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Towards Polyvocal Environmental Debates

I have been anticipating my first editorial as Associate Editor of *Environmental Values* with some anxiety about what I could say about the contributions to the specific issue that I would be editorialising. It did not turn out to be such a difficult task after all, because the contributions to this issue of *Environmental Values* align quite well with my own intellectual commitment to pursuing and understanding intellectual exchange between research traditions (e.g. Paavola, 2008).

On the face of it, this issue includes two articles on climate change, two articles on nature conservation and one article on alternative economic views of these sorts of environmental issues. While the issue clearly focuses on two core global environmental change processes, it is more complex than that. Two of the articles illustrate recent economic takes on climate change and nature conservation, while the other two articles represent philosophical takes on the same issues. And then there is the fifth article, which for some may not tie well with the other four. But it does, as I will explain in the end.

This issue illustrates the potential of *Environmental Values* as a journal that can foster dialogue about key environmental issues and debates across research traditions. Here we have in the same publication forum quite different takes on climate change and nature conservation. One set of contributions are informed by economics, the other set of contributions draw their inspirations from philosophy. This kind of polyvocality is of value because it can tease out a better understanding for those who participate in and follow a debate. It is hard to imagine how the same kind of opportunity could be offered in a mainstream environmental economics journal, or in a standard disciplinary philosophy journal for that matter.

Interdisciplinary research and interdisciplinary journals such as *Environmental Values* are better placed to foster inter-paradigmatic intellectual exchange for many reasons. Firstly, interdisciplinary research is problem- or issue-focused and involves boundary objects such as 'biodiversity' or 'governance' which provide a degree of commonality across different research traditions whilst also accommodating degrees of difference. This kind of partially shared intellectual platform fosters exchange of ideas across research traditions. Scholars also seem to self-select for interdisciplinary research, and those that find it congenial tend to stay in an interdisciplinary setting and learn to communicate with scholars from other disciplines. Whilst there are career and other risks with these kinds of pursuits as Richard Tol points out in his article, let's not forget that there are also upsides to it. For example, interdisciplinary journals focusing on the environment tend to have higher impact factors and be more reputable than those focused on a single social scientific discipline or research tradition.

In this issue of *Environmental Values*, Richard Tol and Marc Davidson make complementary contributions to the scholarship on climate change policy. Re-

viewing recent estimates of economic impacts of climate change, and recognising the existence of gaps and uncertainties in them, Tol argues that in the short run there is an economic rationale for moderate mitigation of greenhouse gases, but that there is no economic rationale for deep emission cuts even over the long run. For him, this suggests that more emphasis ought to be placed in climate change policy debates on adaptation to climate change. Tol's position is that only unprecedented concern for international equity would economically justify deep cuts in the emissions of greenhouse gases.

Tol's conclusions demonstrate in the language of economics that climate change is also, to an important degree, a matter of equity in the broader sense. Generators of greenhouse gases have vastly bigger abilities to pay for doing what they do compared to the ability of the likely victims of climate change to pay for the climate-proofing of their lives and livelihoods. It is not difficult to see whose interests will prevail as a matter of efficiency if outcomes are sought through economic behaviour in the market place. As Henry Shue has said, 'If one is profiting from injustice, it is hardly going to be in one's interest to pursue justice' (Shue 1992: 376). However, the existing prevalence of inequity does not have moral force – greater achievement of equity and social justice still remain desirable. In my own work (e.g. Paavola and Adger, 2006) I have argued that adaptation to climate change requires more emphasis in climate change policy alongside mitigation because of its social justice merits, rather than because of its efficiency benefits (which may still be there). In his contribution, Marc Davidson seeks to make a case for greater cuts of greenhouse emissions as a matter of inter-generational equity. He makes several proposals for circumventing the non-identity problem which can be used as a justification for not vesting the current generation with the responsibility towards future generations. He argues that we should treat climate change as a wrongful harm which justifies a precautionary approach in climate change policy.

In their contributions to this issue of *Environmental Values*, Erik Ansink with his co-authors and Paul Keeling make complementary contributions to debates on nature conservation. Ansink and his co-authors examine alternative approaches to economic valuation of ecosystems, which focus on ecosystem functions and services, correspondingly. Whilst the two approaches should in theory generate the same results if correctly applied, the authors suggest that the ecosystem service approach may be preferable because of pragmatic considerations. The ecosystem approach measures actual benefit streams in economic terms instead of valuing capacities for ecosystem function. To me, the benefit of the more pragmatic approach is that it makes the boundaries of valuation exercises more transparent and their results more contestable, whilst actually providing concrete and useful information on current economic significance of specific ecosystem services. The admission of the provisional and contextual nature of valuation results is a laudable feature of a pragmatic economic approach to ecosystem

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valuation, and one that can help us recognise the importance of distribution of benefit and cost streams (see Balmford et al. 2002; Turner et al. 2003).

In his article, Paul Keeling addresses the debate on the meaning of 'nature', arguing that the opposition of notions of 'nature as inclusive of humans' and 'nature as other than human' may be counter-productive, distracting us from the real issue of what is the value of nature's wildness. Whilst Keeling's project is largely focused on philosophical debates and language use around 'nature' as a concept, it has clear pragmatic implications, too. The two views of nature examined by Keeling underpin many policy strategies and interest-group stances towards nature conservation. Things get difficult when purists informed by one or the other view seek to pre-empt the whole policy area. Specifically, it is difficult to gain support for sufficient conservation measures if they do not provide at least some benefits for the affected or interested parties. On the other hand, it would be equally difficult to achieve satisfactory conservation goals if anthropocentric benefit considerations were the sole basis for conservation measures.

The final contribution by Dan Greenwood examines the views of Austrian economics on market and non-market coordination, and its potential implications and lessons for research in ecological economics on multi-criteria analysis in particular. He reminds us that in their eagerness to highlight the difficulties that incommensurability and non-compensability can create for market coordination, many ecological economists have omitted the important role markets can play in coordination and the ways in which they perform that role. He highlights the Austrian view, according to which markets foster learning, planning and decision-making by agents, rather than form an arena in which pre-existing preferences are exercised. He argues that it cannot be taken for granted that the tools of ecological economics such as multi-criteria analysis can assist in non-market coordination when the latter is considered in the Austrian way as requiring learning and adjustments. That said, he clearly sees that there are possibilities for transferring lessons both ways between Austrian economics and ecological economics.

I consider that Greenwood's observations are also pertinent for coordination in the 'market place of ideas'. I hope that I am not the only one for whom this issue of *Environmental Values* is about transfer of ways of thinking about important environmental issues across the boundaries of research traditions. Happy transfers!

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