

philosophy of non-violence and truth-seeking embodied in the activist Sunderlal Bahugana as a key to ecologically sound development.

Although this is a book that should be read primarily by teachers who want to learn more about Vedanta and India's philosophical traditions, there are a number of papers, including those by Mishra, Johnson, Sundarajan, Reynaud, and Singh, that could be used in an advanced seminar in Indian philosophy or a course in Vedanta.

John M. Koller, Dept. of Cognitive Science, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Great Neck NY, 11021; kollej@rpi.edu

The Pine Island Paradox

Kathleen Dean Moore

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MICHAEL P. NELSON

Environmental philosopher J. Baird Callicott recently lamented that contemporary academic philosophy is inappropriately focused on "specialized arcane intellectual puzzles . . . and away from common and pressing real-world problems—the solving of which might necessitate profound social, economic, and political changes. . . . [T]he highest compliment that a mainstream academic philosopher can win today from his or her peers is to be called 'clever'—not wise, not profound, not insightful, not far-seeing, but merely clever." In Kathleen Dean Moore's book, *The Pine Island Paradox*, we see a risky and dramatic attempt to break away from this, an attempt to make philosophy relevant and attractive to thoughtful people who might otherwise dismiss it, an attempt to fuse disciplines (philosophy, nature writing, natural history, science, ethics) into a beautiful and profound statement about our place in the natural world.

This book belongs in our philosophy classrooms. I have used it with great success in my own. First, I used it as the featured text in a Philosophy 101—Contemporary Moral Problems class which focused simply on the question of how we ought to live in the world. We worked through the essays in the book and I supplemented with appropriate readings of a more traditional philosophical bent when it seemed fitting: we read Aristotle on friendship while Moore was attempting to "make friends" with harbor seals in the essay "Stalking Seals," and asked whether friendship was the appropriate sort of relationship that humans could expect to have with non-human animals or the environment; we read Mill, Bentham, and Kant when Moore critiqued utilitarianism and deontology; we read Aldo Leopold's "The Land Ethic" and Nel Noddings on the ethics of care when Moore worked to develop that ethic as the foundation for the main argument of her book; and

we read Thomas Nagel's wonderful little essay "The Absurd" when Moore employed the work of ecological restoration as a possible representation of the meaning of life.

The second time I used the book was in my graduate environmental philosophy seminar: a course made up of equal parts philosophy graduate students and graduate students from the college of natural resource, some from environmental science, and a few far-flung from creative writing and architecture. Maybe it was because this was a smaller class, but I suspect it was because the students were more mature, but the book was a huge hit. I used it to capstone the course and to demonstrate another way that environmental philosophy could be done. It generated marvelous and serious philosophical discourse, it nicely complemented the more traditional environmental ethical theories that we started the course with, and it gave students an example of the power of creative and critical thought mixed with clean and accessible prose.

Overall, reactions to the book were interesting and somewhat generalizable. Students who came from the sciences or from traditional philosophical backgrounds were more mixed in their reactions; and this mixture seemed to correspond directly to their literary experience and academic training. Students who were more literary and more interdisciplinary loved the book; students who were not did not know quite what to do with it. Many students wanted to pigeon-hole the book: "It's another book of nature essays," "No, it's a book of philosophy," "No, it's not a book of philosophy"; when the book did not fit their neat categorizations many were stymied. I asked, "Is there room in philosophy for this sort of work?" One of the students said that if there wasn't room in philosophy for this sort of work then there *should* be, that there was something wrong with philosophy, "when did philosophy become so narrow?" she asked. I didn't have an answer.

One of the most interesting classroom encounters while reading *The Pine Island Paradox* involved the students' reactions to Moore's confessions of a non-Puritanical and uncertain approach to environmental thought and ethics, something they are not familiar or comfortable with. Students are not used to people who implicate themselves in the very thing that they are arguing against, who confess to occasionally eating at McDonald's or tossing Sociables to backyard jays, driving gas-guzzling motor boats or burning up pine and jet fuel. They are used to people who are, or who are good at feigning, perfection. They want saints (or they think they want saints), they want their teachers to know the answers. In *Pine Island*, however, Moore comes off as imperfect and unsure, which, for some students, makes her too much like them. They are used to environmental saints like Muir and Thoreau, or to people who seem to have very certain and definite answers about how we ought to value the world and how we ought to act in accordance with that value.

Moore's attitude makes students uneasy at first. Slowly, some students begin to whole-heartedly embraced Moore's non-Puritanism and uncertainty,

while others predictably saw it as a sign of weakness. Personally I appreciate the fact that Moore is honest and open and uncertain in the book. In a book that is a deep expression of the love of nature and of a sense of obligation to care for nature that rivals anything ever written on this topic, she swills wine and whiskey, she owns a Ford Expedition (not quite a Ford Excursion, but still big and thirsty) which she uses to haul a twenty-two-foot boat to Alaska each summer to spend time on a remote island, which, when she crunches the numbers turns out to be a \$402.80 gift to the oil industry. She lives in town, not on her own remote eighty acres, and yet she writes nature essays—and she worries about that. She listens to and writes about water dripping from the roof of the 7-Eleven and the Super 8 Motel with as much reverence as she writes about the critters that pop out at night along the coastline when the tide subsides.

But unlike some environmental writers, she does not turn around and take some perverse Edward Abbey-esque pleasure in this counter-intuitive radicalness either. She confesses to feeling unsure about this, of feeling remorse, but of being unsure about how much remorse she should feel. As Moore puts it, “Say you agree that humans have an obligation to care for the earth. What does that mean in particular, in this place and time? What are you going to do? The point I want to make is that it isn’t easy to know.” The world is complicated—“Nobody says it’s easy, knowing the difference between right and wrong.” Here Moore nails it. Ethics is not physics, it is not math; it is, rather, many variable, unformulaic, and complex. And the morally mature person struggles with a multiplicity of moral commitments, not all of which can be completely satisfied all at the same time. The morally mature person is a bad juggler, a ball-dropper who does the hard but honest work of trying to maximize for as many moral commitments as she or he can, but who is fully aware that they will fail, but who still gives it a go—and it is this ‘giving it a go’ that makes them morally mature. Consistency is perhaps purchased at the cost of moral maturity, while the charge of hypocrisy waits for the inevitable fumble of moral commitment. But this is honest, this is exactly the world we live in, and this recognition is one of the things that I like best about Moore’s work here.

In a time when environmentalism and environmentalists are often critiqued for being a joyless lot, here is a book with a sense of humor. Moore mixes wrenching and serious assessment of the passive language that we use to describe our impacts on nature with a delightful irreverence:

The facts are bad enough, but the grammar is terrifying. Species go extinct, we say. But the fact of the matter is that species don’t always go extinct, the way bananas go bad, or bombs go astray, or elderly uncles go crazy or go about their business. Human decisions sometimes drive animals to extinction. Human decisions extinguish entire species. Extinguish: to cause to cease burning. All the little sparking lives.

Shit happens, we say. And sometimes it does. But the fact of the matter is that sometimes, shit doesn't just happen. Sometimes, human beings deliberately create the conditions under which shit is more likely to occur. (106)

And this middle-aged mother of two known for sweet and moving prose focused on love and care and empathy can also demonstrate an almost violent sort of raucous humor at times. Putting Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's theory on the five stages of grieving to work in an environmental framework, Moore comes to stage two, anger:

What kind of a person can cut an ancient forest to bloody stumps, bulldoze the meadows to mud, spray poison over the mess that's left, and then set smudge fires in the slash? And when the wounded mountainside slumps into the river, floods tear apart the waterfalls and scour the spawning beds, and no salmon return, what kind of a person can pronounce it an act of God—and then direct the bulldozers through the stream and into the next forest, and the next? I hope there's a cave in hell for people like this, where an insane little demon hops around shouting, "jobs or trees, jobs or trees," and buries an ax blade in their knees every time they struggle to their feet. (212)

In a similar vein, Moore confesses to writing a postcard to the Mobil Oil Company in reaction to one of their magazine ads which featured a photo of the cloud-splashed earth from space and the words, "Mother Earth is a tough old gal." Moore's postcard read, "If the Earth were your mother, she would grab you in one rocky hand and hold you underwater 'til you no longer bubbled."

But what about the substance of the book as a piece of philosophy? Among other things, Moore is taking on two important and entwined tasks in the book. First, she is arguing that we Westerners are caught by three major dualisms: we take for granted radical distinctions between humans and nature, between near and far (both spatially and temporally), and between the sacred and the mundane. Moore assumes that we do this, that this is at least part of the major root cause of our environmental woes, that these are false dualisms, and she sets out to challenge the clarity of these dualisms as a form of environmental remediation.

Second, she is attempting to argue that nature has intrinsic or sacred value, that we are entwined with nature in a seriously communal fashion, and that the fact of this value and this entwinement carries with it the moral obligation to act accordingly. These are the ideas that matter most in the book, the ideas around which all of the narratives are wrapped and which all of the narratives are aimed at dispelling or proving. These are also the ideas that seem to be central to what we think of as more typical academic environmental ethics. So, one of the things we can ask is, if Moore is right about all of this and if this is the goal of the book, how successful is she at dueling with these dualisms and at getting this argument to stick? In my mind she is very successful, but I am already predisposed to sign for this package. I am not as sure how successful the main arguments would be to those not already so predisposed.

But then again I am not sure how persuasive any of the arguments we environmental philosophers make are to the recalcitrant, especially if we are attempting to shift fundamental metaphysical assumptions or establish the intrinsic value of nature as Moore is doing here. I am, however, fairly certain that anyone willing to entertain an alternative metaphysic (a metaphysic of connection instead of separation) or an alternative environmental ethic (an ecocentric ethic of care) is going to be moved by *The Pine Island Paradox* as much or more than they are by the work of Arne Naess, Val Plumwood, Baird Callicott, or Holmes Rolston.

I would rather judge the success of the main project of the book this way: Does Kathleen Dean Moore demonstrate *good reason* (good enough reason) to reject the dualisms that she takes on? If the dualisms depend upon clarity—a clear separation between humans and nature, near and far, and the sacred and the mundane—then what Moore has to do is show us that these are not so clear after all, that the water is muddy at best. So, does she give us good reason to see muddy water where we once saw clear? Does she give us good reason to think that the non-human world *is* imbued with intrinsic value and that caring is an appropriate moral obligation that grows from this realization? Absolutely, yes, I think she does that, and does that in a most unique and memorable fashion.

In my mind—and this is not hyperbole—*The Pine Island Paradox* should sit on the shelf next to *Walden*, *Silent Spring*, and *A Sand County Almanac*. It is perhaps the most important environmental book written in the last decade.

Michael P. Nelson, Lyman Briggs School of Science and the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, Michigan State University, East Lansing MI 48825; mpnelson@msu.edu