



Lecture • Thursday, February 20, 2025 • 11:00am

Piers H.G. Stephens, “Pragmatic Ecology: William James and Environmental Philosophy”

There is a division in environmental philosophy between pragmatists and radical critics of anthropocentrism. Pragmatists maintain that environmental ethicists who stress the intrinsic value of nature have had little impact on policy. Anti-pragmatists respond that pragmatist thought is too human-centered to properly articulate environmentalist critiques. Stephens argues that the philosophy of William James can offer a way forward, uniting the ecological thinkers’ depth of criticism with core ideas from the pragmatist tradition, creating a new synthesis and significantly reframing these debates. James’s distinctive foci on introspection, non-instrumental aspects of consciousness, transformative experiences, and the centrality of felt value in immediate sensory awareness can ideally attend to precisely those areas of concern radical environmentalists have raised against pragmatists.

Piers Stephens is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Georgia. He is the editor of Ethics and the Environment and philosophy reviews editor of Environmental Values. His research focuses on environmental philosophy, pragmatism, and the history of the ideas of freedom, nature and the good.

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