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"Pragmatism, Adaptive Management, and Sustainability"

Norton, Bryan G.

Norton, Bryan G. "Pragmatism, Adaptive Management, and Sustainability." *Environmental Values* 8, no. 4 (1999): 451–66. doi:10.3197/096327199129341914 .

The pragmatic conception of truth, anticipated by Henry David Thoreau and developed by C.S. Peirce and subsequent pragmatists, is proposed as a useful analogy for characterising "sustainability." Peirce's definition of "truth" provides an attractive approach to sustainability because (a) it re-focuses discussions of truth and objectivity from a search for "correspondence" to an "external world" (the "conform" approach) to a more forward-looking ("transform") approach; and (b) it emphasises the crucial role of an evolving, questioning community in the conduct of inquiry. Any successful definition of sustainability must share these characteristics with Peircean truth. While Peirce and John Dewey never reconciled their disagreements regarding the nature and task of "inquiry," a pragmatist resolution of their differences is offered, arguing that we need both a logic of management sciences (logica utens) and a logic of pure science (logica docens), which (perhaps among other differences) respond very differently to uncertainty. It is shown that adaptive management—an important approach to environmental management—can be understood as a first approximation of a logica utens for social learning in pursuit of solutions to environmental problems, and it is suggested that a pragmatist, transform approach to inquiry such as Dewey's may provide a way around the 'fact-value' gulf.
— Text from The White Horse Press website

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