Days of Decision

The riots in America reminded me of a song from 1965 by Phil Ochs about failures of the political system, poor leadership and racist violence. Here are a few verses:

> I've seen your heads hiding 'neath the blankets of fear
> When the paths they are plain and the choices are clear
> But with each passing day, boys, the cost is more dear
> For these are the days of decision
>
> Now the mobs of anger are roamin' the street
> From the rooftops they are aimin' at the police on the beat
> And in city after city you know they will repeat
> For these are the days of decision
>
> There's a change in the wind, and a split in the road
> You can do what's right or you can do what you are told
> And the prize of the victory will belong to the bold
> Yes, these are the days of decision

America witnessed multiple riots every year from 1964-1968 provoked by structural racism, social inequity, racist murders and in 1968 the assassination of Martin Luther King. Phil Ochs sang 'There's been warnin's of fire, warnin's of flood; Now there's the warnin' of the bullet and the blood'. Today the warnings of fire and flood conjure up images of climate emergency, while the bullets and blood of police violence have been supplemented by an increasingly technologically securitised and militarised society and right wing authoritarianism. A new era of legitimised domination of others built on fear.

Social movements arose to address systemic failures of capitalist democracy: its private affluence and public squalor, promotion of selfish individualism, lack of care, respect and sympathy for others, and readiness to exploit humans and non-humans alike for profit. The '60s saw the emergence of the civil rights movement, gay rights and feminist movements, the anti-war and peace movements and the animal rights and environmental movements. In 1963 Bob Dylan penned his song *The Times They Are A-Changin*, capturing the idea that social and political revolution were imminent. The hope was that people would 'do what's right'. However, the hippies became the yuppies and neoliberalism re-established the idea of a singular capitalist formulation of 'the economy' and rolled back regulatory reforms. There was neither a social nor an ecological transformation.

The deeper issue was a contestation of the structure of capitalist economies and corporate power allied with nationalism and militarism. In the '60s sending 'men' into space, with dreams of boldly going where no 'man' had gone before, captured the imagination and hid the Earthly realities. Corporate capitalism grew strong on the back of arms, aerospace and related technological races. Imperialist militarisation had the major powers intervening in third countries, rattling their nuclear sabres at each other, threatening planetary

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annihilation. America pushed 'development' programmes that secured corporate supply chains (Black 2016). Geopolitical exploitation and inequities were structured within capitalism and its imperial mode of living (Brand and Wissen 2017).

We live in a world divided into winners (Global North, developed countries, Westerners, the new middle classes, the Davos élite, entrepreneurs and innovators) and losers (Global South, less developed countries, financially poor, unskilled workers, women, racial minorities, indigenous peoples). There are ideas of meritocracy in these designations that justify the winners in their inequitable gains. Losers are at fault for failing to emulate the winners. The poor and Global South should aspire to the values of capitalist consumer society, advance 'the economy' and join the race for affluence, where growth is development and technology is progress.

Recent headlines show the aerospace, military-industrial complex continues to sell utopian visions of science fiction futures divorced from social and ecological realities. Today the space programme is being commercialised (e.g. space cargo and personnel transport) and space itself privatised. Billionaire 'entrepreneurs' front corporate empires pushing space tourism for the super rich, and global telecommunications networks: Jeff Bezos of Amazon with Blue Origin Federation, LLC, Elon Musk of Tesla with Space Exploration Holdings, LLC (SpaceX) and Richard Branson of Virgin Group with Virgin Galactic. The race is on to establish satellite telecommunications networks that will cover every inch of the planet. SpaceX plans the equivalent of 5G from space and has permission to place 4425 satellites in orbit.[1] OneWeb with backers including Airbus Defence and Space, and Branson's Virgin Group, has 74 satellites in orbit, but in May 2020 announced it was seeking permission for up to 48,000 satellites, despite filing for bankruptcy a few months earlier. Like other hi-tech, hi-risk corporate 'entrepreneurs' their CEO hopes to exploit Coronavirus 'to enable forward-thinking governments and businesses to deliver much-needed reliable connectivity'.[2]

The Coronavirus crisis offers hi-tech corporations the opportunity to promote surveillance, home schooling, telehealth, smart cities, money free commerce, driverless vehicles and 5G super connectivity (Klein 2020). The terrestrial 5G network will massively increase mandatory exposure to microwave and millimetre-wave radiation, and has raised serious concerns from medical and scientific experts,[3] which are ignored by mainstream media that

1. https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-18-38A1.docx (Accessed 1st June 2020)
2. https://www.oneweb.world/media-center/oneweb-seeks-to-increase-satellite-constellation-up-to-48000-satellites-bringing-maximum-flexibility-to-meet-future-growth-and-demand (Accessed 1st June 2020)
3. See Moskowitz (2019), and two petitions: one with 377 signatories, including many medical doctors, http://www.5gappeal.eu/the-5g-appeal/; and the other by electromagnetic frequency scientists with 253 signatories https://emfscientist.org/index.php/emf-scientist-appeal

only reports criticisms by cranks and conspiracy theorists in order to deride and dismiss any need for precaution. Governments wanting to 'save the economy' are poised to pour billions into such projects that further isolate, individualise and securitise. However, the pandemic and economic crises have also raised the profile of how capitalist consumerism has created an uncaring society that is objectionable and immoral. As the technocrats and capitalists seek to use the latest crises to impose their own digital, computerised, smart world order, their position is contested by increased awareness of other potentialities that express alternative values.

Crises provide moments for reflection, rethinking, seeing the potential for restructuring, and making decisions to change everyday practices. Coronavirus has exposed the structure of the dominant economic system and its inequities (Spash 2020). Forced withdrawal from habitual behaviours of consumption and work break daily routines. Chances arise to question the processes of production and consumption that reproduce capitalism. Rethinking also means questioning how our identities are created through psychological–social interdependencies and what meaning we give to our lives.

Dal Gobbo argues that a new environmentalism of everyday life can emerge in times of crisis where the materiality of self and family reproduction is of necessity being reimagined and practically implemented. She reflects upon the impacts of the 2008 crisis in Treviso, Italy with an intensive case study. The propensity of public policies to pursue behavioural incentives that nudge action over trivial choices (e.g. pricing plastic bags) is criticised as ineffective and failing to address systemic issues. Desires under capitalism (for money, material wealth, conspicuous consumption), focused on individualism, contrast with and are undermined by adopting caring, sharing and frugal pleasures. Dal Gobbo reports on three cases investigated to explore changes in energy consumption. However, the work has a more general aim of questioning the qualities of existence, pursuit of happiness and meaning in relation to ecological forms of desire, aesthetic experience and flourishing. For Dal Gobbo ethical practice is about seeking the good life. More contentiously, she believes this should not be based on '(self-)imposition of abstract-universal values (e.g. preservation and intrinsic value of Nature, its rights)' (p. 412). Why exactly is unclear, especially in relation to recommended goals and their fulfilment. That is, happiness and flourishing appear to be abstract universal values which are in fact (self-)imposed, as evident in the case studies.

The specific studies illustrate the experiences of: (i) a couple downscaling from a modern gas heated urban apartment to a renovated more rural house in a hamlet with a wood fired stove; (ii) a single mother struggling with unemployment and lack of finances but devoting her time to raising her son in a frugal mode that includes strong relations with Nature and dedicating herself to care and cultivation of co-being; and (iii) a man focussed on low energy mobility after the collapse of a family business. The idea of more convivial technologies

and ways of being correspond to degrowth (Kruger 2019). However, contrary to claims of worktime reduction amongst degrowth scholars, there may be more work and less comfort, but lives enriched through joyful relations with Nature and others. This rejects a life of convenience, the oft-used marketing device of hi-tech corporations, and work as a necessary bad to earn a wage. Flourishing is sought through self-awareness and expression. There is a correspondence, especially in the last of Dal Gobbo's studies, to the layers comprising the ecological self, extending from naked person to clothes to house to the environment, as described by Hundertwasser (see Barak 2017). This contrasts with capitalist consumerist value linked to contemporary ways of living as abstract ideals rather than concrete ways of being, a life of continual dissatisfaction with gadgets and a meaningless materialist searching for ever more convenience. As Dal Gobbo summarises, consumerist living is full of shallow, brief and anaesthetised thrills that 'leave subjects in the pain of a constantly dissatisfied drive to a spiralling consumption of life itself' (p. 412).

The structure of that spiralling economic system is the topic addressed by Rammelt in a theoretical exploration and exposition that connects Marxist and ecological economic understanding. His aim is to explain how the capitalist economy reproduces itself and does so through its interactions with and dependence upon Nature. The two schools of thought might provide a unified social and ecological understanding but tensions arise concerning how they address value. More specifically, in ecological economics, based on the work of Georgescu-Roegen (1971), value is related to biophysical and entropic reality. In Marxist theory the 'free gifts of Nature' have only potential (use) value until human labour-power is applied that gives it actualised (use) value. Rammelt then proceeds to summarise and combine these theories through a graphic illustration employing systems dynamic modelling.

Understanding the economic process of reproduction requires Georgescu-Roegen's dialectical concepts of funds and fluxes as distinct from stocks and flows. The latter relates to consuming, while the former is about using without consuming. The distinction helps relate to what is depleted in production and what persists. For example, labour is revealed as misunderstood by Marx as a stock of energy that is consumed rather than a more complex fund that is used. The working population is a fund and labour-power is a flux. Fluxes do not directly use up or drain funds but add to their wear and tear. A machine is then a fund of services. Productive funds are utilised and depreciate, productive stocks are consumed and degraded. A material flow can be accumulated in a stock while a flux cannot. These concepts take on significance in terms of how maintenance of a stock differs from a fund, and might be extended to understanding how we interact with ecosystems in non-capitalist economies.

Under capitalism this physical system interacts with a monetary one. Capitalists aim to sell their products for more than their costs to make profits in a cycle of money used to produce commodities to gain more money, which

explains economic growth as growth in money value. The working population gains wages and spends them on goods and services enabling its own reproduction and so regenerates its labour power. This process of reproduction involves consumption of stocks and use of funds in daily activities – practices discussed by Dal Gobbo – in terms of washing, cooking, eating, relaxing and so on. Labour reproduction also relies on 'free gifts'. Rammelt notes the existence of a complex process of social reproduction including knowledge, work-ethic, skills of labourers, and involving 'free gifts' provided by households and particularly women as well as aided by the State. The precise contributions of free gifts remain unspecified by Rammelt with the primary concern in the present work being to show how the system expands value while diminishing matter-energy.[4]

A core issue for environmental values that arises from this analysis is the source of value and its creation and specifically the role of Nature. In Marx's theory, labour alone creates value while natural resources only provide use-values when processed by the application of labour-power. Rammelt suggests referring to Nature's contribution as potential, or natural, use-values while labour creates commodity, or embodied, value. Yet, the tension remains between how these forms of value are to be understood. The spiralling expansion of exchange value contradicts the unsustainable appropriation of Nature's use value. More than this I would argue that the labour theory of value creation appears inadequate. Under this theory the apple on a tree only has value in use when combined with labour. There is then no creation of value by Nature, but only by labour. Or consider the aesthetic appreciation of a sunset, an 'unproduced' but actualised value. Of course the aim is an explanation limited to understanding capitalism not all values, but it also seems problematic even within those confines. Capitalists do seek means to appropriate and commodify sunsets by buying advantageous viewpoints and privatising properties with 'natural views' and restricting access to aesthetic sites for profit. What about non-humans? The labour theory of value creates a divide between human and non-human animal labour. What if a non-human animal (e.g. a donkey) replaces a human one in an identical role in a production process (e.g. turning a treadmill), does this mean less or no surplus value is now created? Does appropriation of honey from a wild bee colony have less value than from an artificial labour managed bee hive or the fish farmed salmon over a wild one?

The importance here also relates to how capitalism replaces natural processes with artificial ones in order to capture value, imposes private property rights and makes profits. Ecosystems functions are replaced by low entropy energy and material intensive artificial processes. Thus ecological economics points out how the concept of a 'circular economy' is flawed because it ultimately relies on a process of linear throughput of energy and resources

4. This element might then connect to eco-feminist perspective on care work and reproduction of the economy (Salleh 2017, 1997).

it cannot sustain (Giampietro 2019). Therein lies an important distinction between capitalist forms of economic systems and traditional alternatives. Economies as means of social provisioning can come in many forms and these also entail different values from those of capitalism.

Traditional economies are solar- and ecologically-based. In modernist development terms they are deemed to suffer 'energy poverty' due to their absence of reliance on electricity and power generated by fossil fuels. This ignores how social provisioning relies on ecosystems' functions. For example, Hegde, Ziegler and Joosten note how freshwater forest swamps provide villages in Western Ghats, India, with clean mineral water naturally without the need for energy to pump it out. Their study looks at the plural values associated with such swamps. In particular they investigated conservation practices associate with sacred forest swamps which are places for livelihoods, i.e. living from, in and with the environment (following O'Neill, Holland, and Light 2007). In ten focus groups with 82 villagers they explore the importance for different stakeholders of six pre-defined value categories covering hydrology, religion, biodiversity, recreation, utility (including commercial exchange) and social interaction.

Institutions, understood as conventions, norms, rules and regulations, that have traditionally existed in faith based groups, and been passed on orally, have protected the sacred swamp ecosystems. However, economic 'development', land-use change and population dynamics (especially incomers) all pose threats. Hegde, Ziegler and Joosten see the danger of an institutional fence being replaced by a physical one. In Europe this was part of the historical slide towards capitalism, i.e. the rise of enclosure and imposition of private property rights (Thompson 1993). The loss entailed was both material and in terms of customs, practices and values. Hedge, Ziegler and Joosten find the value of sacred swamps is certainly not yet reducible to a 'direct' economic value.[5] The social/cultural and religious aspects including mysticism and worship of Gods all enter the picture. In a changing world, their concern is then how socio-cultural relations between people and Nature can be maintained so that such ecosystems are conserved. Their suggestion here is to look at how some values are held in common and might be shared openly with other groups (e.g. outside the religious community). This may require new institutional processes to establish human–Nature relations for incomers. A sacred swamp must then be understood 'as a place the relation to which is important for well-being (in a wide sense) in the villages' (p. 454).

Such 'relational values' have recently been adopted by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystems Services (IPBES)

5. They reference 'direct use value', which does not appear to be meant in any Marxist sense, but rather as a preference utilitarian value in the context of environmental economics where values are (confusingly) considered as directly and indirectly entering a utility function, i.e. 'use' of an entity itself is valued as opposed to some attribute of, or related to, it.

in its new approach called Nature's Contribution to People. In one sense all values are relational, which would make the concept rather a trivial truism, so there must be something more to it. As Neuteleers explains the concept is meant to address a perceived gap in valuing Nature. Three reasons given are that there is believed to be something more than the two prevalent categories of instrumental and intrinsic value, the existing concepts are regarded as too abstract and intrinsic value is deemed too ambiguous. Neuteleers' aim is to show that the three categories can be usefully distinguished.

Relational values are described by Neuteleers as addressing 'reasons of love, care and meaningfulness' (p. 468), and noted to be equated sometimes with Aristotelian eudaemonic values. More specifically, building from interpersonal relations, Neuteleers identifies four characteristics as constitutive of relational values: mutual creation, identity dependent, motivation dependent and a shared final end that is 'good in itself'. The idea of being good/valuable in itself would seem to be a form of intrinsic value (see McShane 2017), but Neuteleers does not make this connection. In fact he never clearly defines intrinsic value and sometimes, rather unhelpfully, substitutes it with 'moral value' (as if other value categories had no moral aspects?). Yet when discussing a motivation for preserving a forest the relational value seems very clearly to involve a form of intrinsic value: 'The object of care is outside myself and seen as good in itself' (p. 471). Neuteleers' discussion actually reveals relational values as suffering from vagueness, complex definitions and potentially having confusing overlaps with instrumental and intrinsic values.

Perhaps the clearest point of distinction is where the concepts of *de re* (valuing the specific as non-substitutable) and *de dicto* (valuing a class of things where the specific is substitutable within the class) are introduced, with relational value being *de re* (also see O'Neill 2019). Yet this does not seem enough to claim relational values in Nature are distinct from instrumental or intrinsic values. An important additional aspect appears to be the role of identifying with the object of value in what appears to be a self-constituting form of psychological relationship, i.e. feeling connected, feeling something is a part of yourself. This might also link to the discussion by Dal Gobbo because Neuteleers notes that the self-motivation to act in a certain way towards an object is not a duty/obligation. It also shares something with the work by Hegde, Ziegler and Joosten, because there are appropriate and inappropriate practices relative to the object of value (e.g. when to enter a sacred swamp, what can be taken what must be left, what must be given and how). In this case our wellbeing is about what we can do and be. Neuteleers repeatedly notes the close proximity of relational values to Aristotelian concepts of eudaemonism, virtues, flourishing and the good life. Interestingly Dal Gobbo also makes several references to the importance of flourishing. Yet Neuteleers also criticises the relational values literature for using vague and broad definitions of eudaemonic values, questions how Nature relates to flourishing and the good life,

speculates that this might reduce it to instrumental value, and wonders about the meaning of eudaemonic values relative to other values.

Relational value would seem to be aimed at adding something lost by the economic discourse of services, capital and monetary valuation, which has invaded ecology and conservation (Spash and Aslaksen 2015; Spash 2015). Regarding objects in narrowly commercial terms was noted by Karl Marx as failing 'to create an appropriate human sense for the whole of the wealth of humanity and nature' (cited by O'Neill, Holland, and Light 2007: 43). However, more work is required if relational value is to clarify its distinct attributes, distinctions from instrumental and intrinsic values, and to determine what role it might play in policy. In so far as the aim is to challenge the hegemonic discourse of neoliberal capitalism, and link to some form of non-instrumental reasoning, another route to the same end is supplied via virtue ethics. How virtue ethicists have been addressing appreciation of Nature non-instrumentally is the topic addressed by Wood.

An interesting aspect of Wood's approach, that contrasts with the anthropomorphism of relational values, is the attempt to understand the value that non-humans can have in their own right, a recognition of their distinct and unique non-instrumental value. He argues that an environmental virtue ethic can strike a balance between respecting Nature's otherness and our shared commonalities and interdependence with the 'other'. The 'otherness view' of the value of Nature appeals to the work of Simon Hailwood (2000). The argument for Nature's otherness is its independence from humanity. This is based on two separate claims: the indifference of the natural world to humanity that is evident in its self-sustainability and autonomous ability to flourish, and the absence of a moral community that includes humanity, meaning that Nature's ends cannot be interpreted as human interests or anthropomorphised.

Wood's more specific focus is on the essence of gratitude as an environmental virtue. He argues in favour of gratitude that appreciates Nature for 'being what it is'. Nature is understood in essentialist terms as things 'being as they are' in a process of growth and change, flourishing by fulfilling their own purpose. That there is beauty and value in the non-human world, in itself, makes reducing the value of experiencing it to being about one's own pleasure both egoistic and narcissistic. Wood argues that this sense of otherness is lost in much environmental philosophy and is the core of what Aldo Leopold meant by 'thinking like a mountain'. Species loss is seen as a direct result of treating non-humans and their habitat purely in instrumental value terms (as in economic valuation leading to loss of biodiversity; see Spash 2015). Valuing the otherness of Nature requires minimising human interference and seeking to tread lightly. Appropriate action is contextual (the moral rule is not applied universally), but the greater the disruption of an intervention the stronger should be the justification. Anthropomorphism is avoided by respecting Nature

for its otherness and this should make humanity more humble about the role of technology in addressing ecological crises.

The decisions facing humanity today are not especially new ones and have been present and recognised in their current form for at least half a century. The philosophical response appears to be returning to concepts that are millennia old but reformulating them in a modern crisis ridden context. The response to the social crisis is a call for relating to other humans regardless of colour, creed, gender, sexual orientation, age or religion. The response to the ecological crisis is a call for recognition of plural values that relate to Nature's otherness in ways modernity has dismissed and derided. The response to the economic crisis is to recognise the harmful system that has become dominant and that there are alternatives. The choices are clear: rebuild and maintain a socially divisive economic structure that imposes a monistic anthropocentric value system or empower, protect and seek to create multiple social-ecological alternative economic systems that care for the other. Crises offer opportunities, but they do not last.

Yes, these are the days of decision!

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