Finding Ways and Means to Love Nature

What does it mean to want a better future for the natural world? What is required for us to desire ecological and social change? How can we love nature? In Plato's *Symposium* (203b) Socrates, channelling the priestess Diotima, argues that Eros (desire/love) has two parents: Resource is his father and Poverty is his mother. Eros has characteristics of both his parents. For Socrates this is the condition of philosophy, the love of wisdom, that one is not in possession of wisdom, yet one has a sense of the wisdom one lacks and how one can approach it. Today we can surely say that part of love of wisdom is desire for a better world and love of nature. Love of nature would then not be a state-of-mind or a characteristic 'happy glow' when thinking of the natural world. The love of nature would require both a sense of what is lacking in our relations to nature and the ability to continually move towards better relations. The conditions of love, including the love of nature, are that one does not consider oneself the possessor of those whom one loves and that one does not focus every resource on achieving some preconceived end-state of 'happily ever after' fulfilment. Perhaps surprisingly, considering that they focus largely on economic values and resources, I think the articles in this volume of *Environmental Values* can usefully be seen as attempts to help us keep our love of nature alive.[1]

In 'Coping with Devils and Climate Change with the Help of Asceticism? Exploring the Role of Asceticism as a Trigger of Collective Climate Action' Suleika Bort and Alfred Kieser trace the roots and gauge the potential of a new asceticism. Against the background of the Christian monastic tradition they show that asceticism was not only instrumental in the birth of modernity and eventually consumer capitalism, but that elements of asceticism have always remained and have now reappeared as a potentially powerful force in the environmental movement. Voluntary Simplicity (VS) has developed from an idea to help enrich the inner lives of individuals by emphasising sufficiency and reduced consumption, into a diverse collective of social movements, the Voluntary Simplicity Movement (VSM).[2] This movement not only provides cultural resources for those wanting to practice VS, it potentially inspires attempts to reshape the conditions that militate against the desire for simplicity. Nevertheless, Bort and Kiesier suggest, the political potential of VSM may be held back by its roots in the idea of individual renunciation aimed at individual self-fulfilment. A more radical and drastic appreciation of the need for renunciation may be forced upon us in the form of what Ulrich Beck

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1. For powerful reflections on how do this in everyday life experience and create an 'aesth-etics of desire' see Gobbo 2020.
2. For recent analyses of sufficiency and de-growth in this journal see Koller 2021, Heikkurinen 2021, and Lehtonen and Heikkurinen 2022.

dubbed 'emancipatory catastrophism'. When climate and ecological conditions threaten the ultimate loss, we are forced to rethink what it is that we desired in the first place, to engage in a 'revaluation of all values' and a complete metamorphosis of society. Voluntary or forced, individual or collective, self-fulfilling or self-denying, the new asceticism is shot through with tensions that need to be negotiated if it is to continue to create new subjectivities and social transformations. The search for simplicity may turn out, ironically, to be a rather complicated affair.

When it comes to actually existing conditions for gathering and expending resources to tackle climate change at a global level, what processes and mechanisms do we find in operation? In 'Organising Stakeholder Participation in Climate Governance: The Effects of Resource Dependency and Institutional Logics in the Green Climate Fund' Jonas Bertilsson analyses the structure and operation of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) through document analysis and stakeholder interviews. By combining two perspectives that are often artificially separated, 'ideational' institutional logics and resource dependencies, Bertilsson is able to show that each sheds light on the other and he allows us to understand how some logics and resources are prioritised over others. By emphasising stakeholder participation the GCF hopes to maintain access to diverse resources, including financial, operational, cultural, legitimating and oversight resources. However, what Bertillson finds is that participation is organised in such a way as to prioritise private sector stakeholders. This prioritisation occurs in two ways. Firstly, stakeholder participation in GCF was structured so that the nine constituencies of stakeholders recognised by the UN were radically reduced to two constituencies: The Private Sector and Civil Society (the latter incorporating eight separate constituencies). Secondly, in the operation of the GCF, stakeholders who are seen as contributing primarily in an oversight 'watchdog' function are reduced to an observational role and their participation managed and restricted. The result is a prioritisation of 'private sector connectors' and 'apolitical technocratic collaborators' over 'symbolic stakeholders.' The logic of partnership and collaboration, aimed at smooth and efficient delivery of projects, is prioritised over the logic of transparency and legitimacy, which would likely highlight actual and potential conflicts. So it seems that participatory and deliberative decision making is internally subjected to the hierarchical and administrative organisation that it was supposed to replace, or at least augment.

More localised conflicts that involve environmental values may allow those involved in making difficult decisions to consult a range of individual stakeholders, rather than managerially curated stakeholder constituencies or representatives. To do so effectively the decision-makers may want to make use of a decision support system. In 'Analysing and Anticipating Conflict Using a Values-Centred Online Survey' Simone Philpot, Keith Hipel and Peter Johnson have developed a prototype online peer-to-peer support system

(P2P-DSS) that allows decision-makers to anticipate, highlight and reflect upon intractable conflicts that are the result of incommensurable values. This new support system recognises that management tools that seek to resolve conflicts by covering over the incommensurability of values can do more harm than good. The system allows researchers, decision-makers, and stakeholders not only to register value conflicts, but to explore and reflect upon the complex dynamics that result between values and decision preferences. These dynamics are all too often elided by systems that simply rely on the system designer's unstated understanding of how values relate to decision preferences. P2P-DSS allows users to create their own potential outcomes in addition to those initially suggested and incorporates a 'protest' function that allows users to register a protest if they think the system has not properly understood the relations between their values and preferences, making users to some extent co-designers of the system.

I wonder if the reflection on conflict between values that this system is designed to initiate might precipitate further reflection on the possibility of intractable conflict, and even contradiction, *within* value commitments. For example, this system relies on the definition of value developed within the psychological 'Theory of Basic Values' (TBV): values are 'a special type of belief about desirable ends, states or behaviours that transcend situations, guide evaluations and are ranked by importance' (p. 584). But what if reflection on the specificities of value conflict in a given case leads one to the conclusion that beliefs that 'transcend situations' are part of the problem, and that we should strive to become moral particularists? One would then hold the situation-transcendent belief that one should avoid situation-transcendent beliefs. Or what if we turn to one of TBV's higher-order categorisations of values: 'Openness to Change'. If one ranks this set of values highly, should one then be open to changing one's belief that one should be open to change? I am not pointing towards such possible internal contradictions to score cheap points against this, or any other, framework for categorising values and making decisions. I'm suggesting that it may be essential for us to move towards developing capacities, not only for negotiating intractable conflicts between values, but also internal conflict within ourselves as value-holders. Only when we learn to recognise and live with such internal conflicts and contradictions do we hold open space for non-ideological ways of committing to values. Such space for finding ways through is found on the lack or 'poverty' side of the conditions of desire.

The last two papers in this volume both involve what might be broadly described as 'economic integration projects'. The aim of these projects is to expand economic thought to incorporate significant dimensions of human life in society and nature that have been systematically excluded in the past. In 'Social Values in Economic Environmental Valuation: A Conceptual Framework', Julian Massenberg, Bernd Hansjürgens and Nele Lienhoop develop a holistic, complex and integrative framework, which shows that common assumptions

about the limits of economic valuation can be challenged and potentially overcome. Whilst retaining the foundation of economic valuation as a 'preference-based utility framework', Massenberg et al. show that such valuation need not assume that preference holders are atomistic individuals, and that the embeddedness of individuals in society and differing attitudes towards nature can be accounted for. Furthermore, this framework seeks to take account of the whole complex system of interactions that form the context of valuation, including transcendental values, emotions and deep commitments. One can only wonder what the world would look like if this conceptual framework were to become the standard approach to economic valuation and deeply desire that it should become so. Methodological individualism is still pervasive in economic valuation in practice in ways that lead directly to failure to value the environment (Bardsley et al., 2022).

Whilst ecological economists do everything they can to expand the framework of economic thought, it may be the case that the 'internal gap' in desire that I have been pointing towards cannot in principle be integrated into such a framework. Preferences, whether individual or shared, fleeting or deeply held, entail comparison with what is unequally preferred. The 'gap' is between what is preferred and what is dispreferred. That gap can sometimes be hard to find, and as Massenberg et al. argue, when preferences conflict transcendental values can help us to make choices because, based on them, 'desirability (what should be desired) can be distinguished from desire' (p. 629). That distinction is surely crucial for helping us to recognise or construct appropriate preference gaps. But it also points us towards another gap within desire itself. There is a gap between one's desire and what one desires that might be described in terms of whether one's desire 'measures up', i.e. whether one can live up to the desirability of what is desired. Desire isn't just about 'getting hold' of what one desires, but about approaching it in a way that is appropriate to its desirability. Roughly speaking, preferences entail the gap between what is preferred and what is not, but desire entails a gap between what is desired and how it is desired. One could, of course, attempt to articulate the gap within desire in terms of preferences. One 'prefers' that one's desire is appropriate to the desired rather than inappropriate. Yet it seems to me that such a reconstruction of desire in terms of preference would constantly hit up against the limits of the idiom of preference, just a Simon James has pointed us towards the limits of the idiom of 'values' in articulating our most intimate relations with the natural world (James, 2016).

In the final article in this volume Cati Torres shows us that the pioneering Spanish ecological economist José Manuel Naredo has tried to take the project of economic value integration to a point of radical reappraisal of the whole science of economics. Since the first appearance of his 1987 book *La economía en evolucíon*, and in numerous subsequent editions, Naredo has

developed an 'eco-integrating approach' to economic thinking.[3] There are a number of significant elements to Naredo's critique. On the one hand, he traces in the history of economic thought problematic attempts to model economics on the mathematical natural sciences. On the other hand, he is critical of those who propose a break between economic and physical sciences, which would allow them to ignore, for example, physical laws like the Second Law of Thermodynamics. So we need to integrate all manner of scientific understanding into our economic thinking whilst avoiding reductivism. Not only that, Naredo thinks we need to try to integrate all manner of non-scientific modes of understanding into economic thinking, including ethical, aesthetic and even metaphysical modes of thought. In her account Torres highlights a key component of this critique in Naredo's notion of an 'absolute metaphor'. An absolute metaphor 'allows the transfer of ideology and value judgements on socially relevant issues without having any rational or empirical support' (p. 650). These metaphors seem to operate as entirely self-referential tropes and as such, we might say, are absolutely dead metaphors. Naredo's fascinating insight is that the basic categories of economic thought, such as 'wealth', 'production' and 'labour', have operated as sterile absolute metaphors, even when deployed by critical and heterodox economists. The very notion of an economic 'system' operates as an absolute metaphor. The consequence of this insight is that the most radical eco-integration of economic understanding calls for a relativisation of all economic concepts. Our concepts and our metaphors must allow for the maintenance of a gap between what they describe and what they could describe, a gap that maintains the desire for understanding. If we try to understand everything all at once then we understand nothing. Torres's succinct and illuminating account of these ideas will hopefully go a long way towards initiating the proper recognition of Naredo's work in English-speaking scholarship.

We often hear from radical environmental thinkers that the root of ecological breakdown is an instrumentalism that ultimately figures nature as a giant system of resource. I think there is a great deal of truth in that diagnosis. Nevertheless, what the articles in this volume show us is that we should be careful not to respond by thinking that environmental values exist somehow above and beyond the capacity to find ways and means of living our lives well in the natural world. As the philosopher François Jullien suggests, we should start to consider all works of thought not as the possessions of particular groups of people, but as offering us all resources that we can choose to activate or leave unactivated (Jullien, 2021). Jullien has himself drawn deeply on the resources of ancient Greek and ancient Chinese thought, so having begun with a Greek conception of Eros as requiring a space for living up to what one desires, I'll close with some lines from the *Dao De Jing*, which suggest that

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3. For a complementary analysis that draws on the work of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, one of Naredo's major inspirations, see Veraart and Blok 2021.

utility does not come from the things that we possess, but from the space that allows us to find a way through:

> We bore out doors and windows to make a dwelling,
> But the utility of the dwelling is a function of the nothingness inside it.
> Thus it might be something that provides the value,
> But it is nothing that provides the utility.[4]

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4. *Dao De Jing*, Chapter 11 (Ames and Hall 2003, 91). For reflections on Jullien's thinking of the Daoist sage in connection to environmental thought see Mathews, 2008. For some recent activations of the resources of ancient Chinese thought in *Environmental Values* see Yi 2022 and Kassiola 2022.

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