

## Price of Everything/Value of Nothing

Several years ago I participated in a Welsh Government seminar that discussed emerging environmental valuation techniques. During the course of the seminar we learned about the latest techniques of determining the economic value of different fragments of nature. Based, in part, on a ‘willingness to pay’ approach to environmental valuation, we learned some interesting, and disturbing, things. We discovered, for example, the economic value of an otter! If my memory serves me correctly this stood somewhere between £30 and £50. We also learned that attributing economic value to nature is an increasingly important way of protecting nature. For evidence of this process you need look no further than *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity* programme (or TEEB as it is better known) and its attempts to provide a global balance sheet for the value of nature (see Spash, 2011).

Precisely how we should value the environment is, of course, a founding concern of this journal. The contemporary penchant for developing economic benchmarks against which to assess nature does, however, leave many environmentalists feeling somewhat queasy. It is commonly acknowledged that being able to place the environment on the spreadsheets of governments and business is a hard-nosed way of ensuring that nature is not seen as a costless externality. However, a common feeling is that attributing economic value to the things of nature fundamentally demeans a natural world that was pre-economic and will one day probably be post-economic. These expressed concerns raise interesting questions about the relative advantages and disadvantages of establishing recognised systems of value that can be applied to the natural world. It is important, for example, to consider who gets to determine value systems; what happens to valuations of the environment during significant forms of economic fluctuation; and what are the long-term implications of the marketisation of nature.

In his 1890 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Oscar Wilde famously wrote, ‘Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing.’ It seems to me that this quote could have been written specifically with certain branches of environmental valuation in mind. It serves as a reminder that we should not concede too much power, too quickly, to narrowly conceived systems of economic valuation of the environment. I sense, after all, that it was not just the price of the otter that seemed somehow wrong to me, but the very practice of pricing it.

My own concern with the alignment of ecological value with economic price raises another aspect of the values debate. Alongside discussion of the valuation of nature, we are seeing a resurgence of interest in personal environmental value systems. In contrast to discussions of environmental valuation, analyses of environmental values consider the role of internal value systems in guiding human behaviours towards nature. On these terms values (such as

egalitarianism, hedonism, biocentrism, security and benevolence) as seen as meta-behavioural categories that guide our long-term relations with the environment. Recent years have seen a rise in public interest in the role of values in shaping human-environment relations (see Crompton, 2010). The renewed interest in behavioural values has, in part, been a response to the fairly narrowly conceived understandings of human behaviour that inform the nudge policies of behavioural psychology, which have gained significant political traction over the last five years (see Jones et al., 2013). It appears that in order to achieve significant long-term shifts in human relations with the environment behavioural policy must address the value frames through which human decision-making is filtered. Reshaping the dominant behavioural values that exist in industrial society is, however, clearly a herculean task.

This issue of *Environmental Values* brings together five papers that address questions of environmental valuation and environmental values in very different ways. While much work needs to be done to uncover the nature of the relations that exist between environmental valuation and values, this volume outlines some interesting trajectories along which this project could proceed.

In the first paper in this issue Lo (2014) considers the different ways that it may be possible to recognise plural value systems within the framework of environmental valuation (see Lienhoop and Macmillan, 2007). Developing a critique of established stated preference approaches, Lo argues that every effort should be made to avoid *a priori* judgments concerning environmental valuation systems, as this unnecessarily reduces the range of available values that can be mobilised in different governing contexts. Lo proposes the idea of *structural reconstruction* as a way of promoting diversity and uncertainty within value systems.

The second paper discusses the shortcomings of economic systems for valuing nature (Gatzweiler, 2014; see also Douai, 2009). In this paper Gatzweiler argues that in the context of a biosphere that is both complex and uncertain the conservation of biodiversity is poorly served by the pricing of the environment. The paper provides a critical review of existing economic and non-economic approaches to the valuation of nature. Gatzweiler argues that economic valuation systems fail to account for all of the costs and benefits associated with the use of nature. In order to enable policy-makers to get closer to a ‘total value of nature’, Gatzweiler proposes a biological value system that is better able to comprehend the diverse range of life giving forces associated with nature.

In the third paper of this issue Engqvist Jonsson and Nilsson (2014) examine the relationship between people’s expressed values, locus of control, and their behaviour towards the environment. The notion of locus of control is used to refer to ‘the extent to which people attribute control over events in life either to themselves or to external sources’ (2014: 300). Engqvist Jonsson and Nilsson illustrate a positive correlation between self-transcendental values and internal locus of control to pro-environmental behaviour. More surprisingly,

however, this paper also indicates that people with low expressed self-transcendental values still exhibited pro-environmental behaviours when their locus of control has an internal orientation.

The fourth paper introduces the idea of collective virtue as a way of understanding environmental harm and promoting new systems of ecological responsibility. In this paper Clowney (2014) outlines a paradox of contemporary (global) socio-environmental relations, which sees the production of widespread environmental damage for which no one feels responsible (see Booth, 2012; Butler, 2010). Clowney argues that the promotion of green virtues (such as humility, temperance, mindfulness and simplicity) could provide a basis for pro-environmental collective action. This paper provides a detailed discussion of how it might be possible to connect individual value systems to forms of collective virtue. In the context of the other papers in this issue, Clowney paper's also implicitly raises questions about the relationship between values and virtues and how values flow between individuals and the social systems of which they are a part.

In the final paper of this issue Pearson introduces and defends environmental pragmatism from those who claim it cannot address foundational philosophical questions concerning the relationship between human values and nature (see Callicott, 2002). Drawing on the insights of moral psychology, Pearson argues that pragmatism need not be seen in opposition to the core traditions of environmental philosophy. By reframing questions of value in ways that reflect pragmatic thinking, Pearson argues that both environmental philosophy and pragmatism can gain significant philosophical dividends.

Collectively, the papers in this issue present a diverse range of perspectives on questions of environmental valuation, values, virtues and behaviour. Individually and collectively they offer fresh and important insights into the enduring questions surrounding environmental values.

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