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Sustainability and health: Care of the self, care of the world

John Fitzgerald

> All encounters, even those where only the image is actually present, lead to modifications and determinations for action. The euphoria resulting from an encounter with a loved thing, for example, configures the body as a lover disposed to love. All things may now be encountered according to this sympathetic disposition.[1]

Introduction

10-year-old: 'Dad, what's palm oil?'

Dad: [slurp, slurp, slurp] 'Why do you ask?'

10-year-old: 'I heard that orangutans are dying because of palm oil.'

Dad: 'Where did you hear that?'

10-year-old: 'I dunno.'

Dad: 'Interesting you should ask. I am writing something about palm oil right now. There's this company that cuts down trees to make palm oil and they put it into chocolate and sweet things. Most of that sweet stuff you eat has got palm oil in it.'

10-year-old: 'No way! Does that mean I have to stop eating chocolate?'

The dialogue above is a record of a breakfast conversation I had with my daughter a few weeks ago. As I was drafting this chapter, my mind has been moving between two registers: the academic register of analysing the emotional connections that structure our care for the world, and a second register situated in my everyday. My daughter Tilda raised with me her concerns about palm oil, and how it may impact on the welfare of orangutans. However, her care starts to waver when she has to draw the logical links between orangutan survival and her interest in chocolate.

This parallels an earlier observation of some marine biologist friends of mine. They were always jealous of the zoologists who worked with koalas and wallabies. According to the marine biologists, the zoologists had it easy: the public could easily connect with the merit of their research because they were saving warm and furry animals. However, for those marine ecologists working on intertidal crabs, no one really expected the public to connect emotionally with their work.

There are numerous examples in the climate change and sustainability literature of people not getting the message, not connecting emotionally with the evidence, and not modifying their behaviours in the face of overwhelming evidence that they need to care for their world, or face catastrophic health consequences.

From the individual and what they choose to consume, to a nation and the taxation policies it may put in place, to a region that may or may not choose to establish sustainable trade agreements, getting people to care about the world is a challenge. The great risk we face is that people fail to make a personal connection between the health impacts of climate change and the world around them.

We often think of the problem of being disconnected from climate change impacts as a problem of rationality, a lack of evidence, or maybe even the wrong evidence. In this piece I am going to turn the discussion in a different direction, to a different kind of rationality.

I will posit in this chapter that we need to engage people through a rationality borne out of people's bodies. Sometimes called a 'corporeal rationality', we need to recognise our own intimate relationship with the world: to recognise that we are of the world rather than just in it. When we recognise that we are of the world, we will care more for the world and care more for ourselves in the bargain.

We may need to start framing our research, our communications and our advocacy in terms that help people to connect to their lifeworlds through care.

A rationality of the body

A 'rationality of the body' that has emerged from a branch of medical anthropology is not a new way of thinking. In fact, it is surprising that we have not mobilised this approach to a greater extent in the health sustainability arena. It is a surprise, as there are a number of concrete examples (such as tobacco consumption and asbestos use) through which people change their own and other peoples' behaviours as a result of health impacts. A number of medical anthropologists have recognised the mechanisms through which people change the way they relate to the world around them as a result of pain or chronic illness.

Lessons from health, medicine, and chronic disease can instruct us on how best to do this — not just through the aggregation of evidence, but through an understanding of the different rationalities people use to change their behaviours in the face of disease and body disorder. I will explore some ways in which a rationale of the body might help the population care for the world and as a consequence care for the self in a more sustainable way.

Caring for the world

Rather than start with the theory, I am going to start with a feeling, and in this case, it is disgust. Many in the sustainability arena will be aware of the various campaigns that have been used

to develop awareness of unsustainable production or consumption practices. I will be using a case study to make the point that we routinely try and get people to care more for the world by placing people in greater proximity to the problem at hand.

The example is the early 2010 viral advertising and social media campaign by Greenpeace to make people more aware of the impact of palm oil production practices on orangutan populations in Indonesia.[2]

The viral ad campaign focused on the consumption of a bloodied orangutan finger by an office worker when biting into a Kit Kat. Modelled on the original Nestlé Kit Kat advertisement, the ad replaced a Kit Kat finger with an orangutan finger. Visually, the advertisement is disturbing, with blood dripping first out of the office worker's mouth, then onto his computer keyboard, and then out of the orangutan's finger onto a desk surface. The ad is designed to make the viewer feel both disturbed and disgusted. Rather than the Kit Kat making you feel good, the Kit Kat is visually tied to signs of disgust, blood, recently logged trees, and frightened orangutans.

Digital chatter increased substantially, with related Greenpeace videos tagged with messages about Nestlé palm oil policy, totalling up to 1.1 million hits by March 2010.[3]

When Nestlé tried to remove the ad from YouTube through copyright infringement arguments, social media protests erupted and mainstream media turned attention onto Nestlé itself, rather than the Greenpeace campaign.[4]

The campaign was very successful. Around 1.5 million views of the ad, hundreds of thousands of emails and facebook comments placed pressure on Nestlé to review its production policy such that Nestlé committed to excluding companies from its supply chain 'that own or manage high risk plantations or farms linked to deforestation'.[5]

The success of the campaign is evident not so much from the facts it mobilised or the logic it progressed, but through the

feelings it evoked. The response that was mobilised through the disturbing images of severed fingers connected consumers in a profound way. It was collectively profound enough to change Nestlé policy.

Caring for the world

The idea of looking for affect and emotion in a paradigm of caring for the world is not new. Elena Pulcini notes that the older contractual and structural organisation of sociality has fragmented into smaller and more transient formations.[6] Pulcini observes that: 'Spontaneous, day-to-day and empathetic forms, whose sole purpose is to be together, to share an experience or a common feeling' dominate the way we now understand sociality.

However, tracking what emotional conduits we use to connect in order to care is critical. Surprisingly, Pulcini advocates 'fear as just the first step towards reawakening the emotions on the way to responsibility and solidarity'.[7]

Returning to the opening quote from Brown and Stenner,[8] the more we create opportunities and encounters for people to love, the greater potential for them to become lovers. The more opportunities we create for people to care, the greater chance we have to create a population of carers. If we take the Pulcini approach we will run the risk of creating a more fearful population. And fear is never a good basis for action. There must be other alternatives to mobilising fear and thinking about the emotions at work when we care for the world.

Making and unmaking the world

When we think about sustainability, we often fall into a 'folk epistemology' of separating out the self from the 'objective' world. Sometimes, however, we forget there is an intimacy between self and world through what is termed our lifeworld. When it comes to health and illness, there can be sometimes an unbearable suffering in the self when there is an unbearable suffering in the world.

When this occurs, self and world collide. There is an 'unmaking' of the world, and as a consequence, an unmaking of the self.

The proximity between world and self is, however, closer than we think. How interesting is it now, when there is a major storm, that news reporters ask: 'Do you think it's because of global warming?' As experts, we often revert to probabilistic discourse. However, there are alternatives to this. If we want people to care for the world, we need to do more than point out the objective changes in our systems. We need to start telling stories that resonate with the intimate connections between self and world. When we consider sustainable health, we often make recourse to the facts, because we traffic in the economies of truth rooted in objective realities. However, we do this at a cost of an opportunity. The opportunity we lose is to connect with the truth of the experience of self and lifeworld.

Byron Good, Professor of Medical Anthropology at Harvard University, suggests that when people are in pain, the pain becomes the world. Pain becomes a dimension of all perception. It flows out from the body into the social world, invading work, and infiltrating everyday activities.

> The self is constituted in relation to a world, and it is not only through direct description of embodied experience but through the description of that lifeworld that we have access to the selves of others. Persons suffering chronic illness … often describe their feeling that the world has changed… The mutuality of the world, the sense that the world we live in is common to those around us, gives way.[9]

It is the unmaking of the world that people experience and perhaps notice the most. Most noticeable in the unmaking is the sense that the world they experience has somehow become separated from the experience of other people around them.

All this is premised on the notion that the body is in pain or suffers some 'reality shock'. These arguments are obvious for those suffering a chronic disease, but we know that for many of the

issues we face, many of the problems of sustainability are related to consumption behaviours. Diet, alcohol, drug use, and tobacco consumption can change when someone's lifeworld changes. These lifestyle consumption behaviours often change when their lifeworld becomes challenged.

So why is it that we have not been able to connect the dots for people on the relationship between sustainability and health impacts. Perhaps it is because we have approached the problem from the point of view of facts and rational argument rather than from the point of view of story and embodied rationality.

The lifeworld of the chronic pain sufferer is rarely understood in its broadest, and perhaps paradoxically, most narrow sense: the everyday. The idea that we are at a deeper level vulnerable by definition, rather than by demand, has been articulated well by political philosopher Judith Butler:

> The precarity of life imposes an obligation on us.... If we are to make broader social and political claims about rights of protection and entitlements to persistence and flourishing, we will first have to be supported by a new bodily ontology, one that implies a rethinking of precariousness, vulnerability, injurability, interdependence, exposure, bodily persistence, desire, work, and the claims of language and social belonging.[10]

Butler's commentary on our need to recognise our ontological proximity to the world around us was articulated in relation to America's security system's 'immune' response to the September 11 terror attacks. Her arguments, however, go beyond terrorism. If we are to recognise our ontological connectedness to the world, we should recognise that the difference that binds us, also creates a vulnerability, a precariousness that we should treasure. Events like September 11, as terrible as they are, should signal to us not how we should separate, quarantine and protect, but rather embrace the differences that bind us, and through valuing the precariousness of life, revalue our connections to the world in a positive sense and care more for the world.

Often for medical clinicians, a disease is observed as present *in* a body. But for the sufferer, the body is not simply a physical object or physiological state, but an essential part of the self. The body is the very ground of subjectivity; it is our conduit to the world, and the body as 'physical object' can not be neatly distinguished from 'states of consciousness'. Consciousness itself is inseparable from the conscious body. The diseased body is therefore not simply the object of cognition and knowledge, of representation in mental states and the world of medical science. It is, at the same time, a disordered agent of experience.

For many who live in a state of depression and anxiety, the very distinctions between world and self are the substance of their malaise. As Byron Good goes on to discuss in regard to those with chronic pain, the lived body is experienced as a change in the lifeworld.[11] What people experience when in chronic pain is a shift in the embodied experience of the lifeworld.

Following on from the work of Elaine Scarry[12] (Professor of English and American Literature and Language at Harvard University) and Good,[13] social structures and cultural practices mediate and shape the 'unmaking' of the lifeworld that occurs when the body is in pain. The transformation of the lifeworld when encountering chronic disease, connects us to the world around us in a profound way. The encounter opens us up to the world. It reveals to us how connected we are to the world. It reveals to us the precariousness of our existence and creates an opportunity for us to care for the world in a deeply profound way.

Judith Butler acknowledges how profoundly social our individual encounters with the world are:

> What I am trying to do is to underscore the sociality of the self, the fact that we are not bounded beings, or not exclusively bounded, but also constituted in relation to others. This is important in order to overcome certain forms of individualism and to safeguard the value of humility.[14]

The encounters we noted in the above section are not just individual experiences. These experiences are constituted through others: the making and unmaking of the world that we experience.

Bodily pleasures

I will now return to my daughter's questions about palm oil and whether she needed to stop eating chocolate. Many of the chronic disease risks and sustainability challenges in developed countries are related to our consumption behaviours. Our consumption of alcohol, tobacco and junk food are linked directly to seeking bodily pleasures. So how do we reconcile care of the self with the renunciation of pleasure?

Ascetic pleasures have been a topic of debate from the ancient philosophers to contemporary times. Foucault noted this in his examination of the care of the self from early Greek texts.[15] Plutarch and others referred to 'testing procedures' whereby one confirms one's selfhood and capacity to do without unnecessary pleasures by having 'placed oneself in front of tables laden with the most succulent dishes; then, having gazed upon these, one left them to the servants'.[16] From the earliest of times, the self-imposition of regimes that control self-pleasures have been part of the constitution of the self.

Homeric narratives, such as that of the lotus eaters also bring us into contact with discourses of how important it is to the self to deny oneself pleasure. Importantly, this denial of pleasure does more than maintain one's health, it establishes selfhood in the world, distinguishes adults from children, criminals from citizens and the sane from the insane. Regulating pleasure is central to who we are in the world.

Star Trek is a good source of recycled Homeric narratives. In what might seem to be a strange connection, in season 1, episode 25, ('This side of paradise'), Captain Kirk finds his crew intoxicated by strange plants. The plant spores make them perfectly healthy and happy; they never age and can live in tranquility on the

planet without continuing on their life quest to discover new worlds. In a recapitulation of the lotus eaters story, Kirk tries to extract his crew. He tells us:

> Maybe we weren't meant for Paradise. Maybe we were meant to fight our way through, struggle, claw our way up, scratch for every inch of the way. Maybe we can't stroll to the music of the lute, we must march to the sound of drums.

As Kirk tries to wrest the crew of the enterprise away from the emotionally satisfying, pleasurable tranquil existence on Omicron Ceti III, he speaks to the human desire to be in the world and to respond to the challenges the world creates. Continually pursuing pleasure takes us off course from what it is to be human.

The 'Slow' movement captures this interest also, albeit in a more practical dimension.[17] Slow food is a practice that focuses on the experience of, and commitment to, personal food production, (seeing yourself in that which produces pleasure). The emotional outcome of feeling good about how one connects to the world through how you prepare food, is central to understanding the meaning of the slow movement. However, with such a focus on individual bodily pleasures, this all starts sounding a little narcissistic. An alternative is to refocus attention on how the body connects to the world around it.

Our patterns of relations

Not all of us have the privilege, or the opportunity to be able to choose slow food, or 'slow' approaches to life, in order to feel more connected to the world. When, after a long day at work and the kids are screaming for dinner and it takes only eight minutes to order and pick up a pizza, spending an hour to cook a healthy meal will often take second place to the speed and convenience of junk food. Our social, organisational and structured work worlds can be powerful determinants of how we connect to the world.

Burkitt[18] suggests that our emotional health is contingent on our pattern of relations with the world. Beyond the bodily rationality of encountering the world through chronic pain, our bodily rationality is fundamentally linked to the socially constrained 'bodily structures' that frame how we sense and experience the world:

> Patterned recurring relations then develop as meaning structures through which we understand the world. These are perceptible primarily as a bodily sense of being in the world though movement, touch, vision, and all the other senses. These bodily structures are felt through patterns of action largely shaped by the customs and habits of the social group and interpreted in a symbolic way through metaphor; by deploying the symbols and signs of the group to form images that can stand for or represent the bodily senses. Emotion is a complex formed from these different elements, in which bodily feelings take on a more consciously articulated form as specific emotions.[19]

So, not only do we need to think about bodily rationalities in terms of encounters borne out of chronic pain, but of how we structure both how we seek the pleasure of consumption in our day-to-day lives and the meaning we ascribe to the pleasures we seek. Taking us back to Tilda and chocolate, she had made the logical connection between palm oil and chocolate, but she had not made the emotional connections of her bodily rationalities of chocolate pleasure and feeling good about caring for the world. Maybe we need to think with her about the chocolate breakfast cereal we serve up to her each morning, and how the taste of chocolate now has been established as part of her day-to-day routine.

Collective emotional connections

In the previous section I started expanding individual experience into more social terms. As we move to the end of the chapter, I want to extend our thinking into a more collective, political direction.

Different streams of social psychology,[20] human geography[21] and continental philosophy[22] have all located emotions as *between*, rather than *inside* people. This relational theory of emotion[23] opens up interesting possibilities for thinking about how to engage the population through emotional registers.

From a relational starting point, emotion has both social origins and social dynamics. Although emotions may be felt individually, emotions are formed through interactions between people and the world around them. It is these interactions that form the basis for establishing emotionality and for influencing the type of emotional connections people form with the world around them.

The emphasis here is on interaction. In the past, influencing has been left to informational or messaging strategies. In the contemporary world of a networked public arena and 'gov 2.0', informational approaches are necessary, but not sufficient, when it comes to influencing. Features of the networked public sphere include heightened visibility of organisations, corporations and government; a plurality of social relationships between elements of the network; and new forms of collective action (networks of networks and leaderless resistance) and mass self-communication.

The role of the media has also changed. Convergence of different media channels[24] and more fluid relationships between different media networks has contributed to a change in the role of traditional media away from gatekeeper to become 'gatewatcher'.[25] These changes have contributed to an increased permeability between the different levels of the public sphere. Gatewatchers republish personal, often emotionally-laden observations on blogs, tweets and other forms of social media.[26] For example, much of the media outrage over palm oil in the Nestlé Kit Kat campaign came through the emotion mobilised in the comments sections of You Tube, Facebook and other social media channels.[27] As Gould noted some time ago, people unite not necessarily through a collective identity but through shared emotion.[28]

Frames of recognition

According to Butler, all forms of life require to be recognised as life, if they are to be valued as life. Butler believes that 'frames of recognition' are essential in establishing the norms of perception.[29] What counts as a living thing only counts by virtue of the frames of recognition that allow us to perceive the thing as living.

Much of what I have been discussing in this chapter is about shifting our frames of recognition. We want to create shifts in what people perceive and importantly what they feel, rather than just what they think.

I had a shift in my frame of recognition recently when I was riding my bike with my seven-year-old. As we were riding along the bike path, she was riding on the right-hand side and a bike came from behind us to pass. I said to her, 'Harriet, move to the left and let the bike through.' She moved further to the right-hand side of the path and further blocked the other schoolkid from passing. 'No, the other side,' I said, and she duly moved over and the bike passed on its way. Hattie then slowed, turned to me and said angrily, 'Dad, why did you do that, you embarrassed me, I *so* don't like it when you embarrass me in front of other kids.'

I was dumbfounded for quite some time. My frame of recognition shifted not because of the obvious (a left and right problem), but because Harriet was articulate enough to understand and articulate her emotional response to social shame, but not cognitively across her left and right. Even at a young age, and perhaps as we extend though life, our socially relational emotions triumph over our cognition. My shift was to recognise the importance of emotion in structuring behaviour.

So, to bring this rambling reflection together. My starting point was that we needed to engage people through a rationality borne out of people's bodies. This bodily or corporeal rationality, will enable us to recognise our own intimate relationship with the world: to recognise that we are *of* the world rather than just in it.

When we recognise that we are *of* the world, we will care more for the world and care more for ourselves in the bargain.

We need to reframe how we deal with corporeal pleasure. As many of our consumption practices that impact on both our health and our sustainability are rooted in our consumption pleasures, we need to take seriously how we conceptualise and engage with these pleasures.

There are clues as to how we might do this. The clues are in emotion, in the positive feelings that arise from being *of* the world. We need to structure these positive feelings into daily practices and social structures, not just through episodic informational campaigns. We also need to start by reframing emotion as being a socially situated experience of the world, rather than just an individual feeling.

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