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"Valuing Birds in the Bush: For Pluralism in Environmental Risk Assessment"

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It is now widely acknowledged that social theorists can make an important contribution to our understanding of environmental risk. There is however a danger that the current ascendancy of social theory will encourage a tendency to assimilate issues around environmental risk to those at stake in entrenched debates between realist and constructivist social theorists. I begin by citing a recent example of this trend, before going on to argue that framing the issues in terms of a monism/pluralism dichotomy would make for a more informative analysis. Noting that realists and constructivists can make common cause against risk monism, I turn, in the second half of the paper, to setting out a positive case for risk pluralism. Citing some fictional examples of risk behaviour, I show how different individuals might rationally adopt different perspectives on the same risk. I conclude by exploring some implications of the truth of risk pluralism for two current approaches to environmental decision-making (which I term, respectively, the 'teleological-pluralistic' approach, and the 'economic-monistic' approach). I argue that the importance of risk pluralism lies in its capacity to highlight the shortcomings of the latter approach.

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