

De-centring humans from environmental valuation: Introducing the Life Framework of Values

Building on the understandings of how we value nature through reports such as *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity* (Kumar, 2012), as well as those of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) and the UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011), policy frameworks, including ‘ecosystem services’ (ES) and ‘nature’s contributions to people’ (NCP), work on the premise that by thinking of the environment as a set of services or contributions that our economy benefits from, then we may start to better understand the value of nature (Diaz *et al.*, 2018). These benefits may be indicated by monetary values, but they may also be expressed through non-monetary values, such as cultural or spiritual values. Proponents argue that a better understanding of the value of nature will better ensure its protection and centrality in our decision-making. However, this way of valuing the environment is still predominantly anthropocentric in form in that it is about recognizing the importance of nature for humans’ use alone and as a result has been met with a lot of criticism, not least in its inability to account for the intrinsic value of the environment, which is a key tenet of the Convention on Biological Diversity (McCauley, 2006; Silvertown, 2015; Piccolo, 2017). Similarly, although there has been a recent turn to improve our understanding and inclusion of relational values in this field (see, *e.g.*, Chan *et al.* [2018]), these discussions are still on the margins and there is little understanding of how this can relate to decision-making in practice (Gould *et al.*, 2019).

A new article that I co-authored looks to address these critiques through introducing a ‘Life Framework of Values’ (O’Connor and Kenter, 2019). Building on

the understanding by O’Neill *et al.* (2008), this framework recognizes that we value the environment – that is, we find the environment to *matter* – according to:

- 1 **how we live from the natural world** – this category refers mainly to how the environment provides us with crucial resources and materials that we depend on for our survival (food, energy *etc.*);
- 2 **how we live in the natural world** – referring to the environment as the stage of our life events and cultures, and the foundation of our identities and relationships;
- 3 **how we live with the natural world** – acknowledging the planet’s existence long before and after us humans and the fact that we share this planet with the more-than-human world;
- 4 **how we live as the natural world** – recognizing the different ontologies (worldviews) of the various human communities around the world who express a notion of harmony and unity with the environment.

This last framing allows predominantly western frameworks such as ES and NCP to move beyond their underlying assumptions of a nature–culture separation, which have often alienated marginalized groups, who struggle to comprehend these frameworks as a result.

This Life Framework of Values now allows us to recognize the balance of values across the different life frames expressed in any given decision-making context. For example, working on a conception of ‘articulated intrinsic values’ (something being *good for* something else, in the natural world, without reference to humans), we can now include the articulation of intrinsic values in a deliberative democratic

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decision-making process. In our article, we put this theory into practice through reporting on a non-monetary valuation project relating to the marine environment in the UK, where we challenged the participants (a representative sample of marine environment stakeholders) to consider value and management outcomes from the perspectives of the more-than-human world (O'Connor and Kenter, 2019). A large number of relational values were elicited from this exercise, as was the notion of 'articulated intrinsic values'. These values fell largely within the 'living in' and 'living as' frames for relational values and the 'living with' and 'living as' frames for the articulated intrinsic values. These values, which were elicited as part of the non-monetary valuation project, were presented in a video that was played at a deliberative workshop on future UK marine policy by a similar group of stakeholders.

As a result, this may encourage a move away from decision-making that predominantly values the environment in an anthropocentric sense – *i.e.* purely living *from* the environment – to start to recognize the plural values that fall within these other categories. While this approach still centres the humans as the *valuers*, by bringing the voices and perspectives of the more-than-human world into our

decision-making this represents a move towards a more ecocentric approach to environmental valuation. ■

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