Some Reasons for Optimism

There are plenty of reasons for pessimism. One is the recent news that the level of atmospheric CO_2 is now higher than it has been for some three million years. Another is Prince Charles' recent call for governments to act and ignore the 'Incorporated Society of Syndicated Sceptics and the International Association of Corporate Lobbyists'. In a way it is good to see this view expressed forcefully by someone with real influence, but this is undercut, at least for many, by the undemocratic basis of this influence; it was a message from 'on high' – delivered by the heir to the throne in St James' Palace, London – and hardly an example of grassroots deliberation.

Let us not be too pessimistic though. In the first paper of this issue Robert Nolt (2013) provides a careful analysis of analogies between the self-centeredness of personal egoism and the human-centeredness of anthropocentrism ('the egoism of the human species') and of parallel arguments for and against each. Reflection on these analogies allows the formulation of a new argument against anthropocentrism based on the problems that arise once it is universalised into a universal ethical speciesism (analogous to universalised ethical egoism). One of the parallel arguments Nolt considers is the argument from non-adoptability (of non-egoist and non-anthropocentric ethics). The anthropocentric version of this argument starts from an empirical premise: even if we can sometimes act for the sake of nonhuman good we collectively cannot adopt an ethic that *requires* us to do so. It then asserts a meta-ethical principle: an ethic we cannot adopt cannot be true. Therefore, the argument proceeds, any ethic that requires us sometimes to act solely for the good of nonhumans is false; therefore ethical anthropocentrism is true. As Nolt points out, the empirical premise is hardly secure (some societies require the sacrifice of human interests for the sake of nonhuman deities, for example). Moreover, the meta-ethical principle is indefensible; obviously so in the egoist context (why should an ethic be false just because I personally cannot adopt it?), but similarly, though less obviously, in the context of anthropocentrism: a current collective inability to adopt a non-anthropocentric ethic need not be incurable.

Can we adopt a non-anthropocentric ethic, or even an environmentally benign anthropocentric ethic? The other four papers in this issue provide some reasons for optimism. The next two papers report empirical studies.

Marianne Aasen and Arild Vatn (2013) examine the way the framing and organisation of a Citizens' Jury affected the attitude formation and value discussion of the citizens. Their study of a Citizens' Jury, run by the Danish Board of Technology to consider the use of genetically modified plants, is a case study of a deliberative process for environmental politics intended as an alternative to market simulation. It reads as an account of how *not* to arrange a Citizens' Jury if it is to be a satisfactory deliberative exercise in which a plurality of values are articulated and (weakly) compared, rather than crammed onto

a cardinal scale as commensurables. The citizens involved had values, not all of which were egoistic, and perhaps not all anthropocentric, and yet they report that their values and deliberative capacities were not captured adequately. But it is *possible* that they could have been, of course. Aasen and Vatns' study highlights important issues about Citizens' Juries, including at what stage of the development of controversial technology they should be employed and the need for citizen involvement in the preparation of their terms of reference, including decisions about what questions to consider and what types of expert input there should be.

Amy Shaw, Kelly Miller and Geoff Wescott (2013) provide a study of wildlife gardening in Australia, given the gloomy background of the thought that urbanisation has reduced the human ability to 'connect with nature', and so risks a disconnect that reduces our empathy for nonhuman species and willingness to protect natural environments. Wildlife gardening is gardening with a view to the suitability of gardens to wildlife. The authors find empirical evidence for the claim that being connected to nature is a 'primitive belief' (an implicit core belief about the nature of reality and the self), but also that this needs reinforcement, especially through experience of nature in early childhood, if it is to be robust. In this way it is like the biophilia hypothesis: empirical support for strong biophilic tendencies absent early experience of nature-rich environments is similarly weak (compare Joyce and De Block, 2011). However, Shaw et al. also report evidence that although there is a positive relation between them, a strong sense of connectedness to nature is not a prerequisite for commitment to wildlife gardening: wildlife gardening has the *potential* to attract people without a strong sense of connectedness and to then reinforce it.

Gardening is also a focus of Marcello Di Paola's (2013) discussion of active environmental stewardship, which he defends as an ethical approach able to deal with the motivational challenges raised by vast problems like climate change. For Di Paola, environmental stewardship means stewardship of humanity and so protection of the natural systems and entities that support human wellbeing. But to be efficacious and politically acceptable such stewardship has to be active and self-starting, rather than externally decreed by experts and imposed by coercive institutions. This seems a very demanding requirement. In the case of climate change it raises a familiar series of mutually reinforcing motivational challenges (including bearing costs for the benefit of spatio-temporally distant persons; difficulties in feeling personal responsibility for the problem; the apparent futility of individual action and a lack of incentive to enter into coordinated activity unless most others do). This is no reason to run the argument from non-adoptability though: resolving to practise environmental stewardship through non-coerced local activities that are personally rewarding and foster environmentally beneficial habits is a way to meet these challenges. Certain kinds of gardening (such as permaculture and presumably wildlife gardening) involve this resolution to practise whilst being

helpful in terms of climate change. In and of itself such environmental stewardship is an anthropocentric perspective. Di Paola accepts this but positions it as impartial with respect to wider axiological perspectives on nature, including nonanthropocentric, noninstrumental perspectives: it does not rule these out. He also emphasises a contrast between resolution to practise environmental stewardship and arrogant attempts to dominate nature. Indeed, his references to permaculture and to stewardship gardening as akin to 'craftsmanship' suggest an affinity with what Ted Benton (1992) calls 'ecoregulatory', as opposed to purely transformative, human labour.

The final paper, by Kate Booth (2013), brings together deep ecology and recent hybrid theory in geography to consider the relational premise implied by, but often ignored in, the field of environmental management. Environmental management is properly management of the *relation* between people and environment. The relational, gestalt ontology of deep ecology is a way of bringing out this relational premise (should we say 'promise'?) of environmental management. Such an ontology has been developed in hybrid theory in a way that avoids some objections to deep ecology (that the 'expanded Self' is an egoist self, for example) and isn't hobbled by internal dissention (what exactly is the true faith?). The deep ecology idea of internal constitutive relations overlaps with hybrid theoretical notions of place and agency as relational achievements; hybrids that emerge through co-constituting relations between active creative entities. This move, which has been mirrored also in some recent political theory (see for example Dobson 2011), has significant implications for environmental management. Properly understood environmental management is not about acting upon an external environment as a collection of things. Nor is it about realising a predetermined environmental ideal; it is a practice the ethics of which arise within the agency of a more than human relational complexity. Environmental management is not then properly a matter of imposing an order on people or things from on high.

There is no need to be wholly pessimistic: the grip of egoism, anthropocentrism and top-down managerialism is not total, either empirically or theoretically.

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