A problem for environmental pragmatism: value pluralism and the sustainability principle

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ABSTRACT: In this thesis, I claim that the recently emerged perspective of environmental pragmatism is nonviable. For many years, it was deemed impossible for environmental ethics to formulate justified environmental policy. Environmental pragmatism, and its primary scholar Bryan G. Norton, has promoted a new outlook in that debate by proposing an ideal methodology based upon classic American pragmatism. In this methodology, a community can determine what is morally righteous by (i) conducting open-ended inquiry and (ii) considering all relevant stakeholders in a rational discourse. Environmental pragmatism must therefore accommodate reasonable value pluralism. Moreover, Norton claims that these criteria should be complemented with what I call the 'sustainability criterion'. However, this principle of righteous decision-making appears inconsistent with the two aforementioned commitments. This thesis considers the extent to which this is the case. As it turns out, environmental pragmatism is unable to reconcile the commitment of sustainability with reasonable value pluralism, when its ideal methodology is applied in practical terms. And, because environmental pragmatism aims to do so, I conclude that it is nonviable.

KEY WORDS: Environmental ethics, environmental pragmatism, epistemology, sustainability, deliberation, Bryan G. Norton

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Introduction – The challenge of environmental policy

Addressing the destructive impact of human life on Earth is often considered the biggest challenge of our time. This amounts not only to the issue of human-caused climate change but also to the exhaustive impact we have on the Earth's biodiversity and ecosystems as a whole. Only a few months ago, an alarming article in *Nature* was published in which scientists warn that the world's wilderness areas are increasingly disappearing (Watson et al. 2018). Wilderness, the study's authors report, is defined as regions that are not subject to direct human use. Astonishingly, more than 77% of the land on Earth is in fact exploited by mankind – either due to resource mining or conversion into cities or farms. If we continue to deplete the planet in this manner, the article reads, Earth's final remaining wildlands will die out in decades. Moreover, this only amounts to the *direct* influence of mankind. As noted, indirect human-caused consequences on the planet, most prominently the effects of human-caused climate change, could be even further reaching. So, the obvious questions arise: should we act to save ecosystems and possibly the entire planet as we know it? And if so, should we do so only for our own benefit or because we have further-reaching moral obligations towards the non-human natural world? More generally speaking, what are the essence and structure of environmental values? These questions regarding mankind's moral relationship with nature have been central in the discipline of environmental ethics since its emergence in the 1960s and 1970s (Brennan and Lo 2002).

Traditionally speaking, theories of ethics – developed and brought forward by notables such as Aristotle, Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill – commonly enunciate certain aspects that make our actions and characters morally wrong, virtuous or vicious. When the field of environmental ethics emerged, it was claimed that this view was incomplete.[1] More particularly, these traditional theories were said to be too anthropocentric – the belief that only human beings possess moral value. And so, an extentionalism in ethics began, which primarily focussed on the following question: does the non-human natural world, or any of its components, have intrinsic value?[2] That is, if something is valued as an end in itself, regardless of whether that something can be used for something else.[3] The stage was thus set to develop the field along non-

[1] This is not to say that these classic philosophers had nothing to say about the value of nature. Mill, for instance, argued that nature should hold an important function in society (Gerson 2002). But, as this suggests, these claims mainly had a strong focus on nature for the benefit of human beings.

[2] The commencement of that extentionalism is often attributed to notables such as Henry David Thoreau, George Perkins Marsh, John Muir, and above all Aldo Leopold and his influential 'land ethic' philosophy. I will return to Leopold later. For more on the emergence of environmental ethics, see Norton and Minteer (2002).

[3] Complementary, something is of *instrumental value* when the value of that something comes from the means for an end of something else. To early environmental ethicists like Rachel Carson, Paul Ehrlich and Barry Commoner the moral superiority of human beings over nature became untenable. It seemed intuitively wrong to attribute only human beings with intrinsic value. Consider the following: suppose you find yourself wandering through an isolated pine forest. At a certain moment you notice a helpless Bambi-like fawn. The creature is unaware of your present and seems to be in

anthropocentric lines, in which it was indeed claimed that intrinsic value should be attributed to nature.[4] Ever since, the field of environmental ethics has experienced growth, with a broad range of dividing lines in it. Following early debates in the 1970s pitting animal ethics welfare against ecocentric environmental ethics, the focus shifted towards holistic entities and social domination theories, such as deep ecology and social ecology ecofeminism, in the 1980s (Cochrane 2018). Without elaborating upon these disputes, it can be stated that they are all drawn from the struggle of whether or not, or to what extent, we should value nature for its own sake or for the advantage of human beings.

It seems clear why this dichotomy is so persistent: the attribution of intrinsic or instrumental value is often regarded as the foundation for a variety of moral judgements (Zimmerman 2014). And this could have far-reaching consequences. After all, if nature is attributed with intrinsic value, any infringement on the natural world could be morally wrong due to nature's value in itself. Subsequently, the dichotomy led to an impasse: one was either an anthropocentrist or a non-anthropocentrist (Brennan and Lo 2014; Keulartz 2018). There could be no middle ground. Environmental principles existed either for the benefit of men or for the benefit of nature, since even if the anthropocentrist did protect nature, it would be because of the advantages (aesthetical, economical, or even biological and psychological) for mankind.[5] This dichotomy reflected back in environmental policy. Policy ought to be preceded by a morally righteous principle, but because no consistent principle was established, no coherent policy could be formed. Subsequently, it was claimed that consensus on environmental principles must first exist. And so, a challenge for environmental policy was established: how to formulate morally righteous policy for the environment (Brennan and Lo 2015, chapter 1).

In response to this, the field of environmental ethics has experienced a 'pragmatic turn' (Stephens 2007; Minteer 2011, 7-12). In the 1980s, Anthony Weston had already offered a new possibility for environmental ethics to adopt a more pragmatic, action-based attitude (1985). It was, however, an influential anthology of papers assembled by Andrew Light and Eric Katz in the 1990s that led to the now significant academic perspective of so-called environmental pragmatism (which I refer to hereafter as 'EP') (1996). 'Pragmatic' should here not be regarded as the everyday meaning referring to the focus on achieving only

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perfect health. As you are armed, you could kill the animal. Now, would you consider that to be morally wrong? Possibly not, as you could imagine yourself being hungry, in survival mode and thus striving to get food. But what if that is not the case, and you would kill the animal for no particular reason at all - not even for the sport of it? In other words, you would just *kill* it, even though it benefits you in no reason at all. Many would argue that this is in fact wrong, as life has at least to some extent value for its own sake.

[4] Among others, the most prominent non-anthropocentric scholars include: Richard Routley, Holmes Rolston, Kenneth Goodpaster, Paul Taylor, Laura Westra, Eric Katz, and J. Baird Callicott.

[5] This debate is sometimes referred to as the 'axiological debate'. For more on the outlines of this debate and the influence of other environmental subdisciplines, please see Brennan and Lo (2002) and Cochrane (2018).

practical results. Rather, in the philosophical discourse, as mentioned here, pragmatism in environmental ethics is founded upon the commitments of American pragmatism – most notably brought forward by Charles Peirce, William James and John Dewey. This interpretation of pragmatism is widely known for its efforts to make philosophical analysis relevant to urgent ethical, social and political questions and has served as the primary influence on the pragmatic shift in environmental philosophy. Just as American pragmatism focussed on everyday problem-solving, EP aims at doing the same.[6] Rather than debating intrinsic value, EP wants to offer an alternative: we should immediately seek solutions that work and are acceptable for all involved (Odenbaugh 2012; Minteer 2017).[7] It is thus not necessary for everyone to hold the same values. Instead, EP aims to integrate a variety of values, a concept known as value pluralism. As the environmental pragmatist sees it, two people need not hold the same values to formulate the same solutions. For instance, a duck hunter and a birdwatcher will agree that a policy aimed at the annihilation of duck wildlands should be opposed, even though their values differ. So, how can we then come to terms with each other's views, or even know what is morally righteous policy, if we do not agree on the underlying values?

Crucial in this understanding is not only the acceptance, but more importantly, the accommodation of value pluralism in society. Just as in the American tradition, EP rejects epistemic foundationalism, or the denial of the notion that knowledge and belief are grounded in some sort of certain, fixed class or principle and that basic beliefs thereby do not require any justification. Therefore, EP embraces an experimental and fallibilistic view of knowledge, including moral knowledge, that also entails a pluralistic rather than a singular view of belief and values, since a multitude of views increases nuance and potential right answers.[8] So, how can we then know what a righteous solution to certain (environmental) problem entails? Environmental pragmatism claims that truth, and the morally righteous route, will emerge from the dynamic method of discussion, debate and the open exchange of views, arguments and persuasion in the community. We come to *know* what is right because we continuously and consciously consider a plurality of values by means of deliberation, discussion and open debate. And so, if all sides – including those that echo the interests of both

[6] Although American pragmatism is a wide tradition, Hilary Putnam famously identified four main characteristics of pragmatism upon which I will return briefly in Section 1: the refusal of skepticism; the readiness to espouse fallibilism; a holistic approach of sharp dichotomies like fact and value, and 'primacy of practice' (Putnam 1994).

[7] EP includes a broad range of particular views, but the features mentioned in this thesis are commonly accepted in any interpretation of EP (Light and Katz 1996; Norton 2007a; Stephens 2007; Minteer 2008; Minteer 2011; Sarkar and Minteer 2018). Please see Vik (2014) as to how EP has become such an influential position in environmental philosophy.

[8] This does not mean, however, that the pragmatist is downright skeptical. As opposed to the absolute skeptic, the pragmatist can hold beliefs, as long as she is open to the fact that she cannot attain absolute certainty concerning questions of fact - even if such beliefs have good reason to hold based upon previous experience. This is meant by fallibilism, as Peirce defined it (1955). Hilary Putnam has suggested that the insight that antiskepticism and fallibilism can go together could be the most original epistemological observation of pragmatism (1995).

nature and human beings – are considered equally, we can formulate proper solutions for our urgent environmental problems. By rejecting the dominant existing monistic value of non-anthropocentrism in environmental ethics, EP offers a weak anthropocentrism in which human values are accepted but nature must be strongly considered (e.g. Light and Katz 1996; Minteer and Manning 1999; Norton 2002a; 2007a; 2013; Minteer 2017). Value pluralism is thereby not only considered; it is the core of getting to knowledge (Norton 2015, 286).

However, EP faces a *prima facie* problem, which emerges from a prime difference between classical pragmatism and EP. As EP wants to include a variety of values in the debate, it does so with a certain *aim*: the aim of sustainability. Within EP, any righteous policy should include 'the transition to a more sustainable society' (Minteer 2008, 181; Norton and Minteer 2002, 374). So, what is a *sustainable society*? Bryan Norton, EP's most prominent and influential scholar, has defined the criterion of sustainability as follows: 'A set of behaviors (an institution, a policy, or a management practice) is sustainable if and only if its practice in generation m will not reduce the ratio of opportunities to constraints that will be encountered by individuals in generations n, o, p…' (2009, 41).[9] As I have just outlined, EP does not adopt any fixed principles as a foundation. Yet, the aim of sustainability seems to be precisely such a fixed foundation. In fact, Norton holds this aim as a guiding principle for any justified decision, which means that an unsustainable outlook or value would be impermissible (Norton 2005; 2015). But this would contradict the original commitment EP, which was to integrate *any* value. So, is Norton able to maintain his EP, regardless of the sustainability criterion?

In this thesis, I argue that EP is unable to reconcile its principles and that this inability renders it nonviable. I do so on the basis of Norton's work.[10] More specifically, I elaborate upon the aforementioned contradiction in EP and defend my claim in three steps. In the first section, I further amplify the epistemological commitments made by EP – and how these relate to classical pragmatism. Norton prescribes three principles for ideal deliberation, or the procedure for coming to justified policy. In Section 1, I address (i) the open-ended inquiry principle and (ii) the discourse principle. In Section 2, I introduce Norton's third principle for EP, (iii) the sustainability criterion, which covers the environmental aspect of EP. It is here where I delve deeper into EP's contradictory tendency.[11] In Section 3, I suggest three strategies to reconcile EP's principles. Here, I argue that Norton can only reconcile value pluralism with the sustainability criterion if

[9] The affirmation of Norton's influence was underlined last year, when an extensive monograph was published on Norton's philosophy (Sarkar and Minteer 2018). I refer more than once to this publication in this thesis.

[10] I am fully aware that Norton does not represent all of EP's scholars. But because of his influence, my thesis should be an addition to EP's literature in general. To be as clear as possible: when I refer to EP, I mean Norton's view of EP.

[11] Part of that analysis is the consideration of the wider known philosophical problem for proceduralist views in ethics and politics in avoiding substantive commitments. As EP is an ideal procedure, it would be an interesting topic for further research - as I will not further explore this in this thesis- to consider which position EP takes in the so-called 'ideal vs. non-ideal debate' (Valentini 2012; Tully 2013; Talisse 2017).

sustainability is embedded in Norton's ideal of appropriate deliberation. Because this is not attainable in practice, I conclude that Norton's EP is nonviable.

Before I argue for my claim, I must present two small remarks. First, I fully acknowledge that this theoretical problem-solving practice seems to defy EP in itself. Surely, EP prescribes that we should not theorise about environmental issues in the manner I do in this paper. But, for EP to offer a coherent alternative in environmental ethics, it must resolve this *prima facie* problem. After all, it would be even less appropriate to simply apply a pragmatic maxim to any environmental decision for no clearly justified reason at all. We ought to have good reasons for embracing EP. Second, I present a remark about what this thesis aims to clarify. Only very recently has EP been considered a meaningful alternative in the environmental debate. And although considerable critiques have been written about the approach, it still contains many ignored aspects.[12] One of these features is the here-mentioned association between deliberation and sustainability. This thesis, though, has a constructive aim. By considering the criticism, I hope to illuminate a key problem EP faces and consider potential strategies to solve it. Although I myself cannot solve the problem, I hope that by critically assessing this promising outlook, this thesis will help to further advance proposals for addressing environmental issues.

Section 1 – Pragmatic decision-making

Of all scholars in EP, Bryan G. Norton has most notably advocated a framework to diffuse the pressure on the challenge of environmental policy and to guide action for morally righteous policy.[13] Norton is convinced that the dualism of anthropocentric values and non-anthropocentric values is false. By reducing environmental disagreements to merely a black and white (human/non-human) discussion, we lose sight of the actual positions of continually developing views. Instead, Norton claims, such dichotomies should be replaced by a broad spectrum of values varying from small and short-term to long-lasting: 'Pragmatists believe that dichotomies and dualisms usually stand in for disguised continua and are best avoided – dissolved – when possible' (2005, 507). For instance, it could be possible to value both human beings and the ecosystem, or the human/animal relationship as well. This assumption of a variety of values can be traced back to John Rawls' definition of 'reasonable pluralism'. He stated that 'there is no single comprehensive

[12] The main points of critique can be captured into five main problems. The three most spread are (a) economism; (b) reductionism and (c) subjectivism (Stephens 2012). Moreover, some philosophers have argued that (d) EP is no philosophical position at all (Samuelsson 2010), and is (e) unable to apply its methodology to the global sphere of environmental problems (Brister 2018).

[13] He calls this framework 'adaptive ecosystem management' (1999; 2005; 2015). In this thesis though, I will keep referring to Norton's theory as 'Norton's EP'. This is because I mainly address the epistemological commitments in his theory and the appearing contradiction these have with the aim of his theory. Moreover, these epistemological commitments are consistent as well with other scholars of EP.

philosophical, religious or moral doctrine upon which reason converges' (Rawls 2005, 36; Aikin and Talisse 2018, chapter 10). In other words, reasonable people – individuals that are intelligent, sincere and honest, who do their epistemic best by carefully considering the right questions – will nonetheless differ in their answers about the Big Questions, such as 'What is morality?' or 'What is the good life?' And so, according to Norton, we should acknowledge value pluralism in society and bring these insights and views together in deliberation that can reasonably assess these views.

Given this observation, the question that I address in this chapter is how Norton's EP wishes to guide action for policy. As I explain, Norton's framework is an ideal procedural account of policy making. This ideal has been subject to extensive analysis, but it is my interpretation that it consists of two primary principles for coming to *know* what the right policy is. I therefore refer to these commitments as EP's 'epistemological principles', which are (i) the open-ended inquiry principle and (ii) the discourse principle.[14] I address (i) in Section 1.2 and (ii) in Section 1.3. When the epistemological principles are met in the procedure of decision-making, a community can be confident that the right and justified decision is reached. As I indicate, the procedure to which these principles are applied is a deliberative process. And as I unearth, ideal deliberation is only possible when the community not only acknowledges but also accommodates reasonable value pluralism. As Norton states, 'pluralists encourage and expect to learn from a diversity of opinion; pluralism and free expression contribute to truth-seeking' (2015, 113).

But, before I address the procedural ideal of policymaking, I should unearth the epistemological assumptions of EP, because two main questions now appear: (a) Before the compromises between different values that are proposed by Norton can be found, he wants to let in and consider any possible value. But, if any value should be considered, because the cross-pollination of these values is what brings truth forth, what should we then do with facts? It seems that facts are then nothing more than another option in the process of choosing what is a right value. (b) And, how should we regard a plurality of values (i.e. should any primacy be given to some values, or some facts)? This method is epistemological in its very essence: it revolves around the question of how we can *know* what the righteous decision, or righteous policy, is. As I note, both principles are preceded by two epistemological assumptions that emerge from classical American pragmatism. The first is the holistic avoidance of the fact–value dichotomy; the second is the commitment of practice over

[14] These principles are derived from Norton's set of 'procedural heuristics'. These are criteria to promote decision-making in the context of value pluralism and epistemic uncertainty. I have taken the liberty to re-classify Norton's heuristics into the above mentioned principles. Principle (i) adheres to Norton's second 'epistemological heuristic', which states: 'Question everything, but not all at once' and 'Trust experience more than ideology '. Principle (ii) is seen back in Norton's 'process rationality heuristic', stating that 'the rationality of decisions depends more on finding an appropriate process than on making accurate calculations and predictions' (2015, 293). Norton further uses this last consideration to equate 'appropriate' with 'rational'. I will later in this section return on this. There are two more heuristics upon which I reflect in Section 3, and which are seen back in Norton's sustainability principle.

principle. Norton explicitly references classical pragmatism in both regards.[15] So, let us now first consider the influence of classical pragmatism on EP.

1.1. Two epistemological assumptions

In many ways, American pragmatism can be considered a tradition occupied with questions of knowledge. As this movement flourished in the late 1890s and early 1900s, most famously put forward by contemporaries Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey, it argued that knowledge is only obtainable when coupled with action (Haack 2004; Bragg 2005; Putnam and Putnam 2017).[16] We can only know by doing. Hence, pragmatism has the 'pragmatic' in the name.[17] Pragmatism was a reaction to the prevailing absolutist metaphysics of Truthness and Falseness, which claimed that there is one external, objective truth that serves as an epistemological foundation. In its very essence, pragmatism was thereby a reaction to Descartes. Cartesianism, and its epistemological dualism, stated that truth is obtained when there is correspondence between the mind (subject) and some external truth, a separate independent reality (object). And so, if the mind has a certain concept that mirrors, or corresponds to, that external reality, something is the Truth. If something does not, it is False. Hence, this describes the dualism of a gap between (the external) Nature and (the internal) Mind. This also means that a foundation of Truth is available to us. The methodology of science, on the basis of experimentation and verification, was accordingly considered the method to discover those universal Truths and facts (i.e. something that is known to be universally true).

Pragmatism claimed that this idea of a foundational, fixed set of Truth(s) and thus beliefs and facts should be refuted (Bacon 2012, 2-7). By doing so, the pragmatists reinterpreted the meta-theory of propositions for knowledge. As mentioned above, it was traditionally claimed that propositions of knowledge possessed this fixed bias: something is absolutely amenable via empirical verification.[18] However, the pragmatists claimed, verification theories are in themselves inescapably reliant on background assumptions.[19]

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[15] He specifically does so in the appendix of his magnus opus *Sustainability: A Philosophy of Adaptive Ecosystem Management*, in which he claims his epistemological method is an extension of the ideas of Dewey and Peirce (2005).

[16] Many philosophers have described themselves as 'pragmatist' throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century, leading to continuous new ways of articulating pragmatism. For an overview, please see Brandom (2011) and Hookway (2013).

[17] I would like to underline that pragmatism should not be regarded as a coherent movement. That would hide the fact that its leading figures had major disagreements. Regarding EP, pragmatist epistemological insights are mainly derived from Dewey and Peirce.

[18] In this light I would like to mention the logical positivist tradition of verificationism. Of particular interest is the move away from logical positivism by one of its leading scholars, Rudolf Carnap, towards pragmatism. He did so after a series of debates with W.V.O. Quine (Soames 2012).

[19] An interesting article emphasizing this claim is written by Elizabeth Anderson (1998).

This makes the prepositions presuppose value judgements with which, then, states of affairs are described. This led Dewey to note that a proposition should be interpreted as a suggestion that is animated by values – including a truth proposition. It is therefore necessary to be aware that there are values thus underlying factual assumptions. Because science is occupied by the determination of facts, and facts are not value free, the scientific discourses are also value laden.

Norton draws heavily upon these insights for his EP. He claims that the statue of science as an impartial provider of facts no longer holds (2005, §10.3). This means that science can thereby no longer guide actions or inform policy on the justification of Absolute knowledge, precisely because scientific claims are informed by values in themselves, as well. Particularly with very complex problems in which not only are scientific uncertainties present but clear values and interests also play a significant role. For instance, regarding mankind's infringement on the environment, if we only wish to follow the facts, we will miss that (a) facts are also value laden and (b) clear values may also play a role in action guidance.[20] And so, the dichotomy of facts and values is then surpassed (Norton 1999a).

Consequently, the question emerges: is there no difference at all between facts and values? Norton seems to suggest as much: if values are what informs the scientific community – which is responsible for bringing forth scientific facts – then it seems that these scientific facts are nothing more than echoes of certain values. Regardless, Norton rejects this. And, as he does more often, Norton reflects back on American pragmatism to elaborate why scientific facts, though value laden, are not the same as values (1999a). What is at stake here is the question of why a scientific fact is more developed towards knowledge than a value that forms the background of that fact.

The fallibilism of Peirce should be considered in this context. Peirce claimed that we can develop methods in approximating to know things in themselves, but we can never entirely know a thing 'in itself'. And, the right method is the scientific method, on the basis of induction, deduction and abduction – in short, of competent inquiry. Hence, Peirce stated that 'truth can be nothing more nor less than the last result to which the following out of this [experimental] method would ultimately carry us' (Nesher 2002, 70).[21] And so, although fact and value should not be considered a dualism, the pragmatists did regard a fact as a 'developed' type of description. The method of that development, they called 'inquiry' (Norton 2015, 11).

Dewey advanced this notion of inquiry upon which Norton builds. It is important to note that inquiry, to Dewey, always occurs in a community, and it begins with a practical problem that one wants to solve. He

[20] Therefore, it is often stated that EP takes on a holistic approach, in which fact and value have the same point of departure: experience (McDonald 2012, 3). Pragmatism takes this holistic approach also to mind and body, thought and experience (Anderson 1998, 16).

[21] Here one can see the commitment of pragmatism to fallibilism. Any statement about truth is only a nominal definition, by which Peirce meant that it refers only to the name, and not to the a priori world. It is not possible to know the thing-in-itself. This is a rationale that Peirce derived directly from Kant (Christensen 1994).

named such a problematic scenario an 'indeterminate situation' (Dewey 1938, 108). And inquiry is, to Dewey, 'the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole' (Dewey 1938, 171). The situation is thereby *fixed*: it is transformed into a new situation that can reasonably explain our observations. The solution is always only possible through examination and experience, by setting up hypotheses and investigating if these succeed: if one finds a practical solution, the problem is evidently solved and thus becomes determinate. This is true for problems in the scientific world as well as for moral and ethical problems, to which I return later.

If a problem is solved by the community and has become determinate, the hypothesis is then one of 'warranted assertability' (Dewey 1938, 15). The claim, or hypothesis, is defensible - asserted - by the force of reason and so the claim is justified, or warranted. Like Peirce, Dewey claimed that by means of inquiry, we can approximate the truth and ameliorate our descriptions of the world around us. And so, Dewey meant that 'truth is internal to inquiry' (Tiercelin 2014, chapter 1). He thus related truth to what is useful to believe (Dewey 1941). It is crucial to indicate that although Dewey noted that truth is 'the opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate', he did not equal truth with the outcome of inquiry (i.e. warranted assertibility).[22] This is because he was against the notion that truth is some fixed, Cartesian state (Dewey 1938, 268). Instead, Dewey noted that truth relates to hypotheses, which are subsequently set up as future claims, ready to be tested and altered if needed:

> 'The "truth" of any present proposition is, by the definition, subject to the outcome of continued inquiries; its "truth", if the word must be used, is provisional; as near the truth as inquiry has yet come, a matter determined not by a guess at some future belief but by the care and pains with which inquiry has been conducted up to the present time' (Dewey and Sleeper 1988, 56-7).

By applying the term warranted assertibility, Dewey favoured the *process* of coming to know what is right (Bacon 2012, 56). By continuous inquiry are we able to constantly improve our descriptions, yet we are not able to correspond to the external state of affairs. Knowledge is thus the output of competent inquiry and subsequent decision-making is a process of determining what works. In summary, the pragmatists claimed that we only hold something to be true (i.e. warranted assertibility). Because of competent inquiry, we have a justification to hold that claim as the truth, until someone provides better reasons to hold something else as true.

[22] Though, this has been claimed in the past. For instance, Bertrand Russell famously interpreted Dewey to be saying that warranted assertibility is equivalent to truth (1991, 780).

So, does this open the door to the problematic viewpoint of (moral) relativism, in which (moral) judgements are only true or false relative to a cultural standpoint that can differ based on time and place?[23] On the basis of Dewey and Peirce, Norton says that it does not, by reason of the aforementioned competent inquiry (Hirsch 2018, 89). As I stated above, a process of inquiry can be dubbed 'competent' if it follows the scientific method. This methodology of rational, and logical, deduction, induction or abduction plays a vital role here.[24] Peirce and Dewey previously noted that inquiry is the general practice of science – that is, of all sciences. Moreover, it is this inquiry that discriminates science from pseudo-science and other activities (Brown 2009). As I mentioned above, science is shaped by values in the community, but these are values that are reflective of the manner in which questions, methods and acknowledged opinions are upheld. It is for this reason that Dewey – and Norton after him – credited science with such a crucial role in inquiry: science's inquiry makes it self-conscious of the values that shape its discourse. And, because of the scientific methodology, values are developed into warranted assertions. This dismisses Norton of (moral) relativism, because he claims that we can get better at knowing what is right. And so, we can recognise the superiority of a certain utterance over the other because of experience, experimentation and rational dialogue. The pragmatist continues: as scientific inquiry makes us move towards warranted assertions and thereby to what we can hold as true, the same holds for moral inquiry (Anderson 1998). We can determine what is right and wrong by abandoning long-lasting fixed principles that could form hurdles in solving actual problems. Hence, we should hold practice (experimenting, inquiring) over principle (assuming any fixed foundation).

1.2. Open-ended inquiry principle

It should now be clear that the best possible claim to truth (a warranted assertion) is only possible by continuously considering as many views as possible. That is: it is by bringing forward a plurality of values that allows us to experiment with different perspectives to determine which works best. And so, different

[23] Such a standpoint has often been attributed to pragmatism, and brings to mind one of the most cited debates in contemporary pragmatism, between Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam. Rorty famously claimed that 'truth is what your contemporaries let you get away with' (Rorty 1979, 176). Because of this, Putnam accused Rorty of moral relativism (Forster 1992; McReynolds 2013). On the basis of this debate, Susan Haack categorized two branches of pragmatism: (i) Reformist pragmatism, setting out to refine traditional philosophy and (ii) revolutionary pragmatism, which rejected the notion of objectivity and truth altogether (2004).

[24] Unsurprisingly, according to the pragmatists, science is defined as a community which holds epistemically warranted beliefs and has a practice in which similar vocabularies evolve. Unfortunately, this thesis has too little room to discuss the very interesting relation between pragmatism, truth and the philosophy of language - seen back in scientific discourses. This has been a topic of debate in the movement of so-called 'Neo-pragmatism', or 'Linguistic Pragmatism' (Hansson 2017). Related scholars include: Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, C.I. Lewis, Donald Davidson, W.V.O. Quine, and Robert Brandom.

communities might legitimately prioritise or follow different values, because indeed, more than one acceptable set of values exists. According to Norton, it is then the role of ethicists and policymakers to facilitate the process of inquiry through which these different values are subsequently assessed and to formulate solutions. The ambition, of course, remains pragmatic: not to formulate universal moral truths for their own sake but to transform problematic situations into more workable ones for all stakeholders. It is, as I have mentioned previously, in such a case, not necessary to agree upon fundamental values, as long as the outcome is agreed upon. Therefore, for Norton, the focus of environmental policymaking is to define a public participation methodology in which stakeholders are occupied with joint inquiry to reach a cooperative solution, instead of discussing value systems as such (Brister 2018).

Because of his insight that scientific facts are also informed by background values, Norton argues that 'to include not just scientists from established disciplines, but also parties, stakeholders who have varied interests and viewpoints and who express their viewpoints in an open and public process' (2005, 115).[25] In short, he claims that because values are always informing the scientific community, this affects the outcomes of 'scientific facts'. And, because a multitude of values exist in a multitude of scientific communities, we should be open to various ways of knowing – therefore, value pluralism should be facilitated (Thompson 2007; 2018). Indeed, this value pluralism is essential for knowledge, as the more values are considered, the more possible answers are brought forth. Open-ended inquiry will then make us bring in these answers. Therefore, we should commit to endlessly attempting to formulate better solutions in the process – that way are we able to get to better solutions. This is what I call the open-ended inquiry principle.[26]

Norton follows Dewey by placing inquiry – and thus experimentation – at the heart of environmental decision-making (Norton 2001, 479). Policymaking is thus a process of learning about the world, or about determining the best course of action for the public interest; by means of inquiry, we can collect and gather experience and thus possible knowledge in the community. Inquiry is self-corrective if applied and submitted in an open community in which claims can be tested to clarify, justify, refine and debunk proposed truths – we are thus able to progress in our understanding of the world.[27] As Norton himself states, 'communities can

[25] An example of such inclusion can be found in Netherlands, where the 'Nationale Wetenschapsagenda' has served a forum for interaction between scientists and the general public (De Kenniscoalitie 2016).

[26] To be as precise as possible: Norton himself does not explicitly uses the term 'open-ended principle'. He rather suggests continuous 'experimentation' (Norton 2015, 57). I do believe, however, that my term captures his views.

[27] Norton draws here heavily on Funtowicz and Ravetz' notion of 'post-normal science' (1993). This is a view of science, which, as an informer of scientific facts, takes a plurality of values and interests into account as the foundation of knowledge. And this is done by the extension of the peer community. It recognizes a plurality of legitimate perspectives and possible approaches as ways of knowing. And so Funtowicz and Ravetz claim: 'With mutual respect among various perspectives and forms of knowing, there is a possibility for the development of a genuine and effective democratic element in the life of science' (1993, 740– 1). And so, post-normal science opens up the method of doing science to

learn and grow with respect to their values, modifying their goals en route, as well as use scientific and technical means to improve their understanding of system behavior. The incremental learning strategy also reacts to problems with experiments and actions' (2015, 11). In the next subsection, I examine how this modification occurs. For now, the open-ended inquiry principle is the first epistemological commitment for the procedure to formulate righteous policy.

1.3 Habermasian deliberation and democracy

By means of open-ended inquiry, the community continuously considers as many views as possible. And, therefore, we must accommodate value pluralism, because value pluralism offers the community as many possible answers as possible. The question that now arises is how are we able to assess those choices – to ensure that the community makes the best choice for a possible policy? It is here that Norton complements his open-ended inquiry in the ideal procedure for decision-making.

To answer this question, Norton draws heavily upon Jürgen Habermas' procedural approach, based on the 'discourse principle' (Norton 2007a, 14–15). This principle states that only the norms that can claim validity are those upon which all potentially involved persons can agree as participants in *rational discourses* (Keulartz 2018, 197). Now, what is considered to be a rational discourse, according to Habermas, is one that ensures that the outcomes of the discourse are concluded by no other force than that of the better argument. This can be done if and only if the discourse meets the subsequent conditions: '(a) that nobody who could make a relevant contribution may be excluded; (b) that all participants are granted an equal opportunity to make contributions; (c) that the participants must mean what they say; and (d) that communication must be freed from external and internal coercion' (Habermas 1998, 44). And so, the solutions brought forward by the community must be aligned with procedural norms that promote fairness, openness, inclusiveness and mutual respect among the members of the community (Keulartz 2018, 190).

Norton would always opt for 'the more (values) the merrier', because in such a case, a new perspective can shed new light on the problem. Even if we have settled on an issue, new views should continuously be explored (which is seen back in the open-ended inquiry principle). And, if such a new perspective, or value, is unreasonable, it will turn out – due to the discourse principle – to be unreasonable and thus be rejected. Moreover, decision-making in EP must be democratic. This is because deliberation is optimised in the democratic system, in which the method of group decision-making is characterised by some sort of equality among the participants (Christiano 2006; Misak 2000, 102). According to Norton, this is crucial because stakeholders must have a voice in the debate: 'By working with stakeholder groups and other participants in a particular community over a period of time, we can help the participants to articulate

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extensive participation and toleration of diversity. The reason that Norton embraces this view is because he sees it as 'compatible with and even evocative of the practical epistemology of pragmatists' (2005, 114).

multiple, independent criteria, making it possible for the community members themselves to debate and balance competing goals' (Norton and Steinemann 2001, 486).

So, when such a broad spectrum of values is acknowledged, we can, by means of *reasonable deliberation*, arrive at agreeable terms for all stakeholders. By considering everyone, we can work towards practical solutions upon which all stakeholders in the community agree.[28] In practice, this means that the community proposes as many views as possible – open-ended inquiry – before the views are assessed on the basis of the discourse principle. Any participant can, of course, propose any new consideration. Thus, the two principles are reciprocal. They continuously reinforce each other to create better solutions (i.e. knowledge). Hence, the metaethical disagreements over the source of value dissolve in the situation of practical policy formulation. There is no longer a need to dispute which values should be considered most important, because in Norton's case, all stakeholders involved will be satisfied. We can thus point towards workable compromises. This makes Norton's EP a procedural political system, in which its contributors specify relevant values, discuss them and settle disputes.

Now, it could be argued that Norton's manner of prescribing truth finding is the foundation of EP. But, EP would then be self-contradictory, because it has vowed to reject any form of foundationalism. Also, EP claims that strictly speaking, any principle should be rejected, yet it claims that deliberation should be based upon the 'discourse *principle'*. What do we think of this? Both arguments can be refuted by noting that neither involve matters of truth: EP rigorously rejects a foundation for knowledge but does in fact acknowledge a foundation for the methodology to obtain knowledge. These principles and foundations are the procedures; they are not substantive principles or foundations of truth itself. But, even then, it could be argued that EP *knows* that the methodology of knowledge is right because of a foundation of knowledge. And so, it appears that EP still holds on to an epistemological foundation. However, this argument can be nullified by noting that EP actually does not in fact claim that it possesses Absolute certainty over that epistemological foundation (of the methodology). Instead, according to their own principle, EP has only warranted assertibility that this foundation is momentarily the most righteous.

1.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the question how EP – most notably according to Bryan G. Norton – has created a framework for righteous environmental action. The answer to this question is preceded by the question of whether we can *know* what is righteous. It turns out that EP states that, in order to know something, two epistemological commitments must be made that are animated by classical pragmatism. The

[28] In the Section 2 I delve deeper in what 'community' exactly means to Norton. For now, I will simply assume that 'community' means a group of people that are conditioned by a certain shared attitude, value or interest. Questions, of course, can be raised here. For part of that critique see Wolf (2018).

first is the convergence of facts and values, by which EP notes that even scientific facts are value laden. The second commitment is the notion that practice brings truth. These two commitments come together in Norton's ideal of deliberation. This ideal consists of two principles that must be respected in the communal discourse of coming to agreeable terms regarding what is right policy. The principles are the open-ended inquiry principle, which states that the discourse must continuously be inflamed by new perspectives, and the discourse principle, which upholds the rational dialogue in the discussions. Both principles are reciprocal, as they must mutually stimulate each other throughout the discourse to arrive at the best possible notion of truth – that is, the warranted assertion. Because the ideal of appropriate deliberation can only be met if a plurality of values is considered, EP must necessarily accommodate reasonable pluralism.

Section 2 – Sustainability: a principle for policy

At this moment, it is clear how Norton draws on the epistemological commitments of classical pragmatism to structurise a procedural methodology for decision-making. It is, however, not yet clear how this could be of any righteous use in *environmental* policymaking. Now that I have examined the 'pragmatism' in Norton's EP, I delve deeper into the 'environmental' side of the practice. Crucial in this regard is Norton's notion of 'sustainability'.[29] Indeed, for the last 25 years, Norton has devoted his work entirely this theme.[30] To understand Norton's view of sustainability, it is first necessary to analyse the general notion of sustainability in greater depth and, subsequently, how it is applied to Norton's EP. I thereby unearth Norton's 'sustainability criterion' for his ideal procedure of deliberation. This chapter then considers that this criterion poses an inherent problem to EP. But, let us first examine why Norton commits to it and how the criterion is related to pragmatic decision-making.

2.1. Sustainability in general

'Sustainability' is, in its most common sense, a property of an action or of a system that can continue infinitely. This, of course, does not necessitate that something is only sustainable if it can be described as such

[29] Before I further elaborate on Norton's views, I would briefly like to mention, as P.B. Thompson did, that there is still ample room for discussion regarding Norton's analysis of the term 'sustainability' (2018). For instance, it is still unclear how the concept of sustainability is integrated within cooperative action (Norton 2007b). However, for this thesis and the question as to what extent sustainability relates to the environmental aspect of EP, Norton is sufficient in his writings. Additionally, it is relevant to note that Norton has changed his notion of sustainability over time. In order to be ahead of any 'cherry-picking' criticism (i.e. randomly taking aspects of Norton's changeful theory that fit my thesis), I only focus on his most latest suggestions about how the concept of sustainability influences our choices regarding the environment, put forward in his book *Sustainable Values, Sustainable Change* (2015).

[30] It is even often stated that 'sustainability' is the correct term to describe Norton's thinking altogether (Sarkar and Minteer 2018, 1-5).

in an environmental sense and will quite literally continue forever. For example, if a healthcare system is created in a way that ensures that it will surely not collapse in the coming centuries, it will likely be considered sustainable. And, if I spend twice as much money in a week as I earn, I am not exhibiting sustainable expenditure practices. This illustrates that sustainability can be applied in many different *domains*. Another key point is that 'infinite' obviously refers to time, although the temporal scale of sustainability is rarely specified. This relates to the question of the *scope* of sustainability: from when to when should we regard something to be sustainable? This, as J. Baird Callicott has suggested, generally depends on the activity that reasonably determines the temporal scale (2018). If the above-mentioned healthcare system is planned for four centuries, it will probably considered sustainable, but if mankind's time on Earth is structurised for four centuries, we would deem it as extremely unsustainable. In the environmental debate, the scope of sustainability is often assumed to be as long as is conceivably possible or reasonable to assume on a planetary scale (Zia 2018).

Another, more pressing, point of sustainability regards the *currency*. The question here considers what should continue indefinitely – or for any other period of time – within a certain domain. Regarding the environment, two commonly accepted views of sustainability exist, which differ in currency: (a) weak sustainability and (b) strong sustainability. One often-cited paradigm that considers these views, and upon which Norton has reflected, comes from the economist Robert Solow.[31] Solow assumes that various forms of capital (the currency) should be considered for future generations (1993). These forms of capital range from economic and ecological to human. Solow formulates capital in only broad, general terms, and so it is meant as an indication stating which resources are critical to the growth and prosperity of the community.[32] The weak view of sustainability defines the concept of sustainability in terms of non-declining quantities of total capital. As long as the sum of capital is upheld, the system and actions of a community are sustainable. This also implies that different types of capital for future generations are thereby interchangeable.[33] Moreover, as long as the sum is increasing, it does not matter if, for instance, natural capital is declining. This makes such a view very susceptible to 'total sum-criticism', which is often directed at utilitarianism: in such a weak sense, it seems justified, for instance, to diminish all natural capital as long as human capital is improved and thus the total sum increases (Driver 2014). Herman Daly has claimed, in contrast, that it is impossible to substitute natural capital with technology, knowledge or human capital (2005). Entire ecosystems, including our weather

[31] Throughout his works Norton features and compares different paradigms of sustainability, such as in his 1995 paper 'Evaluating ecosystem states: Two competing paradigms'; his 2002b collected papers *Searching for Sustainability;* and the earlier mentioned *Sustainability* (2005).

[32] 'Growth' and 'prosperity' are here not clear-defined terms, but by charitable interpretation, we should understand them as 'developing all aspects of society'.

[33] The weak notion of sustainability is often seen as the economic 'sustainable development' ideal, expressed in the famous United Nations' Brundtland Report, and the subsequent developed paradigm used today by the United Nations and by countries worldwide, called the 'Sustainable Development Goals' (Brundtland et al. 1987; Griggs et al. 2013).

patterns, clean air and clean water, are simply indispensable. And, therefore, humanity should necessarily protect all (processes of) ecosystems. This claim that natural capital should always be maintained and thus even the smallest infringement should be avoided – is dubbed the strong view of sustainability.[34]

Norton questions both of these views. Firstly, he addresses the vulnerability of ecosystems to which our actions can have radical and unknown consequences. The relationships between components in an ecosystem are so complex that we should not take any risks with them (Norton 2005, 353).[35] This is not done due to either an anthropocentric or non-anthropocentric view. Rather, it is the uncertainty of the consequences of the ecosystem that he considers. This leads to the rejection of weak sustainability. However, as Norton sees it, strong sustainability misses the point by only focussing on *always* saving natural capital. Norton claims, and I believe rightly so, that many middle positions are conceivable between weak and strong sustainability. This includes possibilities that are eventually better for ecosystems but demand a preliminary consumption of natural capital. For example, by focussing on technological advancements, it might become possible to develop a mechanism that eventually cleans the air, even if that technology requires an expenditure of natural resources. However, the question of course then arises as to which, or how much, natural capital should then be sustained. Everything with clean air? Entire ecosystems? These questions have become even more pressing for Norton since the publication of his latest book, in which he explicitly argues for such a middle-ground position (2015). Here, Norton claims that preserving some forms of natural capital is an unconditional necessity (Callicott 2018). But again, to what extent? And when are we permitted to sacrifice some natural capital for other capital?

2.2. Norton's sustainability

To answer the preceding questions, let us first examine Norton's specific notion of sustainability in further depth. Interestingly enough, Norton bases his argument on a different type of currency. According to Norton, we should not be discussing (natural) capital and subsequently quantifying how much should be preserved. Instead, Norton argues, the community should argue from the currency of *opportunities*. And so, Norton defines sustainability as follows: 'A set of behaviors is understood as sustainable if and only if its practice in generation m will not reduce the ratio of opportunities to constraints that will be encountered by individuals in generations n, o, p...' (2009, 41). Now, how does this relate to natural capital? Norton responds that the openness of opportunities means that natural capital should not be depleted, because we hold the duty to ensure that next generations have equal opportunities with natural capital as well. 'Opportunities' are,

[34] I should mention Karl Polanyi here, who, of course, brought forward the idea that mankind has 'commodified' everything in its surroundings, and thereby reduced to mere assets - such as labour and the natural world (1944).
[35] He claims this on the basis of 'ecological hierarchy theory', which is a particular description of the complexity of arrangements of biological organisms in relation to one and another (O'Neill et al. 1986).

in this case, regarded as the possibility to do something with natural capital. But, would that not mean that we hold the same obligation regarding other forms of capital? Or, does natural capital hold some superior position?

According to Norton, it does. In explaining why, Norton explicitly refers to Aldo Leopold (Meine 2018, 287). [36] Leopold, – a forerunner of environmental ethics – claimed in the 1940s that we ought to 'think like a mountain' (1949).[37] By this concept, Leopold, followed here by Norton, meant that we should be aware that we as human beings, and as communities, are embedded in our natural environment. Natural capital is therefore not just something we can treat as if it were just another component of the world around us. No, natural capital *is* the world around us – and therefore, it is the community. For this reason, Norton claims that values that are attributed to natural capital, or our environment, are so-called 'place/based values' (2005, 336). He also refers to these as the 'constitutive values'. They 'constitute the community by giving it unity across generations; they are all tied up with the community's sense of itself and its members' sense of themselves as individual members of that community; they give meaning to the life of individuals and the community' (2005, 388). Therefore, the community must consider the temporal and spatial scale of the environment for any decision regarding the environment – think like the mountain.

It is here that it becomes most clear why Norton is dubbed by many scholars as a weak anthropocentrist. The community, which is constituted by human beings, is the centre of assessment, but because that community is embedded in the natural world, the natural worlds too needs be considered (1999b). Norton argues that if we were to expand our horizon on such a scale, it would not matter from a hardcore anthropocentric view: in the long run, a human being would want to defend non-human nature and ecosystems because they are all part of the same community. This is because, Norton assumes, any community will want to thrive and survive and thus maintain their constitutive (i.e. sustainable) values:

> 'If constitutive values of a place are threatened, a community member would fear for the special identity of his or her home place. Such fears might be expressed as "If that were to happen – if my community were to change in that way – I wouldn't even care to live here anymore". This outcome occurs when a place loses its "integrity", and the constitutive link between a community, its environment, and its values is (at least figuratively), severed. While it may be argued that loss of communities and the values they cherish should, on the Darwinian idea of selection, be considered a natural outcome of the competitive process, our

[36] It must be noted that Norton's reading of Leopold is not uncontroversial (Stephens 2018; Callicott 2009).

[37] Leopold continues to be an inspiration in environmental philosophy. Only see the Leopold-inspired renaissance of James Lovelock's 'Gaia hypothesis', in which we are invited 'to think like a planet' (Latour 2015).

> purpose is to ensure that communities can, if they choose to be proactive, articulate policies that maintain a commitment to local natural and cultural history' (2001, 496).

Returning to the question I just raised, how can we determine to what extent we can infringe upon natural capital? According to Norton, we should, at the very least, approach this question with an eye to the larger ecosystem and deep values that constitute the community. As Paul Hirsch, a student of Norton, states, 'Metaphorically speaking [...] appropriate spatial and temporal scale from which to evaluate future decisions [...] is the scale of the Mountain' (2018, 90). Sustainability thereby maintains opportunities for our future community. And, as a community is defined by its constitutive – environmental – values, a sustainable decision is one made in light of the environment.

But now, we have still not yet explicitly answered the just-raised question: how can we then determine the best possible policy, while also considering these constitutive values? This occurs through the aforementioned deliberation. With continuous inquiry, and in rational dialogues, any community can simply decide what to do with natural capital, provided that it considers the above-mentioned notion. If this deliberation is not applied, the community would eventually (on the temporal/spatial scale) diminish itself. And, I have just explained that Norton assumes that any rational community would not want that. It thus follows that only sustainable policy – aimed at maintaining opportunities regarding natural capital – is the right policy.

2.3. The sustainability principle

It now seems fair to raise the following question: is it indeed the case that rational deliberation and open-ended inquiry necessarily lead to such an awareness of spatial and temporal values? Norton's preliminary conclusion does not seem to align with many empirical instances of rational discourses. A prime example is the US, a country that is run – at the time of this writing – by climate sceptics. Argument on the basis of such rationale have been raised by Thompson, Hirsch and Callicott (2018; 2018; 2018). A first line of Norton's defence would be that such societies do not possess an ideal deliberation procedure, due to a failing discourse.[38] Yet, such an argument does not hold. This is because Norton notes that in such societies, as long as continuous inquiry into better possibilities occurs, these possibilities will materialise (2005, chapter 3). But, the amelioration of deliberation is not self-emerging. Norton bites the bullet here. He acknowledges that the awareness of sustainability must come from somewhere.

[38] For instance, special interests could be echoed in the debate, which undermines the discourse principle (Keulartz 2018, 204). Also see the Matthew Festenstein's critique on Deweyian pragmatism: "[Deweyian pragmatism] is vulnerable to appropriation by whatever social forces are most powerful" (2008, 90).

And, Norton is, in fact, quite explicit in this (2015, 293). Because it is not self-evident that the sustainability principle emerges out of EP, Norton derives a principle from his notion of 'normative sustainability', which states that in order to facilitate sustainable change, the community 'requires a public discourse and the emergence of a "public" that can identify key values that must be sustained if the public interest is to be sustained'.[39] Key values should be understood here as the constitutive, environmental values, the public interest being, of course, at the very least, survival in the long run. In more practical terms, Norton means, as Hirsch points out, that policymakers should be aware of the constitutive values and subsequently hold a sustainable aim (2018, 91–93). This notion is rather revealing. It implies that Norton's procedural ideal is only met if decisions are made by a public that is aware of the environmental values, or, at least, if the procedure for considering these decisions is conditioned by this criterion. In the next section, I examine how we could interpret these claims. Normative sustainability touches, as Hirsch has made clear, 'the heart of a possible limitation as to what we can hope for from deliberation' (2018, 91). In other words, as long as deliberation does not meet this principle, it is not ideal – and therefore, it is not righteous. From this, it follows that we can bring forth EP's 'sustainability principle': deliberation is only ideal if the aim of that deliberation is sustainable.

It is here that a problem arises for Norton. Considering what Norton has brought forward thus far, it becomes clear that he makes two primary commitments in his EP regarding an ideal procedure for determining what is right policy. To make justified warranted assertions, the community should stick to the discourse principle in deliberating on as many possible values and opinions as possible. Hence, EP must accommodate value pluralism. But now, EP commits to an additional commitment, namely that of sustainability. And, this seems to be a specific value. Are these commitments compatible?

At first glance, this appears not to be the case. In the introduction, I have named this EP's *prima facie* problem. The problem could be constructed as follows: In the introduction and first chapter, I have elaborated on the notion that Norton regards his EP as an ideal for procedural decision-making. Norton does so based on the often-made distinction between *procedural* and *substantive* claims in political philosophy (Forstenzer 2011; Cohen 1997).[40] Substantive claims seek to promote a specific description of a proposition. In political philosophy this adheres to, for example, democratic theory. Here, a substantive theory advocates a

[39] In Section 1 I pointed out that the epistemological principles are derived from two procedural heuristics. The sustainability principle is derived from Norton's third 'normative sustainability heuristic'. The fourth and final heuristic, is called the 'scales and boundaries' heuristic, which is reflected back in our awareness of natural capital, and constitutive values (2005, 293). It states that we should be familiar with 'the relevant physical, spatial, and temporal dynamics against which those [environmental] values can appropriately be understood to play out' (Hirsch 2018, 90). I am aware that 'heuristic' is defined as a method with an open outcome. But by bringing in normative sustainability, Norton also implies the actual outcome. It invariably consists of a certain aim: the aim of a sustainable outcome of that deliberation.

[40] More specifically, Norton takes Herbert Simon into consideration regarding this distinction (2015).

particular democratic condition for human flourishing (Christiano 2006). In other words, democracy becomes intrinsically valuable because it is an end in itself: it is democracy that is the good life in itself. Procedural claims only feature prescriptions of certain processes, for instance, the methodology regarding how a democracy should be constructed. Such a procedural account does not imply that the proposition is an end in itself, but rather that it is an instrument to reach an unspecified conception of the good life and thereby does not entail any specific notion of a certain goal.

Norton avoids making substantive claims, because that would necessitate also adhering to a specific end-in-itself conception of the good life and therefore embracing a specific value for how to live. This is precisely what he wishes to avoid, for obvious reasons: his ideal deliberation must consider the most possible values to determine the right policy. If Norton were to make a substantive claim, that is, to state which values should be considered, he would contradict his own ideal procedure. Instead, Norton opts for an openness of values allowing reasonable people to deliberate upon them. And, of course, this aligns with his earlier claims: they have all supported his ideal procedure of deliberation.

Nonetheless, the sustainability principle allegedly holds a certain aim, that is, to 'perpetuate place-based [environmental] values and project them into the future' (Norton 2005, 336). It therefore holds an ambition to reconstruct society in a certain direction – towards sustainability. One can argue that the sustainability principle is thereby a substantive claim. It is here that EP differs from pragmatism as simply an epistemological doctrine that only promotes reason. And so, EP cannot be an appropriate, reasonable social ideal – because reasonable people could disagree on its core philosophical commitment of sustainability (that EP claims is necessary for human flourishing). That it, reasonable people could possess good reasons to support other than sustainable values. This implies that EP is self-contradicting. I henceforth call this the 'problem of substantivity'.

I am not the first one to notice this problem. Clark Wolf also argues that Norton's EP seems to imply a substantive goal (2018, §4.3). He further states that this would mean that the goal can be reached by shaping environmental practices around the instrumental achievement of that goal. He illustrates this by stating that a society could, for example, 'define a way to optimize the ratio of opportunities and constraints left as a bequest for future generations, subject to constraints imposed by budget, resource availability, and protections for later generations' (2018, 53). However, he then claims that considering sustainability as a goal would be at odds with Norton's theory, because Norton's project embraces

> 'an adaptionist model that takes goals (...) and constraints to be provisional. Adaptive management [i.e. Norton's ideal for decision-making] involves incremental decision-making and continued revision of goals in light of new information that becomes available' (2018, 53)

Here, Wolf indeed states that Norton's ideal is actually procedural. But, he subsequently fails to provide any arguments as to why this is exactly so other than simply stating that Norton needs his project to be procedural. Callicott also addresses the problem but concludes only that Norton is not sufficiently adequate or robust in his notion of sustainability (2018). The primary reason behind Callicott's argument echoes my earlier criticism: Norton claims that sustainability is not a description of a society, but in all of his principles, he brings sustainability forward as if it were an aim for society to reach – which makes it a description.

One counterargument should now be brought forward: to pose the sustainability principle as a warranted assertion in itself. Just like the discourse principle and continuous inquiry should not be regarded as foundations, but as assertions in themselves, we could say the same for sustainability. What if we simply assume that sustainability should be considered because it has always turned out to be the best possible condition for decision-making? In this argument, the sustainability criterion is then an aim for environmental pragmatic decision-making, because we assert it that way. We then say that, just like the community that has embraced the method of inquiry and the discourse principle as the ideal of deliberation to come to *knowing what is right*, the community has also embraced sustainability as its aim. But, even if one assumes that sustainability is an assertion for a certain aim, it is still not clear if this makes EP viable, because why would Norton want to hold onto such an assertion if he must accommodate value pluralism in the first place? I further elaborate upon this in the next chapter.

2.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined Norton's notion of sustainability. In addition to his earlier commitments, discussed the first chapter – the discourse principle and the open-ended inquiry principle – Norton embraces a further sustainability principle. This seems to imply that, to make righteous decisions, a community should necessarily aim at a sustainable outcome. However, at first glance, it seems that EP is unable to assume the discourse principle together with an openness of inquiry and the sustainability principle. This is because Norton prescribes a procedural ideal for society that must consider the most possible values. But, the sustainability principle entails a specific view for that society. And so, not all values can be considered.

Section 3 – Three strategies for reconciliation

We have now arrived at the consideration that EP commits to three principles: (i) the discourse principle, (ii) the principle of open-ended inquiry and (iii) the sustainability principle. As I have elaborated, the first two epistemological principles appear mutually exclusive with the sustainability principle, which make EP seem nonviable. To truly understand this claim and thereby to uphold the preliminary conclusion that EP is indeed nonviable, I aim, in this chapter, to more deeply consider whether the exclusivity holds. I believe that there are three strategies to do so. Let me be clear by stating that Norton is not explicit in developing such a strategy, although it is possible to establish one likely response on Norton's behalf. I examine two other

responses as well. A critical question for determining how the three principles are related is: where does the sustainability criterion reside in EP? By considering this, we would be able to claim more thoroughly how and when the principles would exclude each other. This is also suggested by the notion that Principles (i) and (ii) seem to involve the process of deliberation but that sustainability has more to do with the examined content of deliberation. So, the principles could not be aligned, or even applicable to the same sort of propositions. This aligns with the original criterion in which it was not yet clarified what the precise subject was: 'A set of behaviours is sustainable etc...' – in which 'a set of behaviours' can be either 'an institution [and] policy', but a 'practice' as well.

3.1. Unpacking the procedure

Before I delve deeper into the question of where sustainability resides in EP, it is worth stepping back and considering how we arrived here. What have we been examining? The philosophical position of EP challenges itself to formulate morally righteous policy regarding environmental problems. Norton claims it can do so, because it prescribes a methodology of finding out what is true, that is, ensuring the best possible claim to truth (i.e. warranted assertibility). This epistemological methodology is more specifically, a procedure of ideal deliberation. By doing so, EP justifies the environmental policy it proposes out of that deliberation. And, it is in this deliberation where EP suggests two principles that capture the manner in which this process is appropriately conducted: the discourse principle and the principle of open-ended inquiry. Thus, all possible involved persons agree in the rational discourse, and rational discourses imply that the conclusions of the discussions are achieved by no other force than that of the better argument, while at the same time, any new possibility for a better solution is upheld and investigated. According to Norton, it is nonetheless the case that policy can only be morally righteous if it is also sustainable – which can be assessed by the sustainability principle.

To fully understand where the sustainability principle resides, I would like to take another look at the decision-making process. After all, a process consists of a series of steps. When, how and where should we apply the sustainability principle in the process of formulating morally righteous policy? I imagine three possible replies. The first two, (a) the 'input-strategy' and (b) the 'output-strategy', both apply the sustainability principle to the *subject* of deliberation. The third possibility, (c) the 'throughput-strategy', applies sustainability to the *process* of deliberation. Moreover, I illustrate the replies with an example of such deliberation processes. The example is that of a fictitious village called Hardin, where the democratic

representatives appropriately deliberate in their Senate. One of these representatives, Senator Elinor, presents the policy proposal 'Claim X' for a certain (unnamed) environmental issue.[41]

Before I commence in elaborating on this, I would briefly like to mention that I cannot identify any strategy other than these three possibilities. When taken together, these strategies are collectively exhaustive – they capture any possible outcome. This is because the sustainability principle can only be applied to either the subject of deliberation or to the process of deliberation itself.[42] If it is applied to the subject, this can only occur prior to deliberation (which I call the input-strategy) or after the outcome of deliberation (referred to as the output-strategy). If it is applied to the process of deliberation, this can only be as a principle of the ideal procedure of deliberation, or what one may identify as *during* appropriate deliberation (here, dubbed the throughput-strategy).[43] Moreover, taken individually, these strategies are mutually disjointed, which means that they cannot reasonably occur at the same time.[44] So, at least one must be true, from which it follows that the others cannot occur: the sustainability principle is either part of appropriate deliberation or it is an application to the deliberation of the inputs or outputs. Now, it could also be inferred that the sustainability criterion forms a condition of the open-ended inquiry principle or the discourse principle. However, since both open-ended inquiry and the discourse principle are that which constitutes ideal deliberation, these possibilities are captured in the throughput-strategy. As I argue below, all strategies face insurmountable issues. I begin with the input-strategy, which is rather easily debunked. I subsequently address the output-strategy – seemingly preferred by Norton – which is a bit more complex but is also non-feasible. Ultimately, the third strategy could be feasible, but not in practice. And, because EP has set out to solve everyday practical problems, I deem the third strategy, and with it Norton's EP as a whole, to be nonviable on its own terms.

3.2. Input-strategy

At this point, it seems useful to consider what a process of ideal deliberation comprises. The following would be a typical process in our Hardinian Senate example: Senator Elinor wishes to address a problem faced by

[41] The names 'Harden' and 'Elinor' refer to two influential scholars in philosophy regarding environmental depletion: Garrett Hardin and Elinor Ostrom. Both have written extensively on the so-called 'Problem of the Commons', a metaphor for the problems of overuse and decay of natural resources and appropriate policy (Ostrom 1999).

[42] By which it appeals to the above-mentioned distinction of either substantive or procedural considerations.

[43] I will point out that the subject of deliberation is then also altered in this scenario.

[44] The sustainability criterion could of course also be applied both before and after deliberation and as a part of deliberation. But that would simply be unnecessary, as the criterion of sustainability would in either case be applied. To be as clear and comprehensive as possible: one could then also say that the sustainability criterion should not be applied at all. However, that is what we are trying to find out: Norton claims he has good reasons to apply the sustainability principle, and I try to analyze whether this is consistent with his EP.

society. She thereby develops Claim X, which she believes to be a reasonable solution to this problem. Senator Elinor takes her Claim X to the Senate, where it is the subject of deliberation. Ultimately, this deliberation can be dubbed 'ideal' if it fulfils both the discourse principle and the open-ended inquiry principle. The policy that emerges from this process is proclaimed to be justified truth (i.e. the warranted assertion of what is the best solution).[45] As mentioned above, I first examine the possibility of applying the sustainability principle to the *subject* of deliberation (that is, Claim X). The primary question I now raise is at which point in the process should we apply the sustainability criterion to the subject? Two possibilities in such a scenario are now presented.

The first strategy would be to apply the sustainability principle prior to deliberation. In such a scenario, Claim X, proposed by Senator Elinor, would be subjected to the criterion before being considered in the Senate. And so, if a claim or argument did not meet the criterion, it would not be adopted for debate. Suppose a different Senator wished to argue for razing certain mountains for the benefit of mining. In such a scenario, his argument would then be regarded by the sustainability criterion and would, of course, fail. And so, his claim would not be allowed to be taken to the Senate. In this scenario, the deliberation is still ideal, as the sustainability principle does not interfere with that deliberation. I call this the input-scenario, because the input for deliberation is what is assessed by the sustainability principle.

Yet, this strategy is instantly problematic. According to EP, we can only know something on the basis of deliberation. In the input-scenario, it is decided that a claim is unsustainable prior to deliberation. However, deliberation was necessary in the first place to determine that it could be declared unsustainable. Thus, how could we even know that Claim X is unsustainable if we cannot deliberate on it? Moreover, who would evaluate Claim X before it is presented for deliberation? Again, according to EP, we can only know something by means of deliberation, and so the act of applying the sustainability principle must occur in a deliberative manner. But, we have stated here that deliberation is to be avoided. And so, either way, the input-strategy is infeasible for reconciling the three principles of EP.

3.3. Output-strategy

The second strategy is what I have dubbed the 'output-strategy'. This seems to be the strategy that Norton himself endorses (although not explicitly). In this case, the principle of sustainability is not applied prior to deliberation but instead to the outcome of deliberation. This may be done to avoid the 'problem of substantivity'. After all, in this strategy, sustainability is not promoted as a limitation of values presented for deliberation. Instead, in this scenario, the community has, at a certain pointed, decided that it only wants to embrace sustainable policy and has then applied the sustainability criterion to ensure that it maintains that sustainable course. So, Senator Elinor takes her Claim X to the Senate. There, the claim is deliberated upon

[45] One should bring to mind here that *we know something is right because we assume it is the best assertion of what we can know.*

and eventually a (possible) revised claim is created – an approved new concrete policy.[46] Only at that moment will it be decided whether that new policy is also sustainable – for example, by a sustainability sub-committee of the Senate. If so, it will be executed. If not, the policy will be dismissed, regardless.

One could raise the objection here that – even if the sustainability criterion is no longer a criterion for appropriate deliberation – this scenario still implies the promotion of a specific view of the good life (and is thus substantive). This is because it seems that in this scenario the community would claim that the good life can only be that which can be dubbed sustainable. And, that would mean that it becomes impossible to consider as many views as possible in the deliberative process. This is, however, not the case. In this scenario, deliberation is fully open ended: all views are considered, and thus deliberation is conducted appropriately. In this case, we only apply an extended principle: is the outcome also sustainable? I must admit that this seems a bit ambiguous: should it not matter whether we apply a certain aim as a principle of deliberation or as a subsequent principle? Yet, for the sake of argument, I explore this path a bit further. If we grant Norton this distinction, it becomes clear that a community can decide on sustainable route even if, out of the appropriate deliberation, a different direction was suggested. Here, sustainability becomes the bedrock for upholding that initial (sustainable) route.

To illuminate this commitment, it seems relevant to ask a preliminary question. As I have outlined in the first chapter, Norton seemingly claims that if deliberation occurs ideally, the outcome must then necessarily be righteous. The most pressing question at this point is, then, why would Norton want to introduce such a dissonant principle to be applied to the result of deliberation? It seems that he has already specified that a 'right' decision will emerge as long as the principles of deliberation are upheld. This should imply that one would not require any successive conditions regarding the result because it would simply emerge on its own. And, if it did not emerge, sustainability would apparently not be the right route. Ockham's razor would suggest leaving out any needless speculation. It seems that the one condition ensuring that the community will be sustained need not be a necessary limitation of the outcome of deliberation because – and this is inherent to Norton's interpretation of ideal deliberation – by means of deliberation, it will come forward nonetheless that the community must be sustained. Is it not so that, by ideal deliberation, *that what is right* will always be *that what is sustainable?*

As I have noted above, in Section 2.3, however, Norton is aware that ideal deliberation does not necessarily lead to sustainability (Keulartz 2018, 194).[47] In terms of our illustration, Claim X is ideally deliberated on, and the outcome is thus the best possible action asserted by the Senate, but it is still

[46] I have added 'possible' in parenthesis here, because it could be that Elinor passes her claim without any revision at all.

[47] For more on this I recommend the discussion between Norton and Manuel Arias-Maldonado. Norton addresses this issue, after criticism received from Arias-Maldonado in his book *Real Green: Sustainability After the End of Nature* (2012). Arias-Maldonado writes: 'There is no guarantee that ecological [sustainable] values will be embraced as a result of free and equal deliberations.' (144).

unsustainable. And so, that which is asserted to be right is not always sustainable. It is here that Norton raises the sustainability principle – which is now a limitation of the outcome of deliberation. By this, Norton means that the sustainability principle is a subsequent principle that ought be to applied to deliberative outcomes, because it is unlikely that a society will always embrace the long-term, place/based values that are necessary to thrive and survive (again, see Section 2.3).[48] However, this acceptance is not always the case – and it is at this moment that a society assumes a policy to be right that is actually wrong, according to Norton.

As I have elaborated upon in the second section, Norton claims that a community will always want to survive and thrive and that any depletion of natural capital works against that survival. Norton argues that by means of deliberation, people will develop insight and determine what is morally righteous. But, because this deliberation is often focussed on the short term, an outcome can be dubbed righteous (because it is derived from ideal deliberation) yet unsustainable. We are aware, however, that ultimately, we should always opt for (long-term) sustainability. Therefore, we should apply the sustainability principle after the deliberative process to the subject of that outcome. To accomplish sustainable change and become aware of long-range values, the social and political environment must first be structurally adapted.

Norton illustrates how this should occur. The stimuli under which people make decisions should be altered. This can be done through incentives.[49] Examples of such incentives, or in more popular terms, of such nudging, in the realm of the environment include carbon taxes and renewable energy tax breaks. Furthermore, sustainable change can also be implemented by specific checks (e.g. conducted by a governmental sustainability supervisory board). According to Norton, our aim for sustainability is first something that we deem necessary through ideal deliberation (hence, that claim is a warranted assertion on itself). And then, we apply that sustainability to our political structures to ensure we are vested in that route.

For example, we come to claim by means of ideal deliberation that a certain act is morally righteous. Suppose everyone agrees through open inquiry and reasonable compromise that lowering taxes to a maximum of 12% is the right action (in the short term, of course). This does mean, however, that the environment could suffer (in the long term) because we will be more likely to use natural resources. However, the community has previously agreed to accept only sustainable policy and has implemented this through political structures: any proposal for resource mining will be subject to extensive and expensive scrutiny – and so companies are nudged to seek other possible means of productions (even when subject to lower taxes).

However, this approach is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, if ideal deliberation is insufficient for knowing what is right, then how can we know – by means of deliberation – that it is right to always uphold

[48] This could be an argument for Norton to address criticism that EP faces in different papers, such as Maboloc (2016) and Carter (2012). Unfortunately, this thesis does not have enough space to explore this further.

[49] Here, Norton builds on the work of social psychologist Thomas Heberlein, who argues for such incentives in his 2012 book *Navigating Environmental Attitudes*.

the long-term values? This would be a classic bootstrap fallacy: we generate awareness for sustainability through the incentives that we create because of our awareness of sustainability. Secondly, the focus of interest is the disaggregation of *knowing what is right* and translating this into morally righteous policy. To continue our example, Senator Elinor takes Claim X to the Senate, where the claim is reflected upon and leads to a (possible) adjusted Claim X2. Claim X2 is the best-known solution for a certain problem. Only afterward is Claim X2 assessed for sustainability. But, by doing this, the sustainability criterion becomes an external standard by which the outcome of appropriate deliberation is then implemented. The most important reason why is this problematic is that, by separating the sustainability principle from the principles of deliberation, Norton removes the enduring, progressive flexibility from the sustainability principle. By this, I mean that the sustainability principle would no longer be open to epistemological adjustment, because the epistemological norms are always corrected by the sustainability principle. The stimuli could be altered, as Norton suggests, but not the overarching principle of those stimuli. Suppose that after ideal deliberation, it becomes clear that the sustainability principle in itself should be altered. This is then, by the community, regarded as a *right claim*. But then, the external sustainability principle in itself will overrule that claim – ensuring that it can never be altered. We could also argue that the sustainability principle then ceases to be an assertion open to adjustment but rather becomes an epistemological foundation in itself – which is, of course, inherently inconsistent with EP.

This argument could be resolved by the following steps: if EP wishes to claim that what is right is also that which is sustainable, and if EP regards its method of deliberation capable of truth finding (both of which it does), it logically follows that through ideal deliberation, a sustainable outcome must be guaranteed. This can only mean that EP should not apply sustainability to the subject of deliberation. However, as Norton argues, it is in fact possible to deliberate without deriving sustainable conclusions. The solution to this would be to implement the sustainability principle into the epistemic norms of ideal deliberation. If this were the case, EP's initial claim that *any righteous decision is only right when sustainable* would hold.

In summary, applying the sustainability principle to the outcomes of appropriate deliberation imposes an external foundation on knowing what is right. It suggests that even insights that we know to be morally righteous must be adjusted to sustainable norms. Yet, these norms are not part of the enduring, experimental epistemological adjustments of deliberation: and so, the sustainability principle has become a superior standard. We must then consider whether it is possible to integrate the sustainability principle into appropriate deliberation. I propose a route for this implementation in the third strategy, outlined in the next subchapter.

3.4. Throughput-strategy

In the previous two strategies, I have examined the sustainability principle when applied to the subject of deliberation. In our Hardinian Senate example, this is the content of Claim X, brought forward by Senator

Elinor. However, because these strategies have turned out to be unattainable, I now consider the sustainability principle as a principle of the process of appropriate deliberation itself. In this scenario, deliberation is then conditioned by (i) the principle of open-ended inquiry, (ii) the discourse principle and (iii) the sustainability principle. Here, deliberation is only conducted properly when the aim of sustainability is considered throughout the deliberative process. Hence, I dub this the 'throughput-strategy'. Here, the criticism of an external standard does not apply: for Claim X to emerge from the deliberation, it necessarily must be sustainable, whereas in the output-strategy, the outcome is also righteous but not necessarily sustainable. I conclude that this is a compelling reply to the substantivity problem only *in theory*.

Let me first elaborate on how to interpret sustainability when applied to the procedure of deliberation. Bring to mind again that something can be dubbed sustainable 'if and only if its practice in generation m will not reduce the ratio of opportunities to constraints that will be encountered by individuals in generations n, o, p…' Applied to the procedure of deliberation, this then means that the act of deliberating upon something will not reduce the scale of opportunities for considering it in the future. But even here, natural capital must be considered. Natural capital constitutes the community, so any diminishment of that capital will reduce opportunities either way. Thus, the long-term values should be upheld here as well. In this scenario, it is then suggested that the sustainability criterion becomes part of the deliberative and epistemic norms: Claim X can only be righteous if, and only if, it is sustainable.

So, what would such a procedure comprise? The implementation of the initial conditions for deliberation through procedural norms is easily conceivable. For example, 'no participant who could make fair suggestions should be excluded' (discourse principle) or 'new possible solutions should always be regarded' (open-ended inquiry principle). The procedural norms for the sustainability principle should refer to the procedure itself, for instance, 'no claim that undermines the process of deliberation is taken into account'. Deliberation is executed by the community, and a claim that does not reflect the place/based values will ultimately undermine the community itself. Therefore, such non-sustainable claims will undermine the process of deliberation.

To use our example, Senator Elinor develops Claim X, which she proposes in the Senate up for debate. It is here that the claim is then tested, bolstered or rebutted so that (possibly) a new claim emerges from this process – which will necessarily be sustainable. The norms for this deliberation prescribe that any rationale should be considered in the long run. This implies that if, in the process of deliberation, a suggestion or argument is made by any of the participants that is unsustainable, the other participants will point out that such a standpoint is unreasonable, because it ultimately weakens the procedure of deliberation in itself.

One may again ask why the community would need such a sustainability principle if the discourse principle is already sufficient for knowing what is right. As I have explained above, this is apparently not the case. Open democratic deliberation could turn out to be unsustainable. And so, we assert the sustainability principle as a way to ensure that we indeed maintain the right direction. Moreover, if reasons exist to refute or

adjust the sustainability principle, the community could do so by critically evaluating the principle itself. In this way, EP would not be assessed by an external standard but would be able to self-ameliorate, epistemically speaking. The sustainability principle could be re-assessed and adjusted if necessary. It is, after all, a warranted assertion on its own – open to debate. And so, here – as with EP's epistemological principles – sustainability is a norm for reasonableness. These epistemic norms are – very precisely so – the methodology to promote that reason and thus determine what is right.[50] Therefore, this strategy overturns the problem of substantivity.

This is, at least in theory, the case. I do believe a fair question would now be whether such a commitment would also hold in *practical terms*. Surely, EP has set out to propose an aim for environmental decision-making in practical circumstances. What if we consider practical environmental situations? It is here that a problem emerges, because it is here that the sustainability principle promotes a non-epistemic notion of the good life. Consider the wildlands, with which this thesis began. These wildlands do not pose a direct risk to human existence, and so one could argue that these wildlands are open to destruction because their destruction does not refute Norton's assumption that any community wants to survive and thrive. Now, EP would prescribe – according to the sustainability principle – that any assessment of knowing what is right regarding the wildlands would be to, at the very least, leave the opportunity open for future generations to decide on the wildlands. So, even if the wildlands were (partially) diminished, they should, in the very least, be able to be restored so that future generations would have their own choice. As Norton explains, and as I have elaborated on in the second part, natural capital holds a specific preference over other categories of capital, because it is constitutive of the community itself. This strengthens the conclusion that the opportunity of ushering wildlands in any manner possible should always be left open. However, this is practically impossible. We live in a world of scarcity, in which we are continuously forced to make choices. It is simply unattainable to *always* leave the opportunity for ushering any natural capital open.[51] If a community is unable to always leave any opportunity open for future generations regarding natural capital, that community thus undermines its communal place/based values and thereby the epistemic norms of deliberation.

Wildlands, or any form of natural capital, form a part of our constitutive values due to spatial and temporal considerations (as presented in Section 2.3). This means that, according to Norton, natural capital constitutes the community in itself. Therefore, a choice between (a) being unsustainable or (b) maintaining

[50] Robert E. Talisse has recently made similar remarks about pragmatism in general: because of inquiry and holding proper discourses we are able to come to knowing what is right (Talisse 2007; Forstenzer 2011). Moreover, Talisse claims elsewhere that classical pragmatism is substantive in its essence, and therefore needs a comprehensive theory of justice (2017).

[51] A question that could be raised here, but is not part of the scope of this thesis would be: if we would be able to restore a specific wildland (thereby leaving the opportunity open, again), would that then be the same natural capital as it was before the initial depletion? This brings Brian Barry's 'plastic tree world' thought-experiment to mind in which all non-human nature is gone, but its functions are still active (1997). Recently this experiment re-occurred in Zwarthoed (2016).

natural capital should always be granted to the latter. If not, the community would deteriorate itself; it would 'sweep its feet under itself'. But, because that choice should then always be with natural capital, the community thus promotes a specific conception of the good life. This means that a specific value must be granted superiority and that some values are to be rejected as 'reasonable'. As we have seen, this makes EP unable to accommodate reasonable pluralism, and thus it is nonviable.

In the ideal procedure of deliberation, any value should be assessed. Furthermore, according to the sustainability principle, any possibility for wildlands should be kept open. And so, such an anti-wetland value is set to be condemned, even before appropriate deliberation. This implies that the sustainability principle, when implemented, will not promote the epistemological method, but rather it prefers a particular notion of what it deems to be good – that is, always preferring natural capital. In conclusion, this makes the sustainability principle in practice reasonably rejectable, because people with other values (for instance, economic) could possess good reasons to promote any other capital above the natural. And therefore, the third strategy for reconciliation is also elusive.

3.5. Conclusion

In this section, I have presented three possible replies to the problem of substantivity. This problem is only solvable if the commitment of sustainability can be reconciled with the principles of open-ended inquiry and proper discourse, that is, to accommodate reasonable pluralism, while providing sustainable outcomes. I have done so by first considering whether the sustainability criterion should be considered the principle to assess the input or outcome of appropriate deliberation. The input-strategy turns out to be unusable due to an absence of any deliberation. The output-strategy, Norton's preferred scenario, could be possible, because that which is righteous could be deemed unfavourable when translated into practical policy. However, this strategy turns out to be indefensible: if the sustainability principle were applied in this manner, it would serve as an external benchmark for assessing known insights that we already believe are right. The third strategy I have proposed aims to consider the sustainability principle as a necessary condition for appropriate deliberation, meaning that an outcome of deliberation can only be righteous if it is sustainable. This strategy seems viable at first sight. The sustainability principle promotes an enduring openness of constitutive environmental values, because in this manner the community, and hence the deliberative process, is preserved. Ideal deliberation is therefore conceptually strengthened in its norms for rational discourse. However, if such an ideal is implemented, it becomes nonviable, nonetheless. This is because when addressing a specific environmental issue, it is deemed unattainable to always maintain all opportunities. We must make choices, including choices that would diminish natural capital. It is here that the inability to accommodate reasonable pluralism comes to light: in the practical development of EP, one must sooner or later choose in favour or against natural capital. And, since that choice is predetermined due to the sustainability principle, it dismisses

those stakeholders, or at least their views, who could hold reasonable priorities that are not in favour of natural capital from the political arena.

Conclusion – Environmental pragmatism's promise of coming together

Both in- and outside the academic world, a hot and heavy debate exists regarding the role of human beings in the non-human natural world. For many years, this issue was addressed on the basis of traditional, anthropocentric ethics. Since the emergence of the field of environmental ethics, a challenge has been posed to that traditional outlook: no longer should we reason from only intrinsic human values, but instead, we should attribute the non-human world with intrinsic value. Ultimately, this has led to a deadlock between those who favour policy based on intrinsic human values and those who support non-human intrinsic values. Under the great influence of classic American pragmatism, an alternative has been offered in this debate, environmental pragmatism – referred to in this thesis as EP.

I have claimed that EP is nonviable because a fundamental incompatibility exists between its pragmatic epistemological commitments and its commitment to sustainability. Here, EP is regarded as the epistemological justification for righteous decision-making, which Bryan Norton, EP's most prominent scholar, calls 'adaptive ecosystem management'. I have made my claim on the basis of three steps. Firstly, I have considered how EP justifies its epistemological claims. After all, to make the right decision, we must first be able to know what is right. It is here that EP builds on the epistemological assumptions of classic pragmatism. Accordingly, a community – that is, a group of people holding the same constitutive values – is able, by means of ideal democratic deliberation, to arrive at warranted assertions of truth. This ideal is constituted out of what I have dubbed EP's epistemological principles: the principle of open-ended inquiry and the discourse principle. For a community to formulate a warranted assertion, it should therefore accommodate reasonable value pluralism.

Secondly, I have considered how Norton wishes to use this epistemic methodology to arrive at righteous decisions in environmental issues, as this is what EP aims to do. It is here that Norton commits to a third principle: sustainability. This principle states that any opportunity, or more specifically, those opportunities involving natural capital (i.e. the environment of the community), should be left open. As Norton argues his point, he makes it clear that a community is based upon its constitutive values, which are encapsulated in natural capital. Because no community wishes to diminish its constitutive values and thereby itself, no community wishes to diminish natural capital. Here, Norton leaves it open to appropriate deliberation by the democratic community to determine what exactly is right, as long as the outcome of that deliberation is sustainable. Yet, this imposes a problem of incoherence to Norton: if appropriate deliberation can only succeed by accommodating reasonable pluralism, then there ought not to be a principle that pre-emptively promotes a certain conception of the good life (in terms of value) – that is, sustainability. If this is so, EP cannot accommodate reasonable pluralism and is thereby nonviable on its own terms.

I have subsequently, and thereby thirdly, assessed whether the epistemological commitments of EP can be reconciled with the sustainability principle. It turns out that EP has many difficulties justifying this. I have identified three possible routes through which the three commitments can be harmonised. A first suggestion is to qualify any input for deliberation. If such an input is then found unsustainable, it may not be debated in the first place. This is instantly problematic, because a community must determine whether something is unsustainable by deliberation, a possibility that is rejected outright. A second strategy is to consider the sustainability principle as an external principle, only applied after the debate is concluded. This would keep the deliberation open ended but seems problematic because the sustainability principle would then become an external bedrock for decision-making, even if the community had already decided what the 'right' policy or decision to take would be.

The third strategy is to acknowledge the sustainability principle as a necessary condition for ideal deliberation. Here, sustainability becomes part of the epistemological norms for reasonableness. This implies that the community can only know whether a certain proposition is (morally) right if that proposition is also sustainable. This strategy seems viable in theory, because sustainability is defined by promoting enduring possibilities and only those policies that are enduring for our community can be reasonable. However, when such a strategy is applied in practical terms, it turns out to be nonviable, nonetheless. When a community is addressing a particular environmental problem, it follows that any practical solution should always favour the environment, that is, natural capital. This is because it is unattainable to always leave any option open, as our choices will from time to time demand a decision between different types of capital. In such case, according to Norton, we should always opt in favour of natural capital. If we do not do so, we threaten our own community, because, to Norton, natural capital is the same as place/based values – they constitute the community. Because no alternative can further be conceptualised as reasonable in reconciling the two epistemological principles and the sustainability principle that would function in practice, I conclude that EP is nonviable in practice.

Before I finalise this thesis, I must stress that I do not wish to throw the baby away with the bathwater. If EP could justify its substantive claims, then it would still promise to be an encouraging and hopeful alternative in the challenge of environmental policy. I believe that the epistemological methodology of pragmatic decision-making does appear justified in terms of its application of reason. Its strength lies in the overarching norms of deliberation, with the attention to the environmental disaster our planet currently faces. Unfortunately, this thesis does not have ample room to further amplify how this could be applied in practical terms. It could be, as Robert E. Talisse has suggested for pragmatism in general, that a specific theory of justice should be first implemented before we can derive sustainability principles. Or, it could simply be that we should first be clear on certain moral environmental values – aware that these could change over time – without descending into Rorty's moral relativism. In its very essence, EP's truth-finding methodology invites us to come together and find out.

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