



Original research article

The Globe Sustained: Shakespeare's allegory for sustainable development

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability theory shows that the sustainability problem is a value orientation problem. In a recent study, Klaas van Egmond identified an underlying pattern of a crossed circle, representing affirmative and adversative value orientations, whose disintegration engenders unsustainable tendencies. This article explicates how Shakespeare's allegories invite to quests for 'values worthy of pursuit', grounded upon a similar immanent cyclical pattern of value orientations, moving from and to the centre of Shakespeare's works. Holding up the allegorical mirror to contemporary sustainability challenges, Shakespeare's works anticipate sustainability narratives for society at large and its individual actors. The results of this research are highly relevant in the contemporary debates on the 'erosion' of European values, as it demonstrates how to identify sustained European value patterns and how to build on these patterns in relation with contemporary questions of sustainability. © 2017 The Author. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Sustainability theory has shown that the sustainability problem is a value orientation problem (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993, repr. 2009; World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).¹ Thus axiological questions have been a major concern of scholars in the field of futures studies, bringing ethics to the forefront of the political and academic sustainability debates in the past decades. This has led to a form of futures inquiry that uses an integral approach, implying a need for recognition of a 'plurality of ways of knowing' and subsequent value orientations (Voros, 2008).² Ziauddin Sardar (2010) notes:

The discourse of futures studies is (. . .) not just multi- and trans-disciplinary, it is unashamedly un-disciplinary: that is, it consciously rejects the status and state of a discipline while being a fully fledged systematic mode of critical inquiry.³

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¹ Cf. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (eds.), *Quality of Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, repr. 2009); World Commission on Environment and Development, chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, *Our Common Future* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

² Joseph Voros, 'Integral Futures: An approach to futures inquiry' in *Futures* 40 (2), 197, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2007.11.010>.

³ Ziauddin Sardar, 'The Namesake: Futures; futures studies; futurology; futuristic; foresight – What's in a name?' in *Futures* 42 (2010), 183, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2009.11.001>.

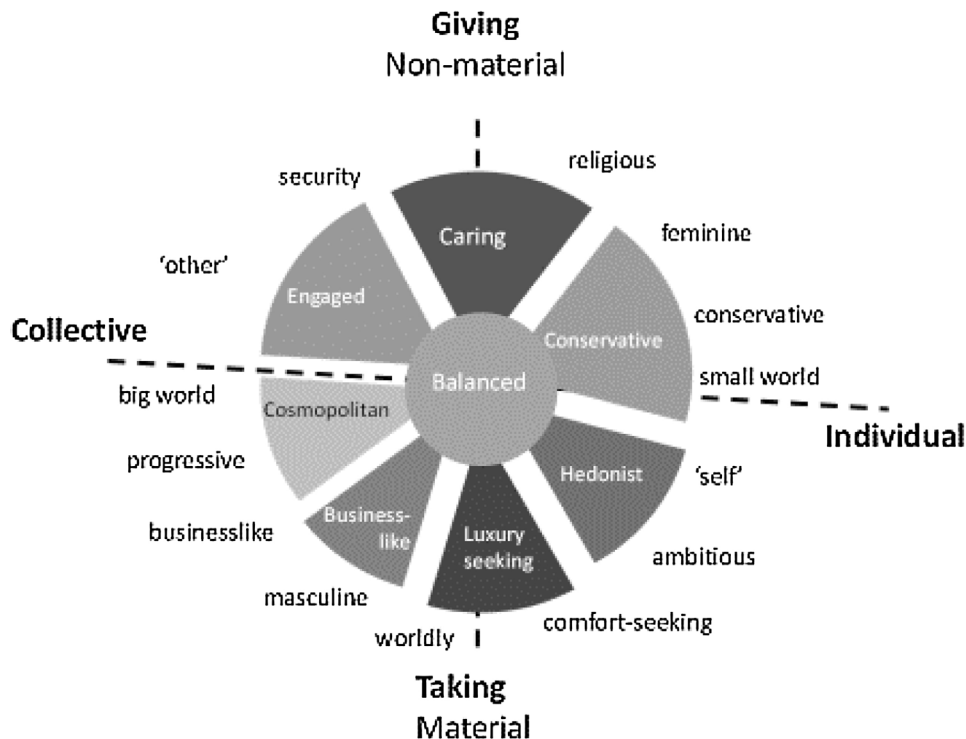


Fig. 1. Survey results: value orientations and their classification in eight categories (Van Egmond & De Vries, 2011, p. 856).

In line with this, Klaas van Egmond and Bert de Vries (2011) argue for an 'integral worldview', to be found in an analysis of the mutual relation between single underlying values, the ranking of these values and the implication of this choice for moral character.⁴

Van Egmond's theory identifies an underlying value pattern in the shape of a crossed circle, representing affirmative and adversative value orientations, whose (centrifugal) disintegration engenders unsustainable tendencies – pleading for a (centripetal) integration of value orientations. However, building on Kant's observation that 'without a teleological framework the whole project of morality becomes unintelligible', MacIntyre (1981/2007/2011, p. 11) has pointed out that there is no 'rational' solution to the problem of virtue versus vice, and in this respect he considers the Enlightenment to be a failure (technology without a moral concept led to an ecological crisis).⁵ MacIntyre argues for a revival of the Aristotelian tradition with the central concept of man as having an essential nature, purpose and function. As Aristotle (2011, p. 61) argued in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, a unity of virtues is to be sought in a complex diversity of values (virtue being the intermediate between two vices):

Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect; and, again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate.⁶

This (dynamic) mean is to enable people to realize their specific human aim (*telos*).⁷ Van Egmond's theory underpins MacIntyre's argument and attunes to the Integral Futures approach, which also recognizes this complexity:

Thus, to take an integral perspective, one needs to be able to move out of specific, particularising paradigmatic assumptions and paradigm-based perspectives into what we might call a 'meta-paradigmatic meta-perspective'—a perspective which recognises and values the contributions of all paradigm-based perspectives but which is nonetheless free of and outside of their particularising hold.⁸

(Voros, 2008, p. 198)

⁴ Klaas van Egmond & Bert de Vries, 'Sustainability: The search for the integral worldview', in *Futures* 43:8 (2011), 853–867; doi:10.1016/j.futures.2011.05.027.

⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue, A Study in Moral Theory* (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 1981, third edition 2007, impression 2011), 66.

⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, William David Ross (trans. & ed.) (Charleston: CreateSpace, 2011), 61 and 65.

⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, William David Ross (trans. & ed.) (Charleston: CreateSpace, 2011), 17.

⁸ Voros, *op. cit.* in *Futures* 40 (2), 198, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2007.11.010>.

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