

A non-dualist approach to environmental ethics by Robert Ellis

For the past four years I have been working on a non-dualist approach to the issue of moral objectivity, which has been embodied in my Ph.D. thesis “A Buddhist Theory of Moral Objectivity”, currently being examined. This paper is an attempt to apply that approach in a field in which it seems readily applicable: that of environmental ethics. Although my theory of non-dualism has been written in relation to a set of general philosophical problems relating to ethics, it seems to me that it offers a more effective tool for doing environmental ethics than any of the established Western ethical systems (or particularistic denials of systems). Nevertheless, I can only hope, in the space of a paper, to give an outline of the approach and how it might be applied in this way. At some point I may be able to turn my attention to working out the implications in a more detailed way; or perhaps others with more detailed practical knowledge of the area may be able to do this more effectively than I.

Non-dualism

First I must offer some preliminary indications as to what “non-dualism” means (for a fuller account of this I can only point to my thesis). These indications will be both brief and dense, but they will be unpacked a little later by being applied to environmental issues.

In my case non-dualism is inspired by Buddhism, and provides a philosophical expression for Buddhist concerns and practices, but it is not reducible to Buddhism nor epistemologically dependent on it. This means that it can be argued for without appeal to religious tradition as a source of knowledge, and it could conceivably be discovered and applied in any context regardless of contact with the Buddhist tradition. It is not “Eastern”, or not merely so, though it challenges some entrenched Western ethical assumptions, because such assumptions (which I describe as “dualist”) are also found in a well-developed form in Asian traditions, and non-dualism can also be found to some limited extent in Western traditions. To give an account of it has meant taking some core insights to be found in Buddhism, and disentangling them from both Eastern and Western confusions and interferences to produce what is (I repeat) a philosophical theory, not a claim about some essence of the Buddhist tradition.

Some basic features of non-dualism in this sense are (a) that it is a consistently open position, attempting to discover the maximum possible through experience; (b) that it removes barriers to such openness by consistently attempting to avoid dogmatic metaphysical assumptions, whether of a positive or a negative kind; (c) that it thus cannot accept the constraints created by the common metaphysical dualisms of Western thought, such as fact-value, freewill-determinism, mind-body, real-ideal, subject-object, absolute-relative: for these dualisms it substitutes provisional theories about the phenomena concerned and admits ultimate ignorance of their metaphysical basis; (d) that it is genuinely pragmatic, gearing theory towards practical ends but not allowing those ends to be predetermined by dogmatic assumptions, such as (for example) the belief that pragmatic ends are necessarily subjective or relative; (e) that it is incremental, making objectivity of any kind a matter of degree rather than of the presence or absence of some absolute quantity; (f) that it understands objectivity of all types, including moral objectivity, as a property of persons, a tendency to interpret experience non-dualistically. “Goodness” is thus a relative capacity to be adequate to the whole set of conditions we experience in our psyches and in our wider environment, not an absolute metaphysical quantity attached to persons, motives, rules or beliefs. “Evil” is the relative absence of such a capacity.

This basic philosophical account of non-dualism can be clarified by a psychological theory. This merely provides a means of breaking down our habitually metaphysical view of ourselves, by thinking of ourselves as psyches as well as egos. The ego is a set of rationally-

focussed desires geared towards particular ends at any given time, and it is the consciousness accompanying the beliefs and drives of the ego that has been traditionally identified as the “self” in Western philosophy, whether to assert its absolute existence (Descartes) or deny it (Hume). In one sense I am an ego, but in another I am something much bigger: a psyche containing not just an ego but a whole set of competing voices which may appear at any point to usurp the current dominant rational conceptions and goals. The object of desire at one moment may become an object of irritation the next, perhaps rapidly ripening into hatred. So in another sense, “I” am a whole set of loosely confederated alternative selves; a nation, as Hume put it. By identifying ourselves only with our egos, we impose on ourselves a dualism of values in which ethical prescriptions must either be imposed by the rational ego on the recalcitrant psyche, or recognised as foundationless and subjective because they are only products of the ego under the influence of its current limited set of beliefs.

If we think of ourselves as egos as well as psyches, though, we can recognise both a universal ethical goal and our position relative to it. We do not have to appeal to any properties of the universe as a whole to derive a universal ethical goal, nor to any absolute rationality of the ego: rather the integration of the ego with the remainder of the psyche provides such a goal without dependence on metaphysical beliefs. Such integration is achieved through the application of non-dualist philosophy, gradually removing the dualistic barriers to our awareness of all aspects of the conditions which apparently manifest in our experience, and modifying our goals so as to take into account those conditions. The goals which remain when we have thoroughly investigated and absorbed both what we ourselves are, in all our contingency, and what occurs in the whole of the environment with which we interact, without any prior assumptions of the type that interfere with that investigation, are morally objective goals to the extent that we can achieve such. Such a state of moral perfection (or enlightenment) may not be achievable, but this does not matter if we have adopted a thoroughly incremental understanding of moral objectivity.

This account itself only succeeds in being non-dualist to the extent that it promotes non-dualism. In this respect theory is not distinguishable from practice. A theory can only be understood as relatively non-dualist in relation to its whole context, including its interpretation. Yet a non-dualistic theory is at least distinguishable in a preliminary sense at a theoretical level through the consistency with which it avoids dualistic assumptions. In this respect many Western thinkers have adopted some of the beliefs of non-dualism, but so far I have yet to discover one who did so consistently. Usually the excitement of discovering some non-dualistic features must be offset by the disappointment of finding unexamined dualisms remaining at the base of a Western thinker’s approach. Thus non-dualism must not be too hastily assimilated to thinkers or movements who offer some non-dualistic elements, since on further examination (particularly when examined in context) nearly all great Western thinkers offer such elements together with dualistic elements. Examples would include Plato, Aristotle, The Stoics, the Classical Sceptics, Negative Theology, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Marx, James, Dewey, Heidegger, Sartre, Wittgenstein, Macintyre, the Postmodernists and many modern analytical philosophers.

The negative process of peeling away other views in differentiation from non-dualism is a necessary clarificatory one before giving much of a positive account of the theory. In my thesis I go through this process on a large scale, by working through the figures I have just listed and showing their theoretical and practical limitations. In this paper I shall confine myself to considering some common approaches to environmental ethics to give a sketch of their limitations in a similar way, prior to offering a more positive account of the usefulness of non-dualism for environmental ethics.

The limitations of dualistic approaches to environmental ethics

It now seems to be widely appreciated that, relative to other applications of ethics, the ethical problems which have come to our attention as a result of environmental problems have a particular intractability about them. Their global scale seems to reveal conventionally-defined virtues as puny and effectual, whilst rational dilemma-based moral theories, like Utilitarianism or Kantianism, are made largely irrelevant by the systemic and habitual nature of most of our abuse of the environment. The scale of the problems makes us feel powerless, and a merely rational prescription of how we should respond to it is often alienating and ineffective as we feel unable to respond to its demands. On the other hand, a merely conventional account of the extent of our responsibility does nothing to address the problems, the scope of which extend far beyond our social or economic group, our generation, or our language game. Environmental problems thus tend to confront us with an apparently unbridgeable dualism between absolute and relative considerations: how can I, a mere individual, do anything adequate to address global problems such as global warming, overpopulation, depletion of natural resources, or land degradation?

For the sake of brevity I shall divide common dualistic approaches to environmental ethics into two types, which I shall call *holistic* and *particularistic*. Each of these types merely identifies certain common features in a wide variety of actual and possible theories, but it is these common features which determine the ways in which each type perpetuates dualism.

Holism

I will begin with holistic types of theory, then. A holistic approach to environmental values is one which attempts to derive a basis of value from nature as a whole. To find a prescription as to how we should act in relation to nature, we have to leap to the perspective of the whole of nature itself and attempt to assume that perspective. There are a number of forms of such holism. Theism employs an intermediary God that creates and dominates nature, and the prescriptions of nature become the commands of God. A pantheistic type of monism, like that of Spinoza, Hegel, or much Hinduism, appeals to the universe itself more directly. Kantianism attempts to reach a holistic norm through the appeal to universalisable reason alone, whilst Utilitarianism arrives at a similarly absolute rational position through the aggregation of consequences judged on hedonistic criteria. A more recent kind of holism in environmental ethics is employed by Eugene C. Hargrove in his *Foundations of Environmental Ethics*¹. Hargrove appeals to a metaphysical realism which he believes we encounter through aesthetic experience, and which he takes to be the best alternative to the idealism he holds responsible for our failure to value nature.

The mistake in all these types of holism is not that of attempting to consider all the environmental conditions (as, for example, Utilitarianism may do) nor of recognising that the reality of nature continually challenges our values: both of these are admirable from a non-dualist point of view. The mistake is rather an epistemological and psychological one.

From an *epistemological* perspective, the holism is premature, because we are relative beings and do not have a God's-eye view of the universe. The absolute rational demand provided by holism is thus self-deceptive, because the holistic moral imperative is not absolute at all, but rather our limited, and doubtless erroneous, conception of what the absolute demand ought to be, based on the limited information we have. We may be well-intentioned, but nevertheless in a position like that of medieval inquisitors, serving what at present seems to be the absolutely true cause yet judged by history as cruel and bigoted.

The appeal to realism in some versions of holism encounters a similar problem. The belief that our values arise from an encounter with the reality of nature must assume that we have

such an encounter, rather than merely projecting “reality” onto our limited perceptions. Far from encouraging a valuing of “real” objects beyond the perceiver, then, realism tends to encourage us to value a particular limited idea of them being real. The extension of our concerns which the realist wants to appeal to is to be found, not through realism, but through recognising the limitations of our grasp of reality and attempting to gradually extend that grasp beyond the limitations of our current conceptions.

Psychologically, the holism is liable to give rise to alienation because it presents the ego with the universal identifications of the whole psyche all at once. We are about as capable of this kind of identification as my four-year old daughter is capable of appreciating *The Critique of Pure Reason*: though in either case we cannot rule out a gradual progression to these now far-removed abilities over time. We can thus be convinced of the rightness of the holistic case and still completely unable to respond to it. For example, I may appreciate all the demerits of car use, but the power that this rational reflection has over me will probably still be momentary given the much greater power that social norms, habits and the desire for comfort and convenience have over me. A leap to a holistic perspective, then, takes into account all the *external* conditions, but not the psychological ones which are required for action.

At this point a typical move for a holist is to appeal to freewill, which it is claimed may override our psychological determinants. But this introduces an unacceptable metaphysical dualism between freewill and determinism, and functions so as to discourage us from adequate recognition of psychological conditions. Traditional Western accounts of ethics tend to assume that freewill is a necessary condition for ethics, and in this way lead us into the unhelpful belief that we could immediately control *all* the conditions of the psyche and develop a perfect will if we so desired. But such an unrealistic account of our responsibility merely prevents us from discovering through more careful investigation where we can actually be responsible in a sustainable fashion: for this a consistently agnostic view of freewill and determinism is required.

If holism is extended so as to take into account psychological conditions, it immediately becomes self-contradictory. For a recognition of psychological conditions requires a recognition of the limitations of human knowledge, which requires a recognition that holism is impossible. Thus the argument of some Utilitarians that Utilitarianism can be effectively extended so as to encompass and allow for the danger of alienation² fails to consider the effects this would have, if done properly, on the rationalistic assumptions about the nature of ethics which lie behind Utilitarianism. The holistic desire to take everything into account, then, rationally extended, seems to imply not holistic forms of ethics of the kinds I have mentioned, but a non-dualistic ethics.

It seems unsurprising, then, that holistic ethics has failed to make much impression on environmental problems. We are not, by and large, motivated by holistic ethics to change our behaviour in relation to the environment, and this lack of motivation is related to the fact that we are not fully convinced. Even if we are convinced, it is often only a momentary and superficial kind of conviction, not the sort of conviction that we might have, say, of the necessity of running away if we were standing on a railway track with a train hurtling towards us. This deficiency is compounded by the fact that holistic ethics is disinclined to accept judgement in terms of such pragmatic criteria, and continues to rely on a narrowly rational account of the role and purpose of ethics. Our ethics are assumed to float abstractly above and beyond our motives, and thus we are unable to even reach a satisfactory philosophical account of the basis of ethics, let alone use them to change the motives.

Particularism

The defining feature of particularism is its denial of holism together with an acceptance of the same dualistic framework. Whilst holists see nature as a whole as a source of universal

values, particularists assume that if there were a source of universal values, it would be the whole of nature, but since there are insufficient grounds for believing in the existence of such values, there are thus no universal values. Justifiable values are thus restricted to particular coherent contexts in which the justification makes sense, whether these contexts are cultural, social, linguistic, or even those of individual experience. Such particularism is typical of much modern analytic philosophy, especially since Wittgenstein, and of both the existentialist and postmodernist types of Continental Philosophy.

In its analytic form, particularly, particularism usually relies on the metaphysical dualism of the fact-value distinction. Here “facts” are taken to be universalisable and thus capable of an objectivity that “values” are not capable of. But this belief relies on two highly questionable assumptions: firstly that the self is no more than the ego, and thus that the desires on which our values are based are incapable of objectivity; secondly that cognition of “facts” involves some sort of isomorphic representation of reality which gives it a status beyond “merely subjective” values. If we adopt pragmatic and incremental criteria for the acceptance of facts, however, (like those suggested by Lakatos, for whom the acceptability of a theory is governed by its explanatory fruitfulness³), the same criteria can be applied just as much to the values which are associated with those beliefs. Just as theories can be successful by providing fruitful explanations up to a point, but can later be superseded, values can be successful in motivating activity which integrates desires and beliefs, making our desires gradually more stable, coherent, and well-adapted to conditions, in the process removing emotional dependence on metaphysical dualisms which interfere with our successful adaptation.

Even in its post-modernist version, denying the possibility of objectivity of facts, particularism is thus not justified in assuming the impossibility of objectivity in values. Observations about cultural or linguistic relativity are helpful as ways of deflating holism, but they do not imply ethical relativism so long as we can maintain the provisional belief (on the grounds of its explanatory value) that the self consists in the broader psyche as well as the ego.

The epistemology even of the weaker forms of particularism, then, is unsatisfactory because of its reliance on negative metaphysical assumptions about the universality of values. Particularism is often characterised by a slippage of argument from an observation of the absence of foundations for universal values to a denial of such values: but this negative position is just as difficult to justify as the positive one it attacks. A similar difficulty has often been observed with regard to God: his non-existence is just as impossible to prove as his existence. But a theory which posits universal values without pre-supposing a holistic epistemology (i.e. a non-dualist theory) is just as much open to incremental investigation as one which posits their absence: indeed the investigation is the same in each case, even if it never reaches a final conclusion.

The psychology of particularism relies just as much on the assumption that the self is the ego as that of holism, but from this assumption, instead of deriving the conclusion that the ego should suddenly and discontinuously conform itself to demands emanating from beyond it, as in holism, particularism concludes that the ego alone is the source of justifiable value. Particularism thus provides a useful rationalisation for a failure to challenge one’s immediate beliefs, habits and impulses, whether these are individually or socially constructed. If my belief is that ethics are socially constructed and that no legitimate challenge can be made to me from beyond that sphere, I have every reason for not swimming against the social tide so as to modify my behaviour to avoid unnecessary damage to the environment.

In environmental terms, even where particularistic approaches are used to support environmental ethics within some particular sphere, they provide justification for ignoring the further context. For example one can be sentimentally concerned only with the fate of individual animals but ignore the wider ecological context; or on the other hand, one can give

priority to saving a species because of a moral acceptance of arguments about bio-diversity, but happily cull individuals of another species in the process because of a failure to accept any moral responsibility for the fate of those individuals. In the latter case it is not sentimentality, but the scientific focus on the “facts” of bio-diversity, whilst self-deceptively attempting to exclude the “values” involved in concern for individuals, which leaves some conservationists unaware of the narrowness of the values that they are actually promoting.

Non-dualist alternatives

This necessarily brief and compressed survey of dualistic approaches to environmental ethics provides me with some basis on which to go on to offer a non-dualist alternative. Non-dualism does not offer clear-cut solutions to environmental problems, but my view is that it does offer a way of approaching them which may make the ensuing solutions more morally justifiable. Any non-dualist “solutions” to specific issues need to be based on a careful process of investigation of those specific issues, so the examples I offer here must be seen as tentative and purely for the purpose of illustrating the general approach.

First I shall offer some general principles of a non-dualist approach, and then some worked examples.

Some general principles for a non-dualist approach to environmental ethics

1. Allowance must constantly be made for our ignorance of the operations of nature, but we must always be on our guard so as to prevent this allowance for ignorance hardening into dogmatic assumption.
2. Both our understanding of the facts and the values we apply need to be as broad as possible, taking into account the maximum of conditions. But these conditions include psychological conditions (in particular the extent of our current egoistic limitations), and also pragmatic conditions which demand that we reach a provisional conclusion at certain points and act decisively on it.
3. Our understanding of both facts and values develops through the Popperian process of theory → experimentation → falsification → refinement of theory. Where circumstances allow, then, we should work out our responses to environmental problems by trying out solutions and responding to the results. This process will be far more effective if we have first rooted out dualistic metaphysical assumptions in our theories.
4. The beliefs and values I need to investigate are not merely explicit ones. My values, and what I take to be true, are indicated by habit and custom rather than by mere statement. Much of the application of environmental ethics will thus involve the addressing of psychological conditions by individuals who attempt to integrate their values and beliefs, and by the social and political promotion of the conditions needed for such integration.

Some examples

Such principles imply that we neglect neither the personal nor the socio-political types of response to environmental issues, and that the process of investigating such issues is as much one of the individual considering their own nature as of socially-supported scientific investigation into environmental (or psychological) processes. I thus make no apology for offering examples which include a personal element. I can best explain how non-dualist ethics might be applied whilst making due allowance for my ignorance by explaining how I attempt to apply these principles myself. I shall do this in relation to two particular issues: car use and food ethics.

Example 1: Car use

A holistic approach to the issue of car use, in the light of current scientific knowledge of global warming, other effects of pollutants released by cars, accident rates and the social effects of car use, might suggest that it is simply our duty not to use cars. Even where holism allows for a weighing-up of conflicting considerations, as in Utilitarianism, the moral prescription which comes out of the calculation is likely to advise that any individual currently using a car cuts back their use severely for the larger good. A particularistic view, however, is more likely to stress the fact that people value cars and their usefulness, and indeed that a whole set of social norms has built up around them. It may not be clear to a particularist why any individual should accept any wider imperatives than those of their social group, particularly when such imperatives depend on less than certain evidence about the future consequences of car use, and the broader commitment required (for example, to future generations) is open-ended and ambiguous.

The Middle Way pursued by a non-dualist here needs to investigate both the wider environmental conditions stressed by the holist and the psychological ones stressed by the particularist. It needs to recognise the incompleteness of both the knowledge and the values being applied, but not let this provide a rationalisation for a failure to act appropriately in the basis of provisional evidence.

Turning to my own personal case, then, I have to consider not only the holistic demand that I curtail or at least reduce car use, but the particular values which lie behind my possession and use of a car. I live in the middle of a rural area with very little public transport, and thus the use of a car reflects my valuation of the things I can do in this situation using a car which I could not do without one. I value being able to live in a beautiful place and yet work, study and maintain friendships in a university city forty miles away. The use of a car is thus contingent on living in a rural area, and it is the justifiability of living in a rural area that I need to consider. My reasons for living in a rural area are partly aesthetic, but partly also a matter of practical convenience, happiness and security for myself and my family in a number of other respects. So, given the complex network of practical and psychological conditions, am I justified in using a car? On balance and at present, I have concluded that I am, but the underlying question of whether I should be living in the country is one I am keeping under regular review.

The personal issue here is thus not merely the abstract one of whether car use is morally justifiable or not, but rather whether I can move from my current situation to one which more fully addresses a broader range of conditions than the ones which have formed my current policy. If I were to merely overrule considerations of personal happiness, pleasure and convenience, I would probably reduce my capacity to address such a broad range of conditions and become rather narrowly (and probably unsustainably) focussed on a narrow idea of the interests of the planet. If I were to move to the city entirely because of the question of car use, for example, it is probable that I would subsequently have an emotional reaction against this self-imposed reduction in aesthetic pleasure. The resulting instability in my personal approach would probably not be in the interests of the planet.

But there is also a large danger of rationalisation here. The appeal to psychological conditions could provide a cover for a failure to challenge myself in ways that I could sustain. It might also appear from this example that non-dualism always results in compromise. It needs to be shown that non-dualism, appropriately applied, can also result in more radical conclusions, and I will attempt to show this in my next, rather contrasting, example.

My emphasis on the personal here will also raise the issue of whether I am neglecting the political conditions which might, for example, bring about improvements in rural public

transport. The extent of my personal involvement in political activity regarding car use is also certainly part of the set of values and conditions to be weighed up, since I could fall into dogmatism either by putting undue weight on political action at the expense of personal, or vice-versa, on the assumption that either personal or political action is necessarily ineffective. On my own part I must confess a neglect of political action, and probably a failure to value it sufficiently, except through the very indirect method of producing moral philosophy.

At the level of public decision-making on car use, though, exactly the same considerations are raised to the level of social aggregation. A truly pragmatic political response will consider environmental, psychological, and political conditions when making decision about legislation on car use. The chances of re-election, and the extent of public adaptability, justifiably figure in a politician's thinking together with long-term holistic considerations. This does not mean that we could not justifiably demand that political responses give greater weight to holistic considerations, or that non-dualist ethics could not be used to justify a much greater sense of urgency on this, as on other environmental issues. On the contrary, a political campaign that takes into account the conditions that matter to one's opponents but nevertheless shows why those conditions have been given too much weight, is much more likely to be successful than a radical approach which fails to recognise those conditions.

Example 2: Food ethics

In this second example I will attempt to illustrate ways in which non-dualist ethics may give rise to radical conclusions in some instances. Food ethics is itself a broad field, but I will focus on one particular issue, that of veganism.

Many of the arguments given for veganism are more or less holistic. A holistic concern for all beings, or for all life, suggests an imperative to prevent unnecessary suffering for all animals. This includes the unnecessary suffering involved in the dairy and egg industries as well as in the scarcely-separable meat industry, especially given the increasing amount of evidence that a vegan diet is entirely compatible with human health. Likewise, an environmental holism offers strong support for the reduction in land use for agriculture that would be created by widespread veganism. Nevertheless, in Western society veganism is still often regarded as extreme, and nutritious vegan food is hard to obtain in many contexts. Lack of widespread sympathy for veganism may be attributed to the psychological impact of the holism with which the case is often presented: people may sympathise with the arguments, but also feel threatened by the moral demand they imply, and alienated from any possibility of response.

Holism also provides the basis of many moral justifications for not being vegan. The appeal to the idea that human beings are "naturally" carnivorous and/or lactivorous requires holistic epistemological assumptions about our access to knowledge of "nature". The theistic or monistic belief in a just universe can also be invoked here, perhaps again in an appeal to an environmental holism designed by God to include meat-eating, without concern for individual beings.

Particularist arguments against veganism are even more common. They may appeal to individual aesthetic pleasure in consuming meat and dairy products, or perhaps to short-term economic or environmental reasons such as the effect of not supporting the livestock industry given its role in the rural economy and its shaping effect on the countryside. Both of these types of arguments tend to betray fixed beliefs about what constitutes desirable eating experiences, a desirable landscape or a desirable rural economy, and resist even incremental changes to these things by seeing all change as totally destructive of what is valued. An allowance for the complexity of psychological conditions in relation to these issues, though, reveals that values may gradually expand in response to outward changes. An appreciation of vegan food, for example, is purely a matter of habit.

A non-dualist approach to veganism, then, can provide support for the vegan position whilst also giving adequate recognition to the existing values that any individual may hold. This recognition of psychological conditions, however, requires an incremental change in eating habits and sympathies as the ego expands, not a compromising of the theoretical recognition that veganism is a desirable goal in most circumstances. Non-dualist veganism, then, differs from holistic veganism in its formulation of what we *ought* to do and why: for non-dualist veganism we ought to gradually reduce the animal products in our diet as quickly as is compatible with the conditions of our individual psychologies, whilst for holistic veganism we *ought* to be vegans, and as long as we are engaged in a process of adaptation we are to some extent failing in our duty.

Exactly the same considerations apply at a political level. The state, it seems, has a moral responsibility to support such changes in diet, and to enable as painless a decline as possible for the livestock industry and its unsustainable and cruel practices. Without widespread change at a personal level, though, the state is almost powerless in the matter, since any attempt at coercion would probably be counter-productive and fail to gain political support.

Personally, then, non-dualism provides a justification for my being a vegan. My route to becoming a vegan, though, was a gradual one. Since that transition has taken place, and most of the psychological adjustments have now been made, my position can thus easily be mistaken for a holistic one. However, in the terms of non-dualism veganism cannot be seen as a final destination, but rather as a staging post in the broader process of refining food ethics. Currently I am focussing on trying to adapt my habits so as to try to consume a higher proportion of organic food. The avoidance of food ethics Puritanism is also part of that practice, since any easily-definable moral position like veganism can easily become hardened into a dogmatic one which then provides an end in itself. An occasional softening of vegan strictures so as to allow for the values of friendship and hospitality seems entirely justifiable on non-dualist grounds.

Why, then, has non-dualism allowed me to reach an apparently more radical conclusion in this case than in that of car use? The answer can only be that the total conditions in each case are different. The conditions of life in my particular case allow for a more radical position in the case of veganism than in that of car use. In the case of another person it might well be the other way round, but we might each be practising non-dualist ethics with an equal amount of sincerity. What is perceived as “radical” is in any case only relative to the prevailing social mores. For example, in the case of car use, a sudden and discontinuous reduction in my case would lead to a good deal of social isolation, whilst in the case of food ethics, the challenge of veganism, on the whole, only requires of me the courage to be challenging where necessary in existing social contexts, not the entire renunciation of those contexts. In both cases, then, existing social practice works against individual ethical practice, but in one a discontinuity more or less forces a practical conformity, whilst in the other the possibility of continuity with existing values and practices has enabled moral progress to occur.

Conclusion

I have aimed through these examples to show non-dualism at work through the whole spectrum of ethics, from the most abstract principles to the basis of personal decision-making. Since the justification of non-dualism lies primarily in its pragmatism and functional adequacy, this broad treatment has been necessary. However, the theoretical critique of dualistic approaches to ethics is just as important to non-dualism as the details of its practice, as over-concern with practical details can easily decay into particularism. The theoretical and practical aspects of non-dualism are entirely interdependent, and it is only to the extent of its recognition of that interdependence that non-dualism can claim to offer both justification and efficacy in ethics.

¹ Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs 1989

² E.g. Brink, David O. (1986) "Utilitarian Morality and the Personal Point of View" from The Journal of Philosophy vol.83, no.8; Railton, Peter (1984) "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality" from Philosophy and Public Affairs Vol.13, No.2 : Princeton University Press, Princeton (also reprinted in: Scheffler, Samuel (ed.) (1988) Consequentialism and Its Critics Oxford University Press, Oxford).

³ See Lakatos, Imre (1974) "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes" from Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge ed. I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.