

Making Good Decisions Well: A Theory of Collective Ecological Management

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Abstract Summary

The point of departure for this thesis is a critique of the practice of assigning monetary values (e.g. shadow pricing, contingent valuation, travel costs measures, etc.) to ecological phenomena (monetary valuation) as a tool for achieving policy relevance for ecological considerations (e.g. via cost-benefit analysis, Pareto optimality, etc.). This critique employs a set of analytical criteria indicating necessary but not necessarily sufficient conditions that must be met in order to speak about the economic worth of ecological phenomena. These criteria are based on a description of ecological phenomena as living systems, and explicitly include human beings, communities and social institutions, as parts of a complex, multi-dimensional system of life on earth, comprised of multiple, inter-dependent, life related sub-meso- meta- and supra- systems. It is argued that due to the specific characteristics of living systems, it is inappropriate and inaccurate to represent their economic worth through monetary valuations (the traditional analytical critique of monetary valuation). This argument is then extended, to develop an analytical critique of the pragmatic defence of monetary valuation. It is argued that because monetary valuation is never suitable for articulating ecosystem values, the *practice* explicitly undermines its own purpose, by creating the illusion of 'taking the environment into account' while failing to provide the required data. Deliberative democratic discourse is evaluated as an alternative process for articulating the economic value of ecological phenomena and is critiqued using the same living systems criteria. Finally, employing complex systems theory and cognitive psychology and drawing from works on ecological economics, environmental politics, post-normal science, democratic theory and philosophy of the mind, of science and of politics, a speculative normative theory of epistemologically complex inter-disciplinary deliberative democracy, through collaborative narrative construction is proposed as a means toward democratically legitimate, epistemologically robust, cognitively coherent procedures for articulating the economic value of priceless ecological phenomena.