

## Narratives And The Ethics And Politics Of Environmentalism: The Transformative Power Of Stories

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### Abstract

By revealing the centrality of stories to action, to social life and to inquiry together with the implicit assumptions in polyphonic stories about the nature of humans, of life and of physical reality, this paper examines the potential of stories to transform civilization. Focussing on the failure of environmentalists so far in the face of the global ecological crisis, it is shown how ethics and political philosophy could be reconceived and radical ecology reformulated and reinvigorated by appreciating and exploiting the potential of stories. This could enable radical ecologists to effect the major social and economic changes necessary to meet the global ecological crisis. What we need, it is argued, is a new, polyphonic grand narrative.

### Introduction

The environmental movement is now in crisis. Despite four decades of effort, destruction of the global environment is accelerating. As the most advanced studies of the greenhouse effect show:

Large swaths of the planet will be plunged into misery by climate change in the next 50 years, with many millions ravaged by hunger, water shortages and flooding... [P]arts of the Amazon rainforest will turn into desert by 2050, threatening the world with an unstoppable greenhouse effect... Land temperatures will go up 6°C by the end of the next century (Brown, 1998: 1).

Yet there is less concern about the environment now than there was ten years ago. As a consequence of this, we are now entering what Tom Athenasiou (1996) calls the fourth wave of environmentalism. The first wave, which began in the nineteenth century, consisted of the preservation and conservation movements. The second wave of the 1960s and 70s institutionalized the environmental movement. A third wave, the wave of 1980s, consisted of efforts to harmonize environmentalism with free markets. Sustainable development was its catchcry. The fourth wave, Athenasiou argues, reflects the disillusionment of environmentalists with bureaucratic and capitalist politics and their move to grass roots movements that link social and environmental problems. More radical forms of environmentalism are coming to the fore.

But looking at the environmental movement as a whole and the direction society is now taking, it is difficult to see this as anything more than the fragments of a marginalized movement. And radical environmental philosophers have not greatly helped. Having begun by showing how far traditional ethical and political philosophies could be extended to deal with environmental problems, most environmental philosophers turned to a more radical questioning of the dominant culture to expose the roots of its destructive tendencies (Zimmerman, 1994). They then attempted to resurrect and promote previously marginalized philosophical doctrines, the cultures and religions of a variety of Asian civilizations and 'primitive' societies, and ways of knowing and experiencing previously suppressed as feminine. While these philosophers have been aligned with and offered philosophical justification for the more radical environmentalists, they have been too divided and their insights too fragmentary and disconnected for them to orient the vast numbers of people required for concerted and effective action on a global scale. In fact most philosophers would regard such a task, if they considered it, to be far beyond the scope of their concerns.

However, given the state of the environmental and the environmental movement, surely the most pressing problem now is to address is the failure of environmentalism so far. Here I will propose a different starting point for radical environmentalists. Rather than analysing the root causes of oppressive ideas and institutions and then promoting a particular philosophy or non-European culture, I will begin by looking at a central but presently devalued component of every culture, its stories or narratives. These, I will argue, can bring into focus the concerns and illuminate the crucial issues faced by radical environmentalists, and provide the orientation required for effective action both locally and globally.

### Actions as Stories

Narratologists have remarked on the omnipresence of stories. Roland Barthes noted:

The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances - as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. ... [N]arrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting ... stained

glass windows, cinema, comics, conversation. ... [N]arrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself (Barthes, 1977: 79).

However, stories are more significant than their ubiquity alone would imply. As Alasdair MacIntyre (1994) and David Carr (1986) have argued, individual and social actions are lived stories. Actions begin with a definition of the situation in relation to which goals are formulated. Once an action begins, the goal is projected as a completed state of affairs, occupying the centre of concern and reflecting back upon and organizing the past and the present. The temporal configuration of such actions, with a beginning, middle and end, is essentially a narrative configuration. More complex actions consisting of a number of component actions must be held together by a grasp that not only attends to the objective or goal, but also to the temporally discrete parts or phases of the action through interruptions and diversions. Such interruptions require of us that we be able to take stock of where we are; after an interruption we must be able to pick up the story of our action. Here there is not merely a narrative structure to the action, but we must at some level narrate what we are doing to clarify to ourselves what we are about. Narrative activity is a constitutive part of the action. Stories are told in being lived and lived in being told.

Such narration makes possible and is even more essential to joint action, particularly large scale joint action. In building a house or fighting a war, the object of the action transcends the individual. It is necessary to move from reference to "I" to "we". There is a collective subject with a collective project that requires the coordination of not only a large number of individual acts, but of actions of different individuals and groups of individuals. Only through continual narrating of the story of such collective action is each individual and each group of individuals able to situate themselves and the narratives of their particular projects within, and thereby contribute to, the broader project.

Broader projects still, such as building communities, ranging from villages to civilizations, endure over centuries. Such enduring projects transcend the lives of individuals, and stories defining the communities and their projects must be passed on from generation to generation. It is by virtue of the stories of such communities that they exist, cohere and function as social entities (Carr, 1986: 122-85). While being lived their stories are continually being told and retold, written and rewritten in the political transactions of its members, uniting the present with the past in relation to projected futures of greater or lesser determinateness.

It is from such lived stories and the organizations and communities united by them that institutions, consisting of systems of role relationships and traditions, crystallize. A practice, an organization or a community becomes an institution when the roles composing it are defined independently of the individuals who happen to fill them, and socialisation requires that people understand and begin to participate in these stories. Families, cities, organizations, communities, nations and civilizations are stories in the process of being lived out, and we have to learn these stories to participate in them. As Alasdair MacIntyre pointed out:

I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters - roles into which we have been drafted - and we have to learn what they are... (MacIntyre, 1984: 216).

MacIntyre went on to suggest that:

It is through hearing stories ... that children learn or mislearn both what a child and what a parent is, what the caste of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions and in their words (MacIntyre, 1984: 216).

Learning how to live through stories is at the same time learning who one is. It is through stories that people define themselves and establish their identities (Ricoeur, 1990). At the same time this involves recognizing the identities of the social forms of which one is part, and the identities of other individuals and of other social forms. Establishing one's identity is inseparable from recognizing the identities of other people, of communities, societies, institutions, classes and social, political and religious movements, and it is through stories that relationships between such diverse identities are established, stabilized and defined and redefined.

Narrating stories is not only important for teaching people how to situate themselves in the stories of which they are part, establishing their identities and orienting them to live accordingly. Conflicts within and between people are centred on how the past and the present are construed and how stories are to be configured to relate these to the future. George Orwell's novel *1984* shows how society could be completely controlled by controlling what is taken to be history. Conversely, freedom is achieved through the ability to construct (or configure) new stories (or at least, new emplotments), historical or fictional, producing quasi-worlds that allow people to distance themselves from the stories they are living out, and to question and then to refigure these stories (Ricoeur, 1984-88). Narrated stories enable people to envisage in an immediate, practical way, new possibilities, new identities, new goals, new communities, new ways of living and the paths to realizing such possibilities.

Stories are necessary for creating new social and political movements, and for the coherence and continued success of such movements. The rise of socialism and the labour movement was achieved through the configuration of stories portraying the working class as the agent that could and would

create a better world. The collapse of Western Marxism as a political force following the successful attacks on Marxist historicism by Althusser and Colletti, illustrates the consequence of the dissolution of a narrative understanding of society. The success of the New Right in Anglophone countries following the elaboration of a new story explaining the relative stagnation of these societies (as a consequence of the welfare state) and projecting a new future based on a return to rugged individualism, illustrates the continuing relevance of stories in the rise of new social and political movements.

## Stories and European Civilization

If stories are so central to human existence, one would expect societies to place a high value on stories and those who configure them. Yet a feature of European civilization is that stories have been denigrated or dismissed as unimportant relative to those discourses concerned to discover eternal truths, notably mathematics, philosophy, theology and science. Since Plato, wisdom has been identified with knowledge of that which is unchanging - the forms, atoms, the laws of nature, logical truths or whatever.

There has been a tradition of opposition to such denigration of stories, with Vico, Herder and all those associated with hermeneutics being its most prominent representatives; but this has been very much a minority tradition. Despite the brilliance of the stories through which Plato represented philosophical debates, he denigrated poets; and Aristotle, one of the great historians of philosophy, dismissed the work of historians. For the most part stories have been regarded as entertainment or as a form of cognition appropriate for the ignorant masses. History is bunk, claimed Henry Ford, and Roland Barthes (1975) in a highly influential essay claimed that the value of literature lies in the pleasure it gives.

Of course if what I have argued is right, that social life is constituted by stories, then they must have been given a place within European civilization. And in fact one of the most important features of this civilization is that at crucial periods it has proliferated story genres. Since Ancient Rome, European civilization has constituted itself through grand narratives, most importantly, the story of fall and redemption proposed by Christianity, then since the eighteenth century by the various Promethean grand narratives of modernity. These have been accompanied by the development of a great variety of historical and fictional narratives. The significance of historical narratives in particular should not be underestimated. Historical consciousness is the condition for people striving for control over their destinies and is characteristic of societies in which there is social mobility. Donald Brown (1988) has shown that societies with rigid class or caste divisions have been characterized by a poverty of historical consciousness, and Charles Radding (1985: 58ff.) has shown this was also true of Europe in the Dark Ages. However, the Dark Ages were exceptional in European civilization.

Historical narratives have been also central to the development of the traditions that have defined the uniqueness of European civilization, including the development of political and legal ideas and institutions and the development of philosophy, mathematics and later, science. It is through stories that the achievements and limitations of the past have been appreciated and people oriented to further develop these traditions. Through stories, conflicts within these traditions are put in perspective and opposing ideas evaluated and judged. As MacIntyre pointed out, major advances in ideas, including scientific ideas, go beyond the criteria that previously people had used to judge ideas, and it is only through stories that they are appreciated as advances:

Wherein lies the superiority of Galileo to his predecessors? The answer is that he, for the first time, enables the work of all his predecessors to be evaluated by a common set of standards. The contributions of Plato, Aristotle, the scholars at Merton College, Oxford and Padua, the work of Copernicus himself at last all fall into place. Or to put matters in another and equivalent way: the history of late medieval science can finally be cast into a coherent narrative.... What the scientific genius, such as Galileo, achieves in his transitions, then, is not only a new way of understanding nature, but also and inseparably a new way of understanding the old sciences way of understanding... It is from the stand-point of the new science that the continuities of narrative history are reestablished (MacIntyre, 1977: 467).

MacIntyre's ideas in this regard have been further developed by Walter Fisher (1989). The power of stories to adjudicate between ideas derives from their capacity to bring into relationship diverse perspectives, allowing them to be interpreted through each other and judged accordingly.

But the grand narratives that have dominated European civilization have been epics, heroic stories of one unified collective subject. We have the epic of Christendom's quest for salvation, or the epic of humanity's quest, led by European civilization, for knowledge, control over the world and economic growth. These epics are characterized by their subordination of history itself to the quest for the eternal, whether this be conceived as the education of humanity to disavow the sensible world for the eternal realm of God, the growth of scientific knowledge to culminate in timeless knowledge of the eternal laws of nature, or the increasing mastery of nature to culminate in its complete reduction to a predictable instrument of the economic machine. Such stories are characterized by upholding an ideal where stories, including history, come to an end - where we will be left with only one, true perspective. So, while stories have been central to European civilization, the dominant tenor even of the major stories has been to denigrate stories. Stories are a sign of deficiency and a reflection of the defective, unfinished state of the present, a present in which conflicts and diverse perspectives have yet to be resolved or exposed as illusions.

## Suppressed Knowledge: A World of Processes

If stories are essential to effectively questioning the existing ways of life and social order and to constituting radical social and political movements, it is not difficult to account for their low status. If stories can be devalued, people will be left without any appreciation of how to become effective political agents. But what other knowledge or understanding is suppressed by this devaluation? My claim is that it is the blindness produced by this suppressed knowledge which accounts for the institutional blindness to the issues raised by environmentalists, and overcoming this blindness is a central condition for creating a sustainable economic order.

While philosophers have reproached or praised stories for evoking emotions or being concerned with the particular, a more basic feature of stories, a feature which sets them at odds with the notions which have dominated European civilization, is that they tend to construe the world as essentially active, as a world of actions and processes. This is evident from the analyses of narratives by structuralist and enunciative theorists of narratives as well as hermeneutic theorists. Despite their atemporal formalism, the analyses of narratives by these theorists reveals their components to be all related to the unfolding of action (Barthes, 1977; Genette, 1980). Narratives not only focus on the changing aspects of reality, those aspects which for this very reason have been held to be mere appearance and thereby unimportant, but they offer a way of understanding such aspects. Agents for the most part are described through their actions, and objects are taken to be of significance as potentialities or as signs in relation to actions and to the unfolding of processes. While science explains phenomena as nothing else but the effect of initial conditions, components and the environment (usually created by the experimental apparatus), stories enable us to appreciate processes as 'unfolding according to a pattern not imposed on it from above or outside but arising out of its own internal shaping (*Gestaltung*) of itself (Carr, 1986: 77).'

However, the potential of narratives in this regard is not always realized. In the case of epics, the process aspect of reality is acknowledged but minimized since everything is seen in relation to and from the perspective of one unfolding action. From this unitary perspective the world is reduced to settings, obstructions or instruments for the successful completion of the heroic action, whether this be the action of a hero, an army, Christendom, European or Western civilization or humanity. Such epic narratives are, in the terminology of the Russian literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), monologic. And as Bakhtin pointed out:

With a monologic approach (in its extreme or pure form) *another person* remains wholly and merely an *object* of consciousness, and not another consciousness.... Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the *ultimate word* (Bakhtin, 1984: 292f.).

Along with reducing people to objects, that is, obstacles or instruments of action, so also is the rest of the world. Epics are commensurate with and central to the dominant forms of thinking in European culture.

But as Bakhtin showed, there are also 'polyphonic' narratives, narratives that give a place to a diversity of contending voices and perspectives, and these construe people as other conscious, active subjects. The world is construed as not just one unfolding action, but a multiplicity of actions and processes, contesting each other, clashing, combining, overcoming or being overcome, forming or breaking up. Polyphonic narratives are implicitly committed to a process metaphysics, as the work of Mikhail Bakhtin made clear (Gardiner, 1993; Bell and Gardiner, 1998). Such narratives tend to emerge among those attempting to subvert the fixation on absolutes of the ruling culture.

It is through such polyphonic stories that we can appreciate what it means to experience the world as a world of processes, or to appreciate anything or anyone as a process (Rescher 1996). Stories emphasize the durational nature of reality, and that the outcome is not predetermined. This is the basis of suspense in stories. Understanding beings as processes involves empathy, or what the philosopher/scientist Michael Polanyi (1959) called 'indwelling', and along with this, the inseparability of understanding, evaluation and emotion. Insofar as beings are conceived of and 'indwelt' within as processes their intrinsic significance, good or evil, is revealed and they evoke emotions; that is, a state of preparedness to act for or against them, even if only in imagination. People are 'caught up' (or as Schapp (1985) put it, *verstrickt*) by stories and the world is experienced as having a claim on them. Polyphonic narratives also dissolve the boundaries between the time of stories and the time in which people are living, and they dissolve the opposition between subject and object. Understanding such a story situates the recipient as a potential participant in the story, as someone who could play an active part in shaping the future projected by the story. This is associated with the appreciation of the corporeality of human existence, that people (including ourselves) are not detached consciousnesses but as actors bodily engaged in the world.

While stories almost invariably portray conflicts of some kind, they also give a place to interdependence. Individual actors form and define themselves in dialogue with others and are dependent upon others for their identities and to make their own actions possible. While not all stories exploit the full potential of the form to portray the range of such interdependencies, stories tend to acknowledge actions of different durations and the relationship between these, and beyond this, of processes of different durations. That is, the projects and lives of individuals or groups can be portrayed in the context of and in relationship to broader social processes, such as wars or major historical transformations, and to the dynamic processes of nature.

## Stories, Processes and Radical Ecology

We can now see the crucial differences between the world as construed through polyphonic stories and through the discourses of mathematics and mainstream science (including economics). And it is these differences which hold the key to and illuminate the opposition to mainstream thought of the radical environmentalists. For the most part, the dominant discourses deny reality to process, or at least try to explain it away as mere appearance or a by-product of the motion of 'things'. Most of the arguments of radical ecologists, and most of the thinkers and cultures drawn upon by them to justify their intuitions, amount to efforts to give a place to some aspect of process. My contention is that the most important of their insights can be united by seeing each of them as partial recognition, against the grain of the dominant culture, of the primary reality of processes over things. Appreciation of this enables their work to be formulated more coherently and a more concerted effort to develop their ideas becomes possible. More importantly, it becomes possible to think more clearly about how to create a radical environmental movement able to make the radical transformations in societies necessary to make them sustainable.

As noted, revealing beings as processes of becoming through stories also involves and immediate appreciation of their unique intrinsic significance (whether good or bad). This is clearly evident in the evaluation of individual lives. It might seem satisfactory to those promoting cost-benefit analysis to place a monetary value on individual human lives and on this basis to justify uranium mining or the construction of nuclear reactors, but a different attitude is evoked by stories of the particular people who might die or who have died from radiation induced cancers. Stories highlight the mortality of individuals and the meaning of life and of death and the relationships between individuals and other people, aspects of reality that the abstract thinking of cost-benefit analyses leave behind with their abstractions, even when they try to quantify their significance. Similarly, stories of communities, of animals or of eco-systems with their complexly interacting organisms, facilitating an appreciation of these as processes which have emerged, maintained themselves in existence and which could 'die', will evoke a different attitude than will be entertained by those who look at them as objects or aggregates of objects. It is from the appreciation of these as processes that a sense of their significance (experienced as a claim on one) is gained.

Conceiving people and communities through stories as processes supports another view of the radical ecologists, that there is something important about communities and something wrong with the political and economic systems that are obliterating them in the name of economic progress. Conceiving of people as processes enables the essential sociality of humans to be understood and appreciated. People become and can only maintain themselves as biological beings and as individuals with an identity through their relations to and in continuous interaction and dialogue with others. The dissolution of communities breaks down such relations and undermines any control people might have had over their destinies, and dehumanizes them. Recognizing communities, societies and civilizations as processes constituted by stories through which people define who they are, and taking a long view of history, we see the current undermining of communities, whether national, regional or local, as a continuation of the self-reproducing expansion of the market economy, with its rapacious quest for domination, its atomisation of social relationships and its destruction of identities, continuing on the path that has already caused massive social, personal and ecological destruction.

Stories, by illuminating the inter-relationship between processes, highlight a further aspect of reality to which mainstream Western thought had, until the global ecological crisis, become almost blind - that all that is useful to humans and on which human societies depend for their existence are the product of processes with different degrees of resilience and stability and operating over different durations. As ecologists and geographers have attempted to show, the climate, the soil, the range of species, and the environmental conditions for agriculture or fisheries, together with the 'sinks' that absorb pollution, are not merely there ready to be used. They are generated by a complex of processes which could be undermined or transformed into less human friendly regimes. And if they are not undermined or transformed, there are limits to what they produce. The concentrations of minerals which can be exploited are the product of slow, almost still geological processes which are very resilient but which cannot concentrate these minerals as fast as they are presently being mined and dissipated.

Finally, stories highlight the possibility of interactions between processes generating unpredictable and novel events and processes. The prevailing reductionist thinking lends credence to the view that environmental and social problems are merely an aggregate of smaller problems, and that the future will be characterized by different quantities of what we have in the present, but nothing dramatically different. This accords with the ontology of being that underlies reductionism; that the ultimate reality is unchanging. Stories allow that a number of small events can collectively result in irreversible catastrophes that can totally transform the existing order, resulting in the death of individuals, communities, societies and ecosystems, or their salvation, or the emergence of something entirely new. Conceiving the world as processes justifies the presentiments of environmentalists that the effects of one piece of environmental destruction after another could be far more than the sum of the individual acts of destruction. They could set in motion irreversible processes that have far more destructive consequences. But it also justifies their conviction that each environmental struggle could have outcomes far beyond the immediate issue. Stories can allow that the future will be qualitatively different from anything in the past. That is, through their commitment to an ontology of processes, stories lend support to environmentalists who believe that eventually we will be able to create a radically different kind of social order based on new social processes which, unlike the global market, are not destructive of the environment.

## **New Directions: A New Ethics**

Appreciating a root source of the concerns of radical ecologists and how these concerns can be

integrated as a start, but it still does not go very far towards creating sustainable societies. However, the study of narratives in general and polyphonic narratives in particular can provide new and more affirmative directions for environmentalists.

To begin with, it is possible to develop a more adequate ethics. Radical ecologists explicitly or implicitly confront mainstream thought by upholding the intrinsic value of beings, but are relatively weak in providing an ethics to live by, which could form the foundation for a different social order. Conceiving lives as stories indissociably related to broader narratives provides the basis for reconceiving the very nature of ethics, returning the field of ethics to the mainstream of culture from which it had been banished by the atomisation of society, the development of capitalism and the triumph of scientific materialism. The issue raised by seeing life as narrative is what kind of narratives have people been socialized into and what narratives could replace these, and how should more specific or personal and communal narratives be related to the broader narratives constituting institutions, organizations, communities, nations and civilization.

To begin with, it is necessary for people to begin thinking of their lives as constituted by narratives. Then what is called for is the cultivation of polyphonic narratives, that is, narratives acknowledging a diversity of independent voices, recognizing that individuals in constituting their own lives as narratives should do so in dialogue, real or imagined, with a diversity of others. This involves recognizing that any commitment to a particular identity, way of thinking or orientation can only be provisional and should be open to further questioning in the future. Identities so formed should situate people within pre-existing narratives which constitute traditions, communities and institutions, and it is as situated that individuals become able to question these narratives, consider alternatives and take an active part in reformulating both the narratives of their own lives and these broader narratives.

What this means is that ethics can be immediately related to the lives people are living, the institutions dominating society and to politics. In place of an ethics which focuses on providing abstract algorithms for judging the rightness or wrongness of actions, an ethics built on narratology would focus on the quality of the stories people are presently living out and on what alternatives there might be. That is, it would focus on what is a good life and how to live it, and consider what motivates people to strive for a good life or to undermine it. It would consider what are the virtues required to live a good life and to perform the roles and sustain the social forms required for living a good life (and what are the vices that undermine the conditions for living such a life). Only derivatively would it consider principles of action. While not all aspects of such an ethics can be considered here, it is useful to review some central virtues required: 'justice', 'duty' and 'integrity'.

As we have seen, acting involves, minimally, defining the situation one is in, projecting a goal on this basis, and then acting to realize this goal. Injustices are perpetrated when in defining a situation, people or any other beings are defined inadequately: when what they are, what are their needs, what they have been through, what they have done and are doing for others, what are their potentialities, what they are doing and what they aspire to, are not properly acknowledged and taken into account in formulating projects and acting. One of the main reasons for constructing stories is to highlight injustices and to do full justice to characters, thereby revealing how to live more justly and revealing the flaws in people which make them vicious. From the perspectives opened by polyphonic narratives, injustices are perpetrated whenever people are construed as objects. This is the case when people are construed as mere labour power to be exploited or as mere statistics. Extending the ontology implicit within such polyphonic narratives, injustices are perpetrated when the reality of processes and their inter-connections are denied - for instance, in refusing to acknowledge what it is to be human or to be alive, in refusing to acknowledge the reality and limitations of processes that make human life possible, or in refusing to acknowledge the oppression and disproportionate environmental destruction perpetrated by the affluent in maintaining and expanding the present world social, political and economic system. Justice is the pre-eminent virtue and the basis for achieving the kind of reciprocal recognition that is the condition for becoming fully human.

Duty pertains to the way individuals fill their roles in organizations and institutions, and concomitantly, how these organizations and institutions in turn fill their roles in broader organizations and institutions. In recognizing all social life as constituted by narratives which are latently polyphonic, it becomes a central duty of everyone in every organization to understand the points of view of others, to take an active role in questioning and defining or redefining the narratives of the institutions of which they are part, and to uphold the means by which people are able to question such narratives. Recognition of the global ecological crisis, the unsustainability of many of the existing practices and social forms dominating the world system and the unequal access to and consumption of reserves and resources, requires of the participants of these forms that they strive to reform them and their goals so that they do justice to future generations, to those suffering from environmental destruction, to social forms, cultures and communities that are at present living in a sustainable way (and to those which are not), and towards the rest of nature.

Integrity is achieved through constituting one's life as the moral unity of a biography. A person of integrity is someone who has acted and lived and can be expected to continue to act and live justly according to their critically reflected upon convictions. By extension, institutions have integrity when they conform to the ideals of their narratively constituted, critically reflected upon traditions.

Such ethical notions and their opposites - the notions of injustice, corruption and 'absence of integrity', can orient people to oppose environmentally destructive practices and social forms, achieve solidarity in the environmental movement, and to preserve or create environmentally

sustainable social and economic forms to replace those which are environmentally destructive. If all people and all institutions were just, doing their duty and living with integrity, society would be environmentally sustainable; and if people were striving to be just, to do their duty and live with integrity they would be attempting to transform society to make it sustainable. Notions of justice and injustice, duty and corruption, integrity and its lack, would provide those working for an environmentally sustainable society with the concepts to orient themselves, define their goals and appreciate the significance of their actions, and to define and mobilize people against those destroying the environment.

However, the Promethean grand narratives of modernity are embedded in institutions and organizations, in cities, buildings, instruments of production, and even in the *habitus* (to use Pierre Bourdieu's terminology) of individuals. And the complexity of social, economic and political institutions, the autonomous dynamics of markets and institutions, and the nature of power in the context of such dynamics, cannot be properly comprehended, let alone transformed, at the level of ethics alone. We are confronting a global ecological crisis of a global civilization dominated by an economic system which impels continued expansion and exploitation of human powers and the natural environment, and which has now largely freed itself from the control of nation states. Those institutions and economic enterprises which have an ecological conscience will almost inevitably be weakened in their struggle for survival in such a system, as will the state and non-state institutions dependent upon these enterprises. In such a milieu those who genuinely face up to this crisis will almost inevitably be at odds with most of the people around them. To be successful such people must unite with others for support and constitute themselves as the movement, and consider what is required to gain success as a movement. It is necessary to understand the nature of politics and political struggle.

## Political Struggle

But as I have noted, stories provide a bridge between ethics and politics. Stories almost always involve conflict, and stories highlight the conflictual nature of social reality and the nature of such conflicts. Conflict between people and groups with unequal power is as much a part of reality as interdependence. It is this that must be appreciated by those engaged in political struggle.

New social and political movements begin with the joint recognition of a problem or set of problems and a commitment by people to overcoming these. Most important here is the need to recognize obstacles, opponents and tendencies who or which must be persuaded, converted, marginalized or defeated. Joint action requires the elaboration of a narrative of the process of realizing the major project with their subordinate projects, to enable participants to define their unique situations and contributions in relation to the broader project and identify themselves as members of a movement. This involves challenging the prevailing narratives, the goals they project and the way they construe the world. This is what constitutes a movement as a 'we' engaging, through their diverse projects, in concerted action to change the direction of society.

This is what is required for environmentalists to develop as a movement. The elaboration of the narrative of the environmentalist movement requires not only the story of the struggles of each environmentalist protest and action in relation to the story of the global environmental movement, but a struggle to rewrite and reconfigure history to give a place to the dynamics of nature and to account for the problems of our present situation. It is necessary to reveal the institutions and emergent social processes responsible for environmental destruction (most notably, the market economy and the oligarchic tendencies in all organizations) and to embrace and support the narratives of those who have resisted and are resisting such destructive tendencies. Ultimately, environmentalists need to contest and reconfigure those narratives constituting and embedded within existing institutions and organizations which are driving destructive processes, and to identify or create the processes required for a sustainable cultural, social and economic order. Since both the causes and problems of the environment are global, the ultimate aim should be to create a world order which is environmentally sustainable, a social order which can and does preserve resources and uses reserves at an average rate no faster than they or their substitutes accumulate. This should be part of the ultimate end projected by the narrative of the environmental movement. But achieving this end will require the narrative of the environmentalist movement become, or at least become incorporated into as one of its major components, the grand narrative of a global civilization, and thereby the ultimate reference point for evaluating all particular projects and institutions and the narratives through which they are constituted. Calling for a grand narrative is clearly provocative in the light of Lyotard's characterization of the postmodern condition as an 'incredulity toward metanarratives'. However, as Carr argued against Lyotard, "such narratives" are not straightforward claims to scientific truth but are advanced as part of the project of community-building, and their validity is ultimately a question of whether their advocates succeed in persuading others to join in the community they project. Hegel's philosophy of history [for example] ... should be read as a moral-political appeal, not as a putative science (Carr, 1986: 151n.31).'

The narrative of the environmentalist movement if it is to avoid the oppressive tendencies of grand narratives of the past should not be conceived of as a monologic epic, an heroic struggle of a unified subject which would thereby reduce people to instruments of this project. It should be seen as a polyphonic or dialogic narrative consisting of people of diverse perspectives engaged in questioning, contesting and reformulating this narrative. Firstly, it should be recognized that within the environmental movement there are and should be a diversity of views, interests, philosophies, types of movement, and so on. Continual dialogue, debate and argument between these should be encouraged as the condition of constituting healthy intellectual traditions or complexes of traditions. A grand narrative should include narratives that characterize and evaluate these arguments.

Secondly, in relation to those people and groups embraced and supported, such people should be included into an expanding dialogue. They should not be manipulated and cajoled into serving as instruments for the grand project. Thirdly, what should be striven for is the creation of the conditions under which people can engage in such dialogue, and assert themselves without fear of retribution or loss of livelihood.

However, the opponents of the environmental movement have much more economic and political power, and are disseminating their own grand narrative and are vigorously engaged in reducing all institutions and cultural fields to instruments of their own projects. The success with which the media magnate Rupert Murdoch has influenced the national politics of Anglophone nations to promote the deregulation and globalization of the economy, in direct opposition to what is required for an environmentally sustainable civilization, is just one case in point. Anti-environmentalists are actively trying to undermine or neutralize the environmental movement, either co-opting it, fragmenting it, marginalizing it, or establishing pseudo-environmental organizations able to take over and transform the environmentalist agenda (Beder, 1997). In this political environment, participants in major organizations who are environmentalists and are attempting to reform them from the inside are bound to face vigorous opposition and to find it difficult to advance to positions of power. Particularly in Anglophone countries, the institutions within which environmentalists could find niches, however precarious, are increasingly being reduced to instruments of the global economy. For example, the partial autonomy of science, a cultural field that gave its members the symbolic power to draw attention to environmental problems, has been severely eroded. In Britain, Australia and New Zealand, universities have been corrupted by efforts to force them to function as business enterprises.

## **New Approaches to Strategy Formation**

What then can be done? What is most important is that environmentalists fully understand what they are up against. Only when this is recognized are environmentalists likely to pay sufficient attention to the integrity of the environmentalist movement, to the narratives defining it and its development and to the identities these facilitates or undermines, to the intellectual debates which have taken place and are taking place within it, and to recording and analysing the movement's successes and failures. And perhaps most importantly, this should provide the solidarity necessary for environmentalists to actively support each other when any environmentalist or group of environmentalists is under attack. However, there are a number of specific ways in which appreciation of the importance of narratives might strengthen the movement.

I have argued that polyphonic narratives construe the world as a world of unfolding actions and processes, and that it is through this construal of the world that an integrated appreciation of environmental issues becomes possible. Clearly, if this is the case, it is of immense importance to uphold the ontological assumptions of stories. Such claims have been devalued in the past by science that has been dominated by efforts to explain away the reality of processes. The traditional response to this by those upholding the claims of stories is to devalue the science of nature, as Vico attempted to do. But a much more powerful defence is now at hand with developments in the sciences now giving the central place to process. According to Ilya Prigogine: 'we are in a period of revolution - one in which the very position and meaning of the scientific approach are undergoing reappraisal - a period not unlike the birth of the scientific approach in ancient Greece or of its renaissance in the time of Galileo (Prigogine, 1980: xiif.)' This revolution involves acknowledging the primary reality to becoming over being (or processes over things), the irreducibility of complex systems, and that we, as conscious agents, are active participants in the world we are trying to understand. As Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers (1984) argued, there is now a new alliance between the humanities and the sciences. The narrative construal of the world will not only be supported, but will be augmented by the advance of this new science, particularly by the developments in the sciences of complexity.

This alliance provides the basis for developing a more adequate method of decision making and simultaneously for more fully elaborating the environmentalist narrative. The decision procedure favoured by reformists is cost-benefit analysis, an essentially reductionist method. An alternative, commensurate with the ontology and structure of stories, is retrospective path analysis. As developed by Cliff Hooker, retrospective path analysis consists in firstly, the selection of macro-economic goals by considering a variety of end-points forty to fifty years in the future, and then secondly, examining various paths to the desired future state. However there is no reason why this cannot be extended to considering goals for the whole of civilization several centuries into the future, and considering a variety of sub-goals for achieving these. This procedure departs from the normal approach in calculating a course of action retrospectively from some future date, specifying 'those key transitions in social structure and functioning generally which, taken in proper sequence, will lead from the present to the desired future social condition (Hooker, 1982).' This procedure focuses attention on the conditions necessary for achieving the desired future states, on the tendencies inimical to their realization, and on the crucial societal decisions at the branchpoints of different possible paths of development. Clearly this is commensurate with the structure of stories, and fits easily with the way people normally form projects and act. It is a way of systematically reformulating and elaborating the stories people are living out, and in my view, this is how it should be understood. Such story construction would not only orient people for action, but also enable them to understand, reflect on, criticise and participate in reformulating these stories. Such stories could be polyphonic, allowing multiple voices and providing for continual questioning and reformulation of story lines by those living out these stories. But retrospective path analysis is also commensurate with models of evolution based on a process view of the world, and natural and human sciences based on a process ontology can be used to supplement retrospective path analysis, further



supplementing the story of the environmentalist movement. The combination of viewing social life as a complex of stories being lived out, retrospective path analysis and the new science provides the basis for formulating more definite goals for society and for more subtle analyses of the paths to get there, providing the basis for developing a more coherent and plausible environmentalist grand narrative.

## Realizing the Future

This leads to the question, What kind of political and socio-economic order do we want in the future? And what paths need to be taken from the present if we are to arrive at this projected future? Answering the first question, it is clearly necessary to start with some very general parameters, and to consider what realistically are the conditions for conforming to these. The general parameters are a global social order that is not destroying the conditions of its existence, a world economy with a throughput that is sustainable indefinitely. Such a society is not possible with the present huge disparities in wealth and power both between and within regions, nations and localities, with an economic system which by its very nature continually undermines people's security, in which individuals, economic enterprises and countries are inevitably struggling for dominance, and in which consumption is continually promoted. Nor will it be possible to conform to these parameters in a social order dominated by massive bureaucracies with authoritarian governments planning every facet of life. A world order capable of creating a global steady state system will be, I contend, a multi-leveled federalism ranging from the world as a whole through major regions, nation states to localities (Gare, 1995; Gare, 1996). Political and economic power will be decentralized as far as possible, and markets contained in such a way that they are subordinated to cultural and political life.

But how could we even begin to move towards this new world order? The problem here is what we mean by 'we' - humanity as a whole, national governments, local regions, or members of the environmental movement. And as soon as we specify anything other than humanity as whole, then the answer will be different according to where we are situated. Apart from general recommendations about how people can orient themselves and relate themselves to others through stories, there can be no universal prescription. It is necessary for different people and different groups to work out their own destinies on the basis of their unique circumstances; but to do so with an appreciation of how what they are doing relates to all other environmental and social struggles and to the dynamics of world history. An appreciation of the nature and importance of polyphonic narratives and their relationship to action and social life should help empower people to do this.

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