

Conflict and Resolution

Environmental issues always involve conflict. In some cases, the disputing parties share much common ground; in others, the divisions are wide and deep. In many cases, indeed, conflicts exist between the members of different species; for example, between the interests of certain humans and those of certain nonhumans.

This issue is about such conflicts. Each contributor asks how we are to understand those cases when, in reflecting on environmental issues, we encounter clashes of values, interpretations, interests, rights, worldviews or theoretical frameworks. Their five papers address a wide range of such cases – from disputes over the management of protected areas in Columbia to the vexed question of whether a nonhuman animal can be said to own something that it has made with its own beak or claws.

In the first paper, Constant and Bell use Van Assche et al.'s (2012) concept of 'traumatic nature' to investigate the roots of modern-day conflicts concerning the establishment and maintenance of nature reserves in the Blouberg mountain range in South Africa. For the Bahananwa inhabitants of the region, the creation of such reserves has had a number of costs. Good grazing land has been lost, culturally important sites have been fenced off and human–leopard conflicts have been exacerbated. The Bahananwa regard these present-day costs in the light of their own traumatic past – an interpretation which, the authors suggest, is partially justified. According to Constant and Bell, the establishment of nature reserves in the region really has resulted in 'displacement and subjugation parallel to the land evictions of the colonising process and apartheid'. If today's conflicts are to be resolved, they propose, local people must be given a voice and the impact of their peculiarly traumatic histories taken into account (see further, Trainor 2006).

The theme of cultural conflict continues with Bach and Larson's paper, which contrasts two ways that certain Aboriginal peoples in Western Australia speak (and presumably think) about so-called invasive species. The local Aboriginal people who carry out most of the land management ('rangers') tend, they explain, to adopt the nationalistic and aggressive language epitomised by talk of 'combating invasives' or 'waging war' on weeds (see further, Peretti 1998). Yet the Aboriginal 'elders', who advise the rangers, tend to speak about such organisms in less pejorative terms, describing them as 'introduced', say, rather than as 'alien', and as 'cheeky' rather than as 'invasive'. Accordingly, the elders tend to see 'weed work' as aiming, not to eradicate weeds, but to manage their growth in ways that will improve the health of the land. Bach and Larson suggest that there is much to be said for the elders' choice of metaphors. If one takes it as one's aim to eradicate weeds, then anything short of their eradication will count as failure. By contrast, a focus on restoring land-health

enables rangers to see the positive outcomes of their work and to comprehend successful land management in the light of those outcomes.

In the third paper, Acosta García et al. treat the management of Utría National Park in north-west Columbia as a ‘Wicked Problem’ – one, that is, which defies solution. To address that problem, they follow Faber et al. (1995) in supposing that all living beings, humans included, have three basic aims or *tele*: (i) ‘self-maintenance, development and self-realisation’; (ii) ‘replication and renewal’; and (iii) ‘service to other species or to the whole of nature’. Acosta García et al. apply this ‘three-tele heuristic’ as follows. They begin by identifying the three key stakeholder-communities in discussions about the management of Utría – namely, (a) local Afro-descendant communities, (b) the Embera indigenous community and (c) the official Park administration. They then move on to ask whether each of those three communities is realising each of its three basic *tele*. A two-month period of field research revealed, they report, ‘a consistently low emphasis on the third telos among all three stakeholder-communities’. In conclusion, the authors ‘propose that fostering attention to the third telos could help to deescalate present and avoid future conflicts related to ecotourism in and around the park area’. They suggest, in other words, that such conflicts could be ameliorated if each stakeholder-community were to come to regard service to the other communities and to the natural world as part of its *own* ends.

Donoso’s paper swings the spotlight on to those cases where human interests conflict with those of nonhumans. Donoso states that he is concerned with what he calls ‘relevant interests’, those ‘whose disrespect wrongs the organism that has them’. Drawing on the work of Gary Varner and (in a surprising twist) that of Edmund Burke, he argues that an entity ‘can have a relevant interest without having at the same time a desire, or other mental state, to satisfy that interest’. Accordingly, it is not just sentient beings that can have relevant interests; such entities as plants and fungi can, he suggests, have them too. Towards the end of the paper, Donoso tries to formulate a nonanthropocentric principle that can help to resolve conflicts between human and non-human interests. Sterba (2005) was, he suggests, right to say that humans may justifiably thwart the basic interests of nonhumans if that is the only way to satisfy their own basic interests. Yet, against Sterba, Donoso adds that in such cases one ‘is still not excused for having so acted’ and is ‘still obliged to make redress’ in some way that conveys ‘the respect owed to non-human nature’. Suppose, for instance, that one needs to fell a stand of trees to provide shelter for one’s family. Donoso would say that although one is justified in felling the trees, one ought nonetheless to express one’s respect for nonhuman nature by making some sort of redress – by, perhaps, nurturing the growth of some *other* trees.

Milburn’s paper is about two conflicting ways of grounding nonhuman property rights: those which appeal to the interests that nonhuman animals have in maintaining their territories (see, for example, Hadley 2015, Cooke

2017) and the Lockean proposal that nonhuman beings own those items with which they have mixed their labour. Milburn argues that the Lockean account is less implausible than is often supposed and may indeed have certain advantages over interest-based accounts. First, it ‘seems to more clearly ground a *property* right than does an interest-based account’. Second, it is, in certain respects, broader than interest-based accounts. It can, for example, account for the fact that nonhuman animals may own things that do not lie within their territories. Third, Lockean property rights are, Milburn argues, much stronger than their interest-based counterparts. For instance, in cases when a human wishes to use something that seems to belong to some nonhuman animal, the Lockean does not need to weigh the human’s interests against those of the animal. If the animal took a previously unowned thing and mixed its labour with it – if it laced it together with its own beak, say, or dug it out with its own claws – then, appearances notwithstanding, there is in fact no conflict over ownership. The thing in question is the animal’s property, end of story.

Like Donoso, then, Milburn believes that some putative conflicts can be resolved by appealing to general principles of justice. Yet, as I expect both writers would concede, the same cannot be said of all environmental disputes. Real-world ones, such as those concerning Blouberg Nature Reserve or Utría National Park, rarely admit of such neat solutions. In such cases, as Constant and Bell maintain, our first task must be, not to take a stand, but to understand what is at stake (see Drenthen 2017).

SIMON P. JAMES

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