Negotiating the Value of Values

> 'It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value. By value, I of course mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense' (Leopold 1989: 223).

Thus spake Aldo Leopold in one of the modern environmental movement's great founding texts. Yet, what Leopold actually meant by 'value in the philosophical sense', and the definition, scope and role of such value in environmental affairs, remains a continuing and perennial source of puzzlement and dispute in both scholarly discussion and public policy, as the very name of this journal testifies. Though Leopold's name is not found in any of the papers within this latest issue, the tensions that his comments signal form a linking thread between all of them, and a series of issues arise across the papers. When does the language of values cease to be helpful or accurate? If living by one's beliefs becomes impossible under pressures of one's new chosen environment, is this more likely to reflect flaws in the values or in the agent's capacities for solving problems? When and how, if ever, may giving up on an apparently lost cause be deemed appropriate and honourable? When a plurality of sustainability values come into tension amongst a social collectivity, how may they best be understood, ranked and negotiated?

One identifiable tendency within environmental philosophy is the inclination to translate all, or almost all, psychologically positive inclinations towards the natural world into the language of value, and in our opening paper, Simon James takes issue with this tendency and attempts to generate greater clarity by placing tighter parameters upon the pervasiveness of value language. Adopting a descriptive rather than a normative approach – that is, exploring the moral psychology of attitudes involved but himself avoiding the imperious moral language of 'ought' – James repudiates the notion that to adopt any pro-attitude towards a natural item is thereby to value that item. Drawing upon reflections from the nature writers Robert Macfarlane and J.A. Baker, he identifies two modes of positive engagement with an environment, namely respect for status and the experience of a felt bond, and argues that in each case, attempts to translate these orientations into the language of values and valuing is either vacuous, reductive or descriptively inadequate. A serious and careful examination of our positive attitudes towards nature, James maintains, will lead us not merely to espouse value pluralism but to move beyond the limited vocabulary of values altogether.

I suspect that the emphasis on individual experience in James's literary examples may be significant, for one consequence of this emphasis is that the internal domain is stressed, and stressed in a way that inclines against the kind of trade-offs we frequently countenance in the realm of clashing social values. This is not necessarily to dispute James's thesis, but our other contributions

incline more towards addressing the intertwinings of values rather than the limits of such language. The themes of a set of felt bonds to place, their rooted-ness in historical time, and the potentialities involved in taking them up and/or abandoning them, are key features that Brian C. Campbell examines. His focus is on the enduring appeal of the region of the Ozarks, stretching from northern Arkansas to southern Missouri, where a diversity of settlers from the eight-eenth century to the present day have been drawn to a rural life. The analysis carefully subdivides the different settlement periods into a threefold pattern. In doing so he avoids easy stereotypes about the 1960s counterculture being a de-finitive incarnation of the region's back-to-the land (BTTL) heritage. Campbell outlines the persistent attractiveness of the Ozarks as a location for the mani-festation of agrarian values and as a magnet for people seeking to realise BTTL ideals. Noting that the well publicised supposedly Arcadian characteristics of the Ozarks attracted thousands of tourists and urban BTTL enthusiasts from the time of the Western frontier's closure right up into the mid-twentieth cen-tury, long before the much-feted hippy phenomenon, he examines the more recent complex relations between new and often initially naïve BTTL arriv-als and longstanding 'old stock' agrarian residents. The practice of frugality – learned painstakingly by those transplanted urban residents who successfully settled, but long established through custom for the old stock locals – forms a bridge of understanding and a route to productive success in testing agricul-tural conditions for both groups, and enables improved bonds both to land and neighbours. Campbell notes the tendency for successful BTTL adaptation to be achieved by those who espoused an ethos of hard work and willingness to learn from the old stock locals, whilst the numerous failures, returning swiftly to urban life, occurred amongst those who were more aristocratic in ethos and often espoused an unrealistic Romanticism towards rural life. The relative ease of modern urban life, whose privileges were often underestimated by naïve BTTL Ozark arrivals, was something that often had to be recognised before it could be truly given up.

The phenomenon of environmentalist disillusionment is central to the paper by Hana Librová and Vojtěch Pelikán. They examine two very differ-ent responses to the perceived failures of modern environmentalism: those of the Dark Mountain Project and neo-environmentalism. For the former, the response to environmentalism's inability to check the paradigm of unsus-tainable economic growth in modern society has been a form of constructive withdrawal. This echoes some radical philosophical critiques (e.g., Plumwood 2002) in regarding the environmental crisis as ultimately a failure of culture and certain forms of rationality. The Dark Mountain Project has, then, at-tempted to retreat through the foundation of a new and alternative culture. This avoids frontally campaigning against the status quo. In stark contrast, the neo-environmentalists cheerfully abandon the traditional emphases of environmentalism against business and the market system. They instead buy

into a managerialist perspective towards nature that openly embraces markets, growth economics, new deep technologies and a preference for anthropocentric foci on human prosperity and ecosystem services as approaches to solving environmental problems.

Librová and Pelikán find that the different motivations expressed by members of the groups consistently resonate with one of the three dominant schools of ethical theory: consequentialism (which the analysts prefer to classify under 'teleology'), deontology and virtue ethics. Though of course significant variety occurs between individuals, the striking difference noted by our contributors here is that members of the Dark Mountain Project appear to tread a path that involves largely giving up on a consequentialist/teleological orientation in favour of embracing deontology and virtue ethics. By contrast, the neo-environmentalists respond to the environmental movement's perceived failings by reinforcing their consequentialism and instrumentalism, with only the deontological aspects of anthropocentrism diluting this emphasis on policy and outcomes. Librová and Pelikán conclude by examining the contrasting perspectives with passing reference to the philosophical works of Hans Jonas, Roger Scruton and Romano Guardini. Here they argue that a more successful environmentalism might come from a hybrid of all three ethical schools, though they offer no clear picture of such a combination of approaches and values.

The practical matter of intertwining values in novel ways is often associated with the philosophical tradition of American Pragmatism. A common view is that Pragmatism's focus on practical policy shirks philosophical duty (Pearson 2014) and disqualifies it from arguments over ontology and noninstrumental values. I personally dispute this claim (Stephens 2000, 2009, 2012), and feel Pragmatism can contribute to integrative axiological efforts in ethics and politics. Indeed, the real possibility that even Leopold might be read in this way has been vigorously debated in this journal and elsewhere (Callicott et al. 2009, 2011; Norton 2011, 2013). So it is fitting that our two concluding papers deal with values in tension within the public sphere.

Piso et al. examine the plurality of values involved in sustainable agriculture, drawing on the concerns of the Pragmatists Bryan Norton and Paul Thompson (Norton 2005; Thompson 2010). They attempt to practically work through the sort of democratic deliberation on the character of sustainability that Norton advocates in his book *Sustainability*. This raises a series of questions, some of them very familiar (Hector et al. 2014). What does sustainability mean to farmers who produce directly for local communities via venues such as farmers' markets, and how does it cash out in terms of their personal and community values? What precisely do they seek to sustain, and how? In pursuing these questions through focus groups of farmers, Piso et al. identify eight recurring key values. In order of expressive frequency, these were: economic efficiency, community connectedness, stewardship, justice, ecologism,

self-reliance, preservationism and health. Ultimately, the shared aim of the farmers interviewed is to sustain a social-ecological system. However, both the definition of that system and the ways in which the differing values are ranked by the individuals involved persistently varies. Deliberation between stakeholders around these shared values plays a vital role in finding common understanding.

The question arises, however, of whether this rosy Pragmatist vision of effective collective deliberation actually works upon the larger and less idealised stage of public policy rather than in particular focus groups. Here the findings of our final paper in this issue are rather less optimistic and sanguine. Costa et al. examine the controversy over the building of the Foz Tua dam in Portugal. They take a close look at the institutional and procedural pressures that came into play during the processes of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). That process, remarkably, took for granted the desirability of the dam project despite quite openly acknowledging that the environmental negatives of the project were greater than the positives. Much opposition to the dam came from local community attachments to a particular place and heritage, made precisely along the lines of the sense of bonding that Simon James identifies as best not translated into the language of values. However, as Costa et al. indicate, the language of attachments and local bonds was swiftly overpowered by the procedural dominance of political-bureaucratic and technical-scientific discourse and choice criteria, to the extent that the EIA process largely ignored expressions of values that were not easily quantifiable. Here we see the familiar cleft stick into which much environmental campaigning falls: making one's case in terms of clearly quantifiable values may mean that one's values are counted but distorted and are in any case often still overridden, whereas refusing the move to quantifiable (presumed) commensurability simply causes one's perspective to be ignored. It is a division which can also be seen to have resonance with the differing responses of the neo-environmentalists and the Dark Mountain Project to failed environmentalist campaigns, in which the former react by embracing quantifiability whilst the latter prefer to withdraw from what is perceived as a rigged game and instead build a cultural alternative in parallel.

Costa et al. conclude, I think sensibly, that the ideal democratic conditions for Pragmatist public deliberation are seldom if ever present in our current political institutions, but that they are worth creating through a struggle. However, the difficulty that arises for the pluralist is to explain exactly why and how the present situation came to be stacked towards certain interests. They must then also answer, what could be done to move closer to the deliberative ideal, taking voters as they are and laws as they might be (to paraphrase Rousseau).

Philosophical Pragmatists tend to be averse to large scale ideological explanations, but the persistent reductive dynamic towards the quantification and commodification of all values in contemporary Western societies itself smells strongly of a narrow ideology having become dominant. This suggests that

if we are to move towards better forms of public deliberation in which we may increase our ranges of meaningful democratic and environmental options, rather than see them continuously reduced, we may well need a larger scale political critique of our present dynamics. Accordingly, I suggest that we need to explore not merely the discursive side of pluralist problem solving, but to retrieve those aspects of the Pragmatist and liberal traditions, from John Dewey, William James and J.S. Mill, that insist on the broadening and enriching of the range of human bonds and experience. For an injunction to deliberate does not of itself give us the guidance to detect or criticise the ongoing impoverishment of debate, but in the currently neglected side of these traditions, we can find the moral, political and conceptual resources with which we can move towards making public environmental deliberation what it should be.

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