or wellbeing as a fundamental value realised by goods such as friendship, knowledge, beauty and so on, which are then merely instrumental values.

However, consequentialists need not be monists necessarily. For instance, some consequentialists apply the principle of utility in a multifaceted way by assuming that there are differences in the qualities and the quantities of utility in different goods. Since different sorts of pleasure might have different sorts of value, utility depends on a plurality of values (Sen 1980). Even consequentialists who claim that the only value to be maximised is pleasure can be pluralists if that pleasure is regarded as plural, that is, as an objective set of goods that are fundamentally plural (Griffin 1986; Fletcher 2013; Lin 2014). The same applies to virtue ethicists. The teleological character of virtue ethics often seems to imply the existence of one specific virtue as more easily defined in terms of its relationship to *eudaemonia*, for instance, thereby justifying monist views. But virtue ethics expresses no necessary commitment to monism because several virtues are needed for attaining the ultimate end (Swanton 2003). Even if virtues are regarded as merely instrumental because they are simply those character traits that benefit their possessor in reaching *eudaemonia* (Annas 2011; LeBar 2013; Badhwar 2014; Bloomfield 2014), this does not preclude pluralism. Since virtue ethics focuses on the character of moral agents, it can be interested equally in principles of action and the pursuit of excellent traits of character.

Applied to environmental pragmatism, this setting might entail that value monism, rather than value pluralism, would be the typical standpoint of those focused on overcoming the gap between morality and efficiency. The ends-in-view approach presumes that environmental protective action is a self-justified value that can harmonise with other values that different agents rank differently. The environment operates here as a supervalue. But this does not have to be the case even to pragmatists. Anthropocentric approaches to environmental ethics, for instance, engage in a task of balancing the environment with equally important values to humans, thereby displaying a pluralist

conception of value. Unlike what is often stated (Pearson 2014: 338), the emphasis on morally justified actions to protect the environment, according to the standard position of environmental pragmatists, does not entail necessarily the rejection of value monism. Rather, it entails neither value pluralism nor value monism at all. Further clarification of what moral pluralism means for pragmatists is wanting.

Second, most environmental pragmatists often seem to overstate the degree to which pragmatism is an alternative ethical theory to consequentialism, deontology or virtue ethics (Minteer 2017: 537). On the one hand, its sensitivity to facts (the values that people actually have, the incentives they actually follow), when taken to the extreme, implies that debates about the basic tenets of morality are to be always considered open-ended (Minteer 2012). This is likely to produce little or no appeal for those environmental supporters who seek a more ‘emotionally stirring, intellectually flamboyant, normative theory’ (Mintz 2004: 22) in the likes of utilitarianism, deontology or virtue ethics. On the other hand, by focusing primarily on incentives rather than reasons, pragmatism opens the door to compatibility with competing ethical theories. If someone is more motivated to follow a specific course of action that protects the environment because she is a utilitarian, this incentive is endorsed by pragmatism. The agent can thus be a pragmatist and a utilitarian at the same time, precisely because pragmatism is not necessarily an alternative to other ethical theories.

A third problem displayed by environmental pragmatism is the emphasis put on moral *incentives* to act in favour of the environment. This is particularly noticeable in Andrew Light’s notion of ‘methodological pragmatism’. Unlike philosophical pragmatism, which involves investigation into the value of nature (Light 2004: 557), methodological pragmatism consists in the effort to articulate arguments that will be morally motivating to both policymakers and the general public in order to promote

policies which protect the environment successfully. The problem is that incentives are more likely to be the object of inquiry of disciplines such as psychology or behavioural economics than ethics. Moral philosophy inquires chiefly into the *reasons* for considering something (actions, characters, policies, states of affairs, etc.) as right or wrong, rather than into the actual motivations people have about that something. One would expect people to be motivated by the morally right reasons, but that is often not the case. People can perform actions that conform to morality, even though their motives for performing them are not moral per se (e.g., we help a friend in need just to feel magnanimous); and people can follow courses of action that do not conform to morality, even though they tried to do the right thing. (e.g., we unknowingly give poison to our sick friend rather than the medicine we thought we were giving her). This is what is implied in the accusation that environmental pragmatism falls short of becoming an environmental philosophy (Samuelsson 2010). By avoiding theoretical debates about what constitutes right or wrong in environmental ethics, pragmatism seems unlikely to provide appropriate answers to a good many disputed environmental questions (Callicott 2009). Its potential for informing decisions to protect the environment appears then to rely more on an undervalue of moral reasoning than on an original conception of moral reasoning (Lucas 2002).

Fourth, the admixture of fact-sensitivity and the ends-in-view approach that is typical of pragmatism is difficult to balance in a broad spectrum of moral values, and many pragmatists fail to accomplish a satisfying level of equilibrium. Two problems follow from this. On the one hand, overreliance on fact-sensitivity, in the sense of starting from the moral values and incentives that people already have in view of a given moral end (the protection of the environment), produces a chicken-and-egg kind of problem when the subject of ‘moral framing’ enters the equation. Several studies show that the different ways environmental problems are presented to various stakeholders have a

relevant impact on how they generate and express opinions about those problems and consequently on how they act (Aasen & Vatn 2020; Hurlstone et al. 2014; Spence et al. 2010; Wiest et al. 2015; Wolsko et al. 2016). In this light, the moral frame is a form of priming whereby stakeholders are nudged into certain kinds of behaviour. In framing, the moral context highlights the incentives people already have for behaving in one way rather than another – when faced with decisions concerning policies A or B, if the frame highlights the incentives for policy A rather than for policy B, stakeholders tend to prioritise their incentives for A and to favour A rather than B. Pragmatism seems to follow up on previously held moral values, preferences and motivations – however, people’s values, preferences and motivations depend upon the way they are attached to frames, and pragmatism is a way of framing. By neglecting theoretical debates in order to produce the most efficient fact-related environmental decisions, pragmatism introduces a theoretical frame that helps to shape the very values, preferences and incentives that lead to such actions. It is constitutive of new moral facts, thereby engaging in the very theoretical task that it aimed to undervalue in the first place.

On the other hand, if a given society and the vast majority of its citizens behave themselves in a way conducive to the protection of the environment (the axiological end) because they value some sort of eco-fascism (the moral fact) collectively, pragmatism seems dangerously close to supporting some moral form of the ignominious maxim ‘the end justifies any means’. Certain pragmatists realise this difficulty, and that is why they emphasise the open-ended character of the moral debates about the environment, thereby making a conceptual connection between democracy and methodological pragmatism (Norton 2005; Minter 2012). However, democracy is regarded by these authors strictly in a methodological sense, as involving the participation of all those potentially affected by environmental decision-making procedures – no substantive values are added, such as

liberty and the principles of equal concern and respect typical of contemporary liberal democracies, thereby leaving room to morally endorsed cases in which individuals relinquish their freedom and wellbeing to subject themselves to a dictatorship leading to a healthy environment. In political contexts characterised by forms of organisation inimical of democratic egalitarianism, pragmatism can be counterproductive insofar as it reinforces moral beliefs in abusive scenarios, even if friendly to the environment (Maboloc 2016; Sarkki et al. 2017).

#### A NOVEL METHOD OF ENVIRONMENTAL PRAGMATISM: JUSTIFICATORY MORAL PLURALISM

The need to overcome the difficulties inherent in METHOD 1 requires a pluralist form of moral reasoning that avoids the problems into which environmental pragmatism usually falls. This new form of reasoning – let us call it *justificatory moral pluralism* (JMP) – is plural in the sense that it involves freedom from a prior commitment to a single ethical theory in decision-making. JMP is thus a form of environmental pragmatism that depends on the plurality of normative frameworks of justification.

What exactly do we mean by JMP in environmental ethics? First and foremost, it is a form of environmental pragmatism insofar as it respects the need for environmental ethics to develop a practical and normative mission beyond its rich theoretical one, assuming a more significant role in decision-making explicitly. Environmental ethics should be able to inform decision-making more efficiently, thereby adding concerns with efficiency to the fundamental ethical concerns about legitimacy and goodness – this is one of the core tenets of environmental pragmatism. But, unlike what is often stated about environmental pragmatism in general, JMP does not imply that theoretical debates in

environmental philosophy hinder the ability of the environmental movement to forge agreement on basic policy imperatives and to focus on more practical and pragmatically motivated debates (Samuelsson 2010). Rather, JMP implies theoretical problem-solving mechanisms at the service of decision-making.

Much like general accounts of pragmatism, JMP is tolerant of different environmental values and of different ways of valuing the environment. Rather than starting from a presupposed ethical theory to decide on legitimate action towards the environment, and thus seeking to persuade people to value ‘the right things’, JMP starts from the values and motivations people have about the environment (Palmer 2014) – for example, caring about the future of their children rather than about the intrinsic value of nature, or vice versa – and tries to reconcile them in moral terms with the available environmental policies and courses of action that seem most efficient in each given situation. Unlike general accounts of pragmatism, though, JMP consists not in prioritising efficient decision-making but in sorting out the right set of moral values and principles that can legitimise the most efficient available forms of environmental policy and action. JMP is necessary if we are to adjudicate between the various competing environmental ethics we encounter. It is not enough that a specific policy or action conforms to the principles of some or other ethical theory – it should conform to the best justified one in every case that calls for an efficient response to environmental problems.

JMP works backwards from the available set of possible policies and courses of action. For instance, for every policy or action that aims to mitigate, adapt or compensate the effects of climate change with a minimum level of efficiency, JMP identifies what reasons are there for believing that the policy or action in question is morally correct. This reason-seeking method establishes the grounds of the most efficient policies or actions regarding environmental protection and also avoids immoral-efficient and moral-

inefficient solutions. JMP aims at enhancing the moral acceptability of environmental policy or action to be adopted by different agents. Pluralism is paramount in this process because different ethical theories can provide more substantial justificatory reasons for certain policies or actions depending on the nature of the agents and on the current states of affairs. So, political institutions that aim to maximise policies of climate change mitigation may find a more robust moral support in consequentialist ethical grounds. In contrast, individuals that can act in ways that mitigate climate change may find stronger moral reasons to do so in virtue ethics. For example, an individual motivated to use non-polluting means of transportation might feel easily frustrated if her decision is grounded in consequentialism – if nobody else around her does the same, she is likely to have the impression that her action failed to produce critical overall consequences. But if the same action is based on virtue-oriented grounds, frustration is less likely to occur. Conversely, political institutions that assess the viability of pursuing policies such as curbing traffic in certain parts of the city or campaigning for the use of public transports might find stronger justifications in consequentialism.

The method of justification (JMP) is the opposite of the typical way (METHOD 1) in which moral reasoning informs environmental decisions. Different agents facing environmental problems and challenges have a variety of available possible policies or actions. What each agent should do follows from the set of available values, norms and policies that binds the agent. The ethical theory operates as the justification for the axiological set that binds the agent, and consequently also for the actions and decisions that follow from this set. Ethical theories help inform decisions in this sense by providing the best moral justification for choosing one course of action rather than another. Finding the right action is now a bottom-up procedure whereby the agent is required to adopt the course of action that is based on the most robust moral justification. The moral agent is

no longer dependent on one single normative theory that guides her actions in all circumstances.

This method requires a reconsideration of the way ethical conflicts take place in environmental ethics insofar as it endorses the possibility that they can be understood in terms of a conflict between mutually incompatible, albeit equally valid, ethical doctrines. Rather than assuming that there is a dispute between ethical positions where only one can win, JMP engages in a dialogue between mutually valid, even if possibly incompatible, ethical positions. What is presupposed here is that such conflicting positions share a significant set of assumptions that allow for an understanding between them about the moral grounds of courses of action that affect the environment. Through a thorough JMP process, seemingly incompatible ethical theories gain validity. Accepting the moral justifications asserts that the end is valid, and accepting pluralism asserts that the results are accepted by all. JMP helps to overcome sectarianism in environmental ethics and policy.

JMP's pragmatic nature sidesteps these theoretical difficulties and is open to any kind of ethical theory – that is, it presupposes their validity. This is not to be confused with moral scepticism, and far less with moral relativism, the view that all values or value systems are equally true. Instead, JMP is committed to the moral value of the environment and motivated by the importance of ethics for environmental decision-making. It informs environmental decisions not merely by establishing the legitimacy of the most efficient policies or actions (Adger et al. 2017), but also by contributing to the very efficiency of those policies or actions insofar as robust moral reasons can often become important motivators – they increase the acceptability by different agents of the most efficient environment-friendly course of action.

According to general accounts of pragmatism, environmental ethics raises many questions whose levels of difficulty and uncertainty often hinder, rather than inform, efficient decision-making. Should we protect individual species or entire ecosystems? Should scientific analysis take precedence within decision-making practice? Should we care about the environment because it is economically valuable or because nature has intrinsic value? How do we establish an ethical trade-off between our current needs and those of future persons? According to pragmatism, we should work with what we have and proceed to effective decisions rather than remaining stuck in the search for the correct answers to these theoretical problems. But JMP emphasises the importance of providing reasonable solutions to these problems. The level of efficiency of the decisions that are to be made may depend on how robust the moral answer to some or all of these questions is for different agents in different circumstances. The advantage of pluralism is that it does not involve a commitment to a once-and-for-all set of truth conditions that applies to all agents in all circumstances. But truth conditions matter – justification is the task by which the most efficient policies or actions for protecting the environment become grounded in ideal truth conditions.

#### THE MEANING OF ‘PLURALISM’ IN JMP

The term ‘plural’ reveals a wide semantic field of possibilities. There are several kinds of moral pluralism. JMP is different from most other usages of the expression ‘moral pluralism’. First, unlike what occurs with environmental pragmatism, JMP is not synonymous with value pluralism. True, the non-necessary-prior commitment to a specific ethical theory finds a fruitful ground in value pluralism, especially when certain

problems seem more pressing than others. This is especially noteworthy in environmental ethics.

Some environmental issues, such as climate change, unlike pure scientific ‘tame’ problems, also tend to be social, political and ethical, and therefore coined as ‘wicked’ problems, implying that there are no solutions in the sense of definitive and objective answers (Rittel and Weber 1973). Therefore, they need innovative and creative approaches such as complexity ethics (Lyon, 2018), acknowledging the non-linearity of reality and claiming the need to incorporate a polycentric approach to climate governance.

Value pluralism is a recognition of the complexity of life in the sense that the themes analysed by ethicists are variegated, especially when confronting big questions. This variety is intuitively grasped by environmental activists, who seem to coexist peacefully with a plurality of environmental principles (Horwitz 1994). In this sense, why should our ethical commitments be derived from a single principle determined by a single ethical theory? No single ethical theory is immune to evaluative criteria whose prominence is to be found in other ethical theories. For instance, virtue rules are also part of virtue ethics, and both Kantians and utilitarians might want to add an Aristotelian account of the emotions and remain Kantians and utilitarians (Hursthouse 1999). There are forms of utilitarianism that are virtue-oriented and versions of rule-utilitarianism that are virtue-oriented, and it is possible to formulate virtue-oriented forms of Kantian ethics and act-utilitarianism (Sandler 2010).

However, this does not mean necessarily that the prior non-commitment to an ethical theory must express value pluralism of some sort. Moral environmental pluralists acknowledge that we may have different moral obligations or responsibilities derived from different principles for distinct natural entities such as animals, non-sentient beings

or ecosystems. When a specific course of action involves a conflict between protecting members of a given species and protecting the ecosystem as a whole, moral environmental pluralists endeavour to determine which moral principle applies rightfully to the particular situation. But this sort of moral reasoning can be compatible with a commitment to a specific ethical theory insofar as different moral principles can be encapsulated by the ethical theory of choice. Environmentalists can be deontologists and still believe we have equal moral values to humans, animals, and ecosystems. Correlatively, it is possible to think of non-committed value monists focused on the protection of the environment as the fundamental value from which all other values are to be derived and seeking in each case for the ethical theory that provides the most robust justification to such protection (Callicott 1999). Environmentalists can have a deep commitment to ecocentrism rather than anthropocentrism (or to biocentrism versus sentientism, or deep ecology versus social ecology, etc.), for instance, and yet remain neutral to consequentialist, deontological or virtue theory perspectives. Debates on which underlying value takes precedence in the context of environmental ethics are illustrations of environmental value pluralism, not of JMP in decision-making. Some maintain that environmental policies or actions should be evaluated solely on the basis of how they affect humans (Baxter 1974; Norton 1988), whereas others appeal to life-centred ethics (Attfield 1983; Goodpaster 1978; Taylor 1986) that may even endorse an extreme form of biotic egalitarianism (Naes 1979). None of these positions – anthropocentric or non-anthropocentric, particularist or speciesist, humanist or ecocentrist – requires a prior commitment to consequentialism, deontology or virtue ethics. The prior non-commitment applies equally to value pluralists and monists.

JMP also differs from political pluralism, which concerns the question of what sort of restrictions governments can put on people's freedom to act according to their

values. One version of political pluralism is connected to moral value pluralism, claiming that there are irreducibly plural moral values and that this justifies a liberal political system since it is the most tolerant of diverse human values (Berlin 1969; Crowder 2002; Galston 2002). But even this connection is not necessary. As Isaiah Berlin, one of the main founding-fathers of moral pluralism, points out, it is entirely consistent to eschew liberalism, yet maintain a version of value pluralism (Berlin 1991; Galipeau 1994: 58-9). Certain advocates of pluralism (Gray 1993; Kekes 1993: 199-203; Hampshire 1989: 142-6) have raised doubts about the compatibility of liberalism and value pluralism because liberalism supposedly prioritises the value of individuality and equality, in contrast with forms of pluralism that reject such ranking (Wolf 1992) and lament the exclusion or the underestimation of other values. And just as political liberalism does not rely necessarily on the claim that there are plural moral values (Dzur 1998), the same applies to JMP. Political pluralism is based on liberalism's reliance on fallibilism as a methodological assumption in decision-making, which implies a comprehensive view of different ethical theories. Conversely, there is no reason to believe that the non-commitment to an ethical theory entails the endorsement of political pluralism.

Also, as an account of moral justification, JMP shares a few relevant characteristics with Rawls's reflective equilibrium, a method in moral deliberation in which we work back and forth between our judgements (or beliefs, intuitions, considerations, etc.) about particular instances and the principles (or reasons, theoretical considerations, rules, etc.) that bear on accepting such judgements, revising any of the elements when necessary to achieve a reasonable coherence among them. Like reflective equilibrium, JMP relies on typical moral judgements on particular cases related to the environment to be revisable. JMP also focuses on the outcomes of the challenges posed to existing judgements by arguments that derive from diverse positions in ethics (Rawls

1999: 43). In accordance with a developed notion of overlapping consensus (Rawls 1993: 386), JMP allows that the rationale for moral action arises from distinctive features of different, albeit sufficiently comprehensive, moral views. Different moral agents might support the same kind of action that leads to a revised conception of the importance of the environment, even if for entirely different reasons stemming from different theoretical backgrounds (e.g., a Kantian, a Millian, a religious person, etc.), which in turn are also revisable (Schroeter 2004).

However, JMP differs from reflective equilibrium in important respects. First, it does not consist of a coherent defence of moral justification. In reflective equilibrium, coherence arises not only when judgements are in line at all levels of generality, but also when they provide support for other judgements – coherence is the relation of consistency between the broadest set of judgements and beliefs and the moral principles that support them. Moral judgement is justified if it coheres with the rest of one's judgements about right action, after appropriate revisions. But JMP regards coherence between judgements and beliefs as secondary. As an ends-in-view approach typical of pragmatism, what matters is that the normative framework justifying a specific course of action for the protection of the environment is consistent with its aim. Coherence results from the relations between efficiency and the underlying reasons for actions related to the protection of the environment. At most, JMP resembles a narrow form of reflective equilibrium when it comes to environmental protection, not a wide reflective equilibrium (Brandt 1999). But it is still open to sacrificing general coherence between moral beliefs if that is the price to pay for robust moral support in favour of the most efficient environmental-friendly action.

Second, even though JMP retains the importance of revisability of moral judgements and beliefs, it treats the environment as a foundational moral value, even if

still defeasible (Nichols 2012). The basic assumption of JMP as part of environmental pragmatism is that the underlying intuition that the environment is worthy and in need of urgent protection requires further justificatory methods. Revisability of this primary moral intuition about the environment is very limited. Third, JMP's scope is defined in terms of the ends of environmental pragmatism. JMP applies whenever a course of action or policy relates to the environment in some way, regardless of the agent. Unlike reflective equilibrium, which relies on moral deliberation by political agents, JMP is a form of justification available to all agents capable of affecting the environment, regardless of their political status.

JMP should also be distinguished from methodological pluralism, an influential thesis in ecological economics that advocates the absence of meta-principles for the choice of method for scientific inquiry and the subsequent use of a range of methodologies (Norgaard 1989; Samuels 1997; Dow 1997). For instance, the endorsement of a cost-benefit analysis seems to imply a commitment to utilitarianism, which mischaracterises the complexity and variety of environmental systems – hence the need for multiple insights to guard against the tendency to oversimplification developed by monistic methodologies. In this light, methodological pluralism seems very akin to JMP. But there is a striking difference between the two. Whereas methodological pluralism refers to methodological diversity to enhance adaptive capacity when trying to cope with unpredictable environmental challenges, thereby depending on the absence of meta-principles and applicable solely to economics, JMP refers to the prior non-commitment to a specific ethical theory when moral reasoning informs environmental decision-making. Thus, JMP deals with the legitimacy of economic analyses, and it can embrace certain kinds of methodological meta-principles just as long as those principles do not derive from a pre-determined ethical theory. Methodological pluralism often seems

too concerned with the rejection of utilitarian operators due to the supposed ‘intrinsic value of nature’ (Norgaard 2005), whereas JMP leaves the door open to any ethical theory and any kind of underlying value.

#### HOW JMP AVOIDS THE PROBLEMS OF PRAGMATISM

Besides not requiring a necessary commitment with value pluralism, JMP sidesteps many of the other problems to which environmental pragmatism is often subject. For instance, the non-necessary commitment to an ethical theory leaves room to moral arguments derived from any theoretical settings if they aim to provide robust justification to efficient decision-making procedures. JMP is then a method for assessing the legitimacy of the most efficient courses of action for the protection of the environment, not an ethical theory. This form of pragmatism requires openness to the idea of possibility and creativity in problem-solving without neglecting the importance of finding sufficiently strong moral grounds for each possible solution. It also emphasises that the richness of human existence lies in its multiple relationships within the natural world. It should not be regarded as yet another theory of environmental ethics, rather as providing a platform of understanding between different theories.

Also, JMP focuses on *reasons* to act in favour of the environment, not on *incentives*. JMP is far less sensitive to moral facts than general accounts of environmental pragmatism. Justification tries to establish the reasons that help to ascertain, amidst the range of possible courses of action that seem most efficient in favour of the environment, what is the (morally) right action or policy. But it is still fact-sensitive in the sense that it does not assume that the criteria for assessing rightness are the same in all circumstances nor that they derive from the same theoretical framework. The set of circumstances that

contextualise the decision that is to be made (e.g., the agent, the moment, possible policies and actions, the level of efficiency forecasted, the spatial scope, and moral facts such as values, incentives, preferences, etc.) can be justified differently by normative criteria deriving from different ethical theories – the (morally) right answer depends on the criteria that best fit into the context for the production of the most effective environment-friendly decisions.

This fact-sensitive openness can tip the balance in favour of possible courses of action that are morally justified when compared to competing courses of action that lack moral justification. But it can also inform moral decisions without relying on a prior meta-ethical commitment. If an agent has to decide about pursuing policy A or B, both can be (morally) right (or wrong) depending on the adopted ethical theory that provides the evaluative tools for justification – policy A is justified by deontology, whereas policy B is justified by some form of consequentialism. Justification can help inform decisions by breaking ties such as this. The tie is broken by *robustness*, that is, by choosing the ethical theory (not the actual policy A or B) that in such circumstances provides reasons to produce decisions that are most likely to benefit the environment. JMP still deals with reasons about what is right or wrong, but it remains fact-sensitive insofar as it provides moral justification for the most efficient courses of action for protecting the environment depending on each decision-making context.

As an illustration, suppose the following scenario.

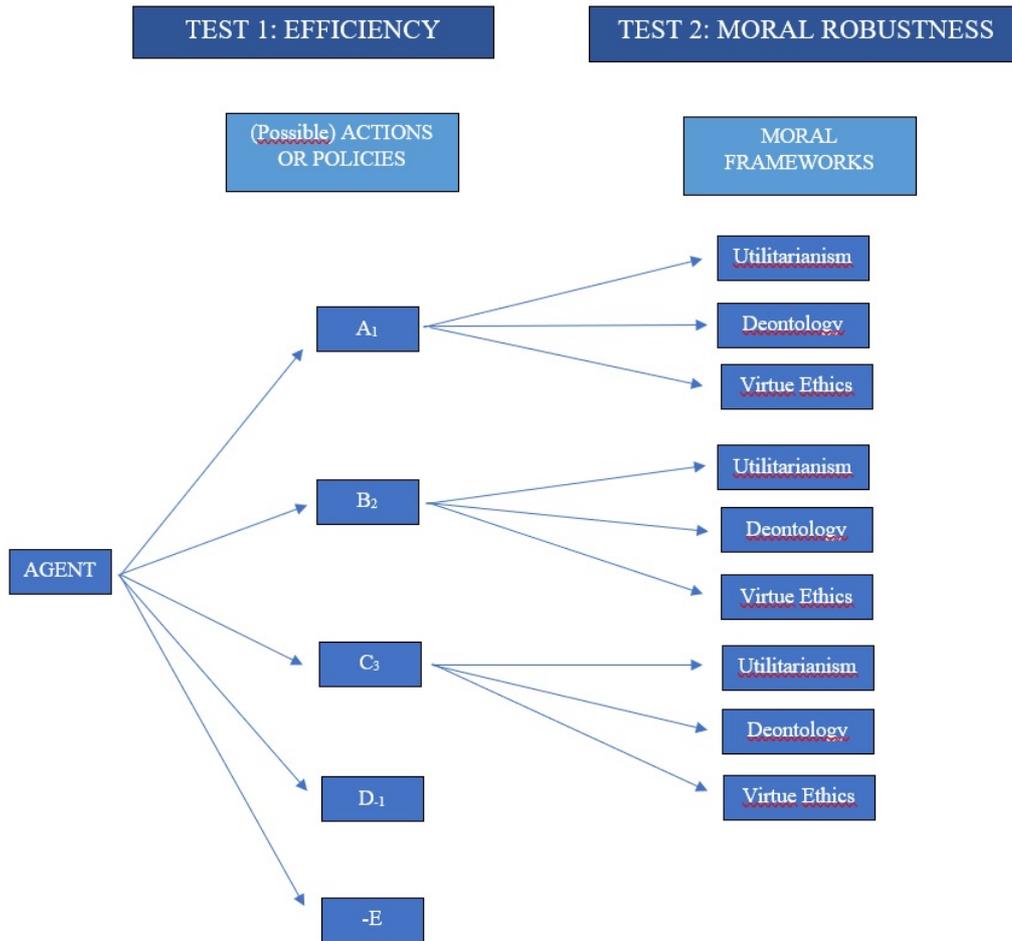


Figure 1.

One moral agent (an individual person, a non-state actor, a national or international body, etc.) has the possibility of deciding between five courses of action that affect the environment. The first test is that of forecasting efficiency in the protection of the environment. Hypothesis E is harmful to the environment, and D is completely inefficient in causing some level of protection to the environment. They fail the test of efficiency. The remaining hypotheses – A, B and C – are ranked according to their probability of efficiency. A ranks higher than B, which ranks higher than C. JMP enters the equation by searching for the most robust moral framework that can justify the adoption of the most efficient hypothesis. If no sufficient moral support is found for A, then JMP proceeds to establish the best justificatory framework for B, and so on. The moral framework of

choice is the one that provides the reasons more consistent with the purpose of protecting the environment in all situations in which agents of the same status face similar alternative courses of action.

What is distinctive about JMP is that the justificatory process may vary from agent to agent and from context to context even concerning similar types of environmental-friendly courses of action. Suppose the following example.

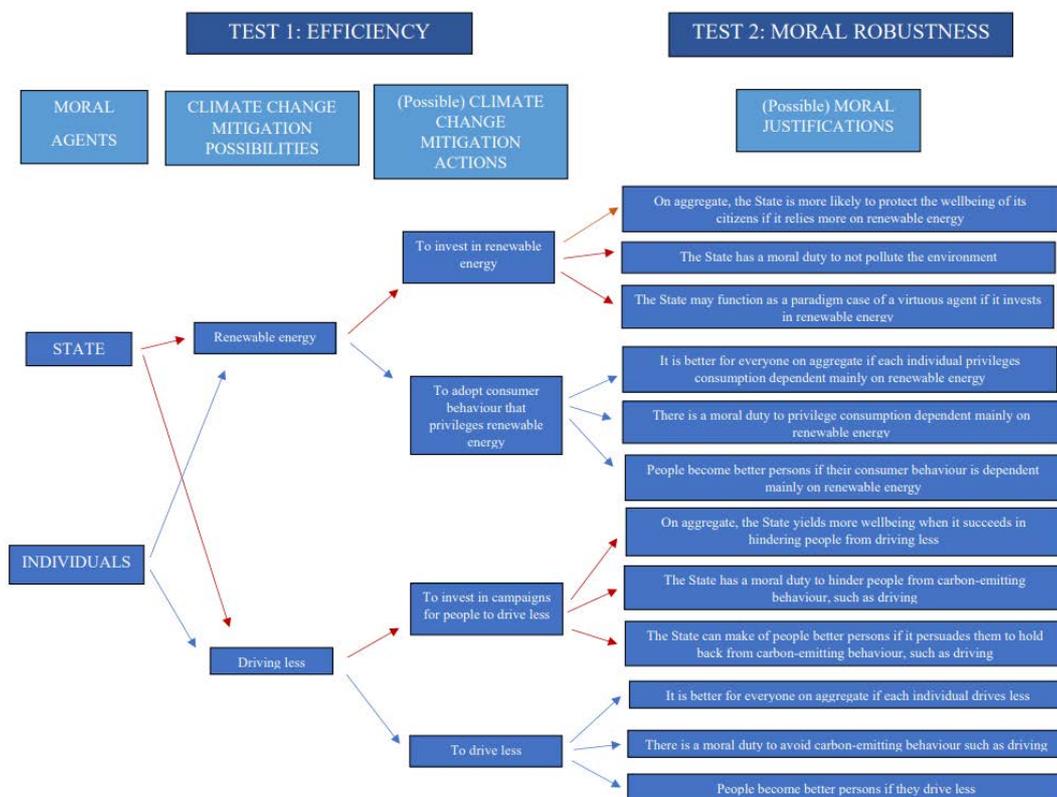


Figure 2.

When faced with possible courses of action related to climate change mitigation, different agents may pass the tests of efficiency and moral robustness based on entirely different normative frameworks. What matters is to find the adequate moral justification that leads the agent to adopt climate change mitigation courses of action. The connection between both tests culminates in a justification that is capable of enhancing the moral acceptability

of an action or policy. The reasons that justify every possible course of action need to be aligned with the genuine incentives that the agent in question might have for acting in such or such a way. Incentive alignment thus determines the ultimate level of robustness. The moral framework of choice is then the one that provides the reasons more consistent with the protection of the environment and which are most likely to induce the agent to act whenever she encounters similar alternative courses of action.

Such a level of fact-sensitivity also avoids the chicken-and-egg problem posed by moral framing to environmental pragmatism. Rather than being challenged by moral framing, justification consists precisely in comparing competing moral frames for the same set of circumstances. Since it deals primarily with reasons about *possible* courses of action, it does not depend on actual unframed moral preferences. Also, since what establishes the relevant ethical theory in each case is robustness, that is, the connection between moral grounds and efficiency, the reasons that support the right course of action can sometimes function as instruments of incentive alignment.

JMP, however, facilitates nudging in favour of the environment but is not itself a nudge. The arguments and values established by different ethical theories are the nudges. The task of justification is not to align underlying moral incentives to act in favour of the environment with an ethical theory but to find the ethical theory that adequately frames the most efficient moral incentives to act in favour of the environment. Justification does not seek to identify and orient people towards ideal behaviour but to establish the moral grounds (or legitimacy) of the most efficient kinds of moral nudges. It is in this sense that it contributes (indirectly) to aligning actual incentives people already have with the reasons for pursuing the right course of action in favour of the environment.

Additionally, because JMP is about moral grounds, it can never endorse a policy or course of action towards the environment that (i) is not a sufficient means of achieving the end in view, and (ii) does not pass the test of rightness by any relevant ethical theory. The two conditions are cumulative, which means the end does not justify any means whatsoever. This generates consequences to social structures of power. In a social framework, the prior non-commitment to ethical theories that characterises JMP entails the inexistence of any kind of substantive commitment to a specific political regime. However, JMP is possible only where the justificatory process is open to and tolerant of competing ethical theories. This is a procedural requirement that produces substantive effects. Ideologies and political regimes based on monist and monopolistic views of society, such as eco-fascism (Lubarda 2019), are not acceptable with JMP because they leave no room for inquiring into the most robust justifications in each given situation, even if their collective end were solely to protect the environment at all cost. More than an argument in favour of democracy, whatever its form of development (deliberative, representative, direct, etc.), JMP introduces a procedural argument against social organisations of power that are hostile to methodological pluralism.

## CONCLUSION

Environmental ethical discussions are often perceived as unintelligible to non-philosophers and a hindrance to effective policy. To overcome this caveat, some philosophers proposed environmental pragmatism. Environmental pragmatic philosophers advocate moral pluralism, acknowledging that even if some approaches might be theoretically incommensurable, it is possible to reach consensus on policy positions. Environmental pragmatism suffers from some pitfalls, but considering moral

pluralism as essential for a valid, legitimate and efficient way of informing environmental policy decisions, we propose JMP as an improvement of the theory to overcome those drawbacks.

JMP entails a thorough process of matching policies and actions with ethical theories, motivations and reasons for actions in a way that is ethically acceptable, politically efficient and individually motivating. JMP allows ethics as a policy-decision relevant discipline, in a pro-active manner, taking care of legitimacy and efficiency without underestimating the importance of moral reasoning. This paper enlarges the scope of environmental pragmatism filling the possible void caused by incompatible and incommensurable value discussions.

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