

The need for a different value approach

By Nicklas Mørk - Easy Sustainability

Introduction

The world is burning, there is no doubt about it. We are facing crisis upon crisis, everything from droughts, floods, forest fires, coral reef bleaching, earthquakes, rising oceans, war, and illnesses, to the biodiversity crisis, all connected to the major crisis – The climate crisis and all connected to our species effect on the world.

We have long been aware of what direction our society and world are going in, is not one that ensures neither thriving humans nor a thriving world. It only brings a worsening of the conditions for all life on our planet. However, it is also clear that no matter how much we yell, discuss, and argue for the change needed nothing seems to change or is not changing fast enough. We are still very much on the same train tracks towards a bare and bold world, where the consequences of our actions will have catastrophic consequences not just for us but for all life on planet earth.

It is easy for all parties in this debate to point fingers at each other, for why or why not we are capable of making the change needed or if the changes are even necessary. However, instead of pointing fingers at each other, we ought to start to look at and understand why our voices and reasons don't resonate and reach the other party. This is what I will try to elaborate on through the use of value theory, which creates the ethical foundation for how and why we act.

Value theory¹

Value theory is often used in relation to conservation biology. Here it is used to ask the question of why should we protect nature? Why should we protect and conserve ecosystems or restore or recreate these ecosystems? As well as the question of who gets a say in this debate of what and why. These types of questions refer to the question of nature's, biodiversity's, or ecosystem's value (Soulé 1985: 727– 734).

Working from this approach and with the notion of humans not being a separate entity from nature but an integrated part of nature and the realization of humans being nature just as much as the leaf, tree, crow or whale is, I will explore the three traditional value approaches that are used in relation to why we ought to protect nature, which nature and so forth.

By taking this approach of humans being nature then this discussion of conservation biology

¹ This chapter is a shortened rewritten version of the chapter called "The value of nature, biodiversity, and ecosystems" in my masters thesis called: Ecological conservation and rewilding – A conceptual analysis

suddenly becomes the same discussion of why we need to act and how we need to act on the climate crisis and all the facets of the climate crisis.

Intrinsic value

Intrinsic means to value something "without instrumental reference". This means if something has intrinsic value, it is not based on the use, need, or satisfaction we get out of that something as humans, but that it in itself has value, just for being what it is (Rolston 1994: 13-14).

Rolston describes it as follows: "if we try to take the term intrinsic seriously, this cannot refer to anything the object gains, to something within ('intra') the present tree or the past trilobite, for the human subject does not really place anything on or in the natural object. [...]. The attributes under consideration are objectively there before humans come, but the attribution of value is subjective" (Rolston 1994: 14-15).

As an example, we can take the giant redwood tree. Following the notion of intrinsic value then the tree has value for simply being, and further, it has this value no matter if we as humans observe it or not, it holds value without the need for human acknowledgment of the tree and its value (Rolston 1994: 15).

Intrinsic value has a very individualistic notion to it. It is the tree, the fish, the dog, the human - that holds value. It is not the tree species, it is not the type of fish, not the dog breed, or the human collective that holds value. However, by extension of every individual being that holds value, the species and so forth also gain value, it is just not in the species itself that holds the value.

Instrumental value

Instrumental value is a form of value that is dependent on how we as humans can see the use of that object; it is a means to an end. What can we acquire by using this object? Does it satisfy a need? Does it satisfy or give us a certain feeling? It is all depending on how we as humans experience the thing and what it can give us (Rolston 1994: 13, 16). This means that we only see the tree as something that supplies firewood, gives oxygen, and so on. The value is based on what it can give us (ibid.).

Instrumental value is the dominating value approach, especially in older generations and those who hold a lot of power. It is a value approach that resonates very closely with the capitalistic society and the anthropocentric view of nature as it is based on what gives us value is what holds value, and that value is only placed by us and our opinions. This is the approach that has led to the development of the modern world, however, if we look towards indigenous cultures around the world and a historical view on the time before the modern world, then this approach is hard to find in the same form of extremism as there can be observed today.

Systemic value

The last type of traditional value approach is the systemic value approach. This value approach is based on a value-generating system. This approach contra the intrinsic value approach and the instrumental value approach is one that can contain more complexity.

An example is any ecosystem. Using the systemic value approach the flora and fauna gain value by being a part of and contributing to the bigger ecosystem.

It is the system that produces the products that we can and do give instrumental value, and at the same time, it is the system in which the individuals or collectives which have intrinsic value exist as a part of.

Rolston describes it as follows: "why not say that the process is what is really value-able, able to produce these values?" (Rolston 1994:22-24). He elaborates this as "A sentient valuer is not necessary for value. Another way is for there to be a value-generating system able to generate value. If you like, that is another meaning of value-er; any x is a valuer if x is value-able, able to produce values." (Rolston 1994: 29).

Multifaceted value approach

All of the different value approaches have their advantages and disadvantages in relation to sustainable development and creating lasting change that creates a thriving world.

Instrumental value disadvantage is it creates an only worth for its usefulness approach which both leads to overuse of our resources and for 'things' that we as humans can't see the direct value of becomes unnecessary and obsolete. Meaning it becomes very hard to argue for these 'things' worth of protection. Its advantage is however its direct connection to the way we run the world and its ability to being able to create very 'logical' arguments for protection for those things we can translate into some type of value for humans, which is what the people in power will respond to.

Intrinsic value advantage is its ability to argue both for the individuals worth and by extension for the species worth in simply existing. It is worth to protect and act for them because they exist. It is an approach that is very appealing to us humans emotional side compared to the logic side which the instrumental value approach easily speaks into. However, this is also its shortcoming, as it becomes hard to argue further for the protection of something that holds worth just by being without having to go searching for an instrumental approach's 'logic' arguments of 'we need to protect is because it gives us X'.

Systemic value advantage exists in its way of encompassing more complexity, which makes us able to use both intrinsic value arguments and instrumental value arguments for if something is worthy of protection and worth of take action for. However, the disadvantages also lay in how complex this approach is in determining an object worth or value depending on what it gives to the system.

Especially in our current world where most things are unstable and constantly shifting at a rate never seen before.

A good and very clear example of this is how unstable ecosystems have become due to the effect of the climate crisis. The loss of biodiversity and the migrating species makes some species obsolete

and functionally extinct as they no longer can contribute to the system to which they previously belonged. In cases like these, it becomes very hard to argue for its protection whether it is flora or fauna, by using the systemic value approach. Here only the intrinsic value approach or instrumental value approach is sufficient.

The complexity of our society and the multiple crises we are currently facing or hastily approaching, means the traditional value approaches that are the basis for our actions and the way we communicate no longer are sufficient, especially in such a so diverse global society as we have today. With every approach's advantage and disadvantages to solely be used to make rational arguments for preventing a bigger climate crisis and every type of crisis that are connected to it, then we are already facing becomes increasingly hard.

The arguments needed to both ensure it being heard, responded to, and acted on in this complex interconnected world, cannot be solely based on one or another approach, as it currently most often is. This simply does not resonate enough with us as humans to create action. The need arguments need, needs to be based on a multi-faceted value approach which requires us to embrace the complexity of the world, and learn that a being or species deserves to be acted for simply because it exists while being able to make more 'logical' arguments based on the instrumental value approach, as it is these arguments that resonate with a capitalistic society, in which we currently live in and most importantly we need to have a more systemic approach and way of thinking as the whole world is interconnected and actively gives something of value to the ecosystem of the whole world.

A multi-faceted value approach to create the ethical foundation and to determine the way we need to develop and handle all life on the planet earth is a holistic approach and direct opposition to the current society which is individualistic and based on silo thinking, which is what has lead us to the problems we are now facing.

A multi-faceted value approach is however also an approach that makes us capable of cooperating and communicating within and with the current society and helps it migrate into a paradigm that is not solely humanistic in its approach but a paradigm that is based on a thriving natural world in which we most definitely are a part of.

References

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