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"There is a Great Joy that Comes from the Wild Creatures:" Greening Happiness across Cultures and Disciplines

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"There is a Great Joy that Comes from the Wild Creatures:" Greening Happiness across Cultures and Disciplines

by Peter Mortensen

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Abstract

In recent years, the relationship between human happiness and the natural environment has become the object of considerable research, debate and contention. In this essay I first discuss two powerful concepts with distinctly different national, cultural and disciplinary origins, namely E. O. Wilson's concept of biophilia and the Bhutanese concept of Gross National Happiness, which have both stirred considerable debate and contributed to shifting contemporary thinking about happiness in a more ecocentered direction. Subsequently I present a "eudaimonic" (happiness-oriented) reading of a significantly older literary text—the French writer Jean Giono's novel Joy of Man's Desiring *(1935)—that contests the dominant happiness ideologies of the twentieth century but resonates strongly with still-emerging twenty-first-century paradigms of understanding. The essay's discussions are chosen, organized and prioritized to highlight the multidisciplinary and transnational nature of the new green discourse on happiness, and to exemplify how literary and cultural studies may contribute to this. Focusing on happiness, I suggest, offers an alternative and potentially productive way to engage with questions of environmental crisis and human-natural relationships more generally.*

Keywords: biophilia, ecocriticism, ecology, environmentalism, happiness

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"There is a Great Joy that Comes from the Wild Creatures:" Greening Happiness across Cultures and Disciplines

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Happiness

Happiness is a word with many conflicting definitions, a rich and complex history, a host of problematic implications, and a massive presence in contemporary academic and popular culture (McMahon 2006; Bok 2010). An important shift took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the rise of modern economics, which tended (and tends) to identify happiness with utility—a term that became synonymous with the benefits and satisfaction that a consumer derived from economic goods as revealed by that individual's circumstances and preferences (McLaren 2006). In addition to assuming that we naturally compete for scarce and limited resources, economics textbooks generally assume that a country gets happier as it gets richer, and that humans experience more well-being when they acquire more goods. Such associations are reinforced by the socializing influence of celebrity culture, advertisement, and powerful and pervasive mass media images, which routinely equate happiness with hyperconsumption.

One problem with this long dominant story of happiness is that we know that more does not equal happier above a certain moderate level of consumption.[1] Another problem is that the material pursuit of happiness through ever-increasing economic growth has led to unsustainable use of natural resources (Hamilton 2003, 179–204). "There is a paradox at the heart of our lives," writes economist Richard Layard: "As Western societies have got richer, their people have become no happier" (2005, 17). But if increased consumption beyond a certain point does not make for greater happiness, what does? In recent years, the relationship between human happiness and the natural environment has become the object of considerable research, debate, and contention in and across different disciplines, discourses, and cultural traditions. Prompted by increasing

discontent with dominant happiness models and rising anxiety about industrialized societies' unsustainable growth trajectories, new questions have been asked about the nature of human flourishing, the forces that shape humans' well-being, and especially to what extent the state of the natural environment impacts human happiness. The manifold meanings of happiness have begun to change, perhaps to green.

How is the challenge to dominant happiness imaginaries occurring, and where is it coming from? What role, if any, can ecocriticism and the environmental humanities play in this emergent conversation? What are the implications of bringing happiness discourse and environmentalism into closer proximity, and how can environmentalists benefit from focusing on happiness more than, say, crisis, catastrophe, or apocalypse? In this essay, I first discuss two powerful concepts with distinctly different national, cultural, and disciplinary origins, namely Edward O. Wilson's concept of biophilia and the Bhutanese concept of Gross National Happiness, which have both stirred considerable debate and contributed to shifting contemporary thinking about happiness in a more eco-centered direction. Subsequently, I turn to literature, presenting a "eudaimonic" (happiness-oriented) reading of a significantly older literary text—the French writer Jean Giono's novel *Joy of Man's Desiring* (1935)—that also makes a case for necessary reevaluations of accustomed and culturally sanctioned notions of happiness.[2] My discussions are chosen, organized, and prioritized to highlight the multidisciplinary and transnational nature of the new green discourse on happiness, and to exemplify how literary and cultural studies may contribute to rethinking of environmental consciousness. By way of conclusion, I briefly return to the overarching concept of happiness to consider its strategic value and potential usefulness for those of us who are interested in sustainability more generally.

Biophilia

The concept of biophilia, first coined by the American biologist E. O. Wilson in his landmark book *Biophilia* (1984), is a familiar buzzword, so I will deal with it in relative brevity. Wilson posits that humans have an innate tendency to focus on, and affiliate with, other living beings. Termed "the biophilia hypothesis" by Kellert and Wilson (1993), this attraction to life and lifelike processes can be understood in an evolutionary perspective. According to this hypothesis, being connected to nature would have been adaptive for our ancestors. More specifically, successfully interpreting signs in nature would have helped humans in hunter-gatherer societies solve their immediate tasks, such as finding suitable food, water, and shelter, keeping track of time, and avoiding and reacting to attacks by predators. Thus, individuals who were more attuned to the natural world would have had a significant evolutionary advantage over those who were less

connected. Because we humans have spent all but a tiny fraction of our evolutionary history in the natural environment and have only recently migrated to urban living, this attraction, identification, and need to connect to nature is thought by Wilson and his followers to remain a potent factor in our modern psychological make-up (Kellert and Wilson 1993).

Biophilia theorists leave somewhat vague what it means to "connect" or "affiliate" with nature, and they fail to explain precisely how the "nature" that they invoke should be distinguished from the world of human beings, who are themselves "natural" creatures. Even so, the biophilia hypothesis makes environmental connectedness, and the lack thereof, central to discussions of human (ill-)health and (un)happiness. For the first time in human history, more of the world's population now lives in urban instead of rural areas; children are spending less time playing in natural environments compared to previous generations and, in general, individuals in developed nations are spending an increasing part of their time indoors (Clements 2004; MacKerron and Mourato 2013). Writers building on Wilson argue that cities, buildings, and indoor environments dominated by manmade objects leave basic human needs frustrated and are not optimally suited to minds and bodies that evolved in different (more natural) ancestral environments. Some hold that this physical disconnection from the environments in which we evolved is now having a detrimental impact on our emotional well-being, which is sometimes labelled "nature deficit disorder" (Louv 2005).

Conversely, Wilson's biophilia hypothesis enables an eco-centered understanding of positive functioning. That is, biophilia adds plausibility to a way of thinking that highlights environmental factors and makes the natural environment strongly related to people's physical and psychological well-being. According to Wilson and his followers, we flourish in the presence of nature and wither in its absence, and the understanding that "nature—even in our modern urban society—remains an indispensable, irreplaceable basis for human fulfillment" (Kellert 2005, 2) has been gaining ground ever since the hypothesis was first launched. In the world of scientific research, the correlation between nature and well-being has been tested and largely corroborated in numerous academic studies, which find not only that experiencing and interacting with healthy and diverse natural systems helps counteract dysfunctional states like stress, depression, or anxiety, but also that nature's beneficial effects extend to positively increasing true mental health and well-being (Nisbet, Zelenski, and Murphy 2011; Howell and Passmore 2013). Rich in theoretical implications and practical applications, biophilia has also inspired many pioneering experiments of a more hands-on nature, vitalizing diverse fields such as horticultural theory, wilderness therapy, animal (or pet) therapy as well as important developments in biophilic architecture, design, and urban

planning (Burns 1998; Buzzell and Chalquist 2009; Kellert, Heerwegan, and Mador 2008).

Gross National Happiness

The concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) stems from Bhutan, a country nestled in the Himalayan Mountains roughly the size of Switzerland and with a population of approximately 700,000. The concept was first floated only half-seriously in 1972, when the then fourth king of Bhutan, responding to perceptions of his country as poor and undeveloped, quipped that "Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product" (quoted in Burns 2011, 73). The term caught on, however, and in subsequent years GNH was intellectually elaborated and substantiated. In the late 1990s, the king of Bhutan and his advisers adopted GNH as the orienting principle of development and governance and began to promote the concept at international meetings.

GNH is a policy concept, an index of national welfare and a socioeconomic development framework which provides a unifying vision for Bhutan's five-year planning process, and which is fleshed out in all the strategy documents that guide the economic and development plans of the country. While the origins of biophilia lie in Western evolutionary psychology, GNH arises out of the Mahayana Buddhism native to Bhutan. More specifically, GNH is said to rest on four "pillars:" socioeconomic development; preservation and promotion of cultural heritage; good governance; and preservation and sustainable use of the environment (Thinley 2005). As this suggests, GNH poses a challenge and possible alternative to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which measures human well-being in terms of economic activity and growth. GNH shifts consciousness away from the pursuit of purely quantitative goals towards a consideration of a wider range of economic, social, psychological and environmental factors. In response to the perceived economic reductionism of GDP, the architects behind GNH propose to measure the well-being of a country in a more holistic way, believing that "the beneficial development of human society takes place when material and non-material development occurs side by side to complement and reinforce each other" (Ura, Alkire, and Zangmo 2012, 111).

Bhutan has made GNH the yardstick of its own development process, conducting two nationwide surveys on GNH in 2008 and 2010. The national happiness study contains more than 700 questions about personal happiness and covers topics of four pillars, nine domains thirty-eight sub-indexes, seventy-two indicators and 151 variables that define GNH. The data collected from the national happiness surveys in the villages and towns of Bhutan is used by the government to identify the most effective policy

initiatives for each local community. In addition to implementing GNH domestically, Bhutan has successfully campaigned to promote the concept on the international stage. Thus, GNH has been embraced by the UN, which adopted the resolution "Happiness: Towards a Holistic Approach to Development" in 2011. A biannual UN *World Happiness Report* ranks the world's happiest and unhappiest nations (Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs 2013), and in a resolution of July 12, 2012, the UN proclaimed March 20 the "Annual International Day of Happiness." Happiness has risen to prominence on the political agenda, and prominent western legislators have publicly flirted with the concept.

Too much happiness discourse has been centered on Western countries and cultures, especially North America and Europe. While "green orientalism" has at times pervaded Western environmentalism (Lohman 1993), Bhutan remains less than a perfect Shangri-La for other states to emulate.[3] Nevertheless, GNH deserves notice not least because it entails important challenges to dominant individualistic and anthropocentric ideas of happiness. In the words of Kharma Ura, director of the Centre for Bhutan Studies, the Bhutanese "don't believe in this Robinson Crusoe happiness. All happiness is relational" (Weiner 2007, 104). Most importantly, GNH goes beyond the focus on subjective well-being to highlight reciprocal relationships, ethical concern for others, and harmony with nature. In this respect, the underlying Bhutanese notion of "happiness" (*Ghakey*) is inspired by the Buddhist values of interdependence, harmony and compassion and based on the Buddhist representation of the human being, which maintains that it is integrated into a complex of relationships that include all forms of existence.[4] In accordance with their basic Buddhist orientation, that is, the Bhutanese argue that human well-being depends on the wholeness and coherence of living systems. Human happiness is tied to the flourishing of other sentient beings, and out of this understanding emerges an ethical imperative for the protection of nature. Unlike many developing countries, where the environment has remained a low priority for public investment and policy formation, Bhutan has placed environmental conservation at the heart of its development strategy. 38% of Bhutan's land area is protected, and the national constitution requires that forests permanently occupy at least 60% of the national territory. A global biodiversity hotspot, the country has one of the highest species densities in the world. Almost all electricity is generated by hydropower, resulting in one of the lowest rates of fossil fuel use (Allison 2011; Zurick 2006).

Eudaimonia

In their introduction to *The Eudaimonic Turn: Well-Being in Literary Studies*, James O. Pawelski and D. J. Moores (2012) contend that literary critics excel at "suspicious critique," vigilantly "on the lookout for diseased psychodynamics and/or participation in

undesirable ideologies, such as racism sexism, neuroses, false consciousness, heterosexism, patriarchy, imperialism, and the like," while they have been less adept at engaging with "texts in which positive configurations of eudaimonia, such as love, joy or serenity, are present" (27). So far, to be sure, happiness has only rarely been explicitly thematized in ecocritical scholarship, which has tended, especially in recent years, to privilege tropes like pollution, apocalypse, ecocide, ecophobia and various other manifestations of "dark ecology" (Morton 2007, 181–97). The connection between human happiness and the natural environment is a time-honored literary motif, however, and the study of culture and literature should rank with economics, political science, philosophy, psychology, and other disciplines as one of the discourses that can help us obtain a more nuanced and balanced understanding of contested terms like "happiness," "well-being," "flourishing," and "joy." Ecocritics and environmental humanists have access to valuable cultural resources—concepts, narratives, genres, traditions, and texts—that allow us to (re)discover and foreground other and more productive ways of thinking about happiness.

That environmental variables matter to human (un)happiness will come as no surprise to readers of Jean Giono (1895–1970), a French writer who wrote about happiness throughout his long career in novels, short stories, memoirs, and essays. Ecocritical interest in Giono has so far primarily centered on his short story "The Man Who Planted Trees" ("*L'homme qui plantait des arbres*" [1953]) which was commissioned by the US fashion magazine *Vogue* and later turned into an Oscar-winning animated short film (Comfort 2011; Girard 1972; Trout and Visser 2006, 39–50). The rarely used full original English title of that story—"The Man Who Planted Trees and *Grew Happiness*" (my emphasis)—indicates the focus of my present argument about the longer and more complex novel *Joy of Man's Desiring* (*Que ma joie demeure* [1935]), whose title Giono adapted from a cantata by Johann Sebastian Bach ("Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" [1723]).

Joy of Man's Desiring is a eudaimonic novel published in 1935, at the height of the Great Depression. Set in an agrarian world of farmers, shepherds, and small artisans, *Joy of Man's Desiring* opens when the itinerant acrobat Bobi arrives in the Grémone Plateau, an agricultural region in the highlands of Provence. Here he chances upon the old farmer Jourdan and learns that the area is declining because its inhabitants—some twenty farming folk in scattered inhabitations—suffer from "unhappiness" (1980, 53). The novel's main plot follows the progress of Bobi's attempt to eliminate "this leprosy of unhappiness" (Giono 1980, 60) with a therapeutic "experiment" (1980, 241) that Giono elsewhere characterized as "a project for the establishment of joy" (1989, 147).

Why are the Grémonois so unhappy? To offset the novel's main concerns, Giono introduces a nameless farmer, who functions as a foil to Bobi insofar as he espouses the

progressivist, rationalist, and materialist beliefs of the orthodox Marxist left: "Become is forward. Never back. . . . I am for the power of men" (1980, 244). To this, however, Bobi retorts that "[t]he essential thing is to become again the light vagabonds of the earth. I am against the power of men" (245). Bobi is naturalist, poet, philosopher, teacher, trickster, magician, pagan priest and green man all combined into one puzzling figure. He seeks the explanation for human unhappiness less in class conflicts and socioeconomic disparities (though these remain important concerns) than in alienation and disconnection. His eclectic and idiosyncratic "cure" of "unhappiness" (62), consequently, is a *bricolage* drawing inspiration from writers like Rousseau, Marx, Whitman, Thoreau, and Nietzsche and from discourses including romantic nature appreciation, neo-Hellenic paganism, Provencal folklore, philosophical vitalism, political anarchism, voluntary simplicity, and various early twentieth-century alternative healing methods and life reform discourses. Bobi's bizarre agency in the novel amounts to a kind of ecotherapy *avant la lettre*, as he exerts "healing hands" (8) to mend the breach between human culture and non-human nature.

Bobi rekindles happiness with connective experiences, encounters, and practices including camping trips, wilderness expeditions, collective work exercises, and other "acrobatic stunts" (1980, 343). Plants become particularly important ingredients in Bobi's "medicine," as he mediates curative immersions in the vegetable world. Bobi posits a deep and mystical human-arboreal kinship, claiming that "man is . . . in fact like foliage: not pressed together in a mass, but composed of separate images like the leaves on the branches of tress and through which the wind must pass in order to sing" (66). Approximately halfway through the novel, for example, he leads a nocturnal "caravan" (208) of villagers, "crawling along as if . . . bearing the Holy Sacrament" (227), on what becomes a sort of vision quest to the nearby forest of Nans:

> All seven of the men went into the forest. They walked toward the moon. They went Indian file. According to the denseness of the foliage, there fell upon them the white light of the sky or shadow. Ten metres from the path that they were following, on either side, the forest manifested its indifference. The trees glistened. Understanding was about to be born between these men and life. (1980, 219)

Henry D. Thoreau held that forests should be preserved less for economic reasons than as sources of "inspiration and our own true recreation" (2009, 145).[5] According to Giono, "anyone who . . . has smelled the intoxicating fragrance of chestnut blossoms will understand how much it means to have it flower often" (1980, 67). Or as one character

puts it, having lost his bearings in the "pitch-dark" (1980, 215) of the forest, "'if we aren't enjoying ourselves here, it is our own fault'" (219).

Bobi's "experiment" sees him lead a small troop of unhappy humans on a transformative journey towards re-embodied connectedness and a "joy . . . based on simplicity, on purity, on the common things of the world" (1980, 244). In writing about animals, Giono makes fictional gestures in the direction of what Margot Norris has called "the biocentric tradition." Experimental forms of "biocentric" art, according to Norris, originated in the anti-anthropocentric thought of Charles Darwin, flourished briefly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century but collapsed during the 1930s under the weight of its paradoxes. Giono interrogates and inverts the human-animal hierarchy with a variety of "animal gestures" (Norris 1985, 3). For example, he interrupts his human-oriented narrative with long sections told from animal perspectives, and he introduces animal figures strong and charismatic enough to guide and influence human characters.

Convinced that "there is a great joy that comes from the wild creatures" (Giono 1980, 72), Bobi at times feels "almost beast" (121), and he enlists animals as co-therapeutic agents of "healing" (8) and "transformation" (67). Arriving in the midst of winter, Bobi first persuades the frugal farmer Jourdan to sacrifice a sack of wheat that will attract flocks of wild birds and help lift his and his wife's languishing spirits. Most startlingly, Bobi some months later brings home from a journey a stag (male deer) known to him from his circus days, who answers to the name Antoine:

> A huge shape that was lying in the bilberry bushes and which seemed a part of the ground rose slowly like a piece loosened from the soft spring earth. It was an animal, bigger than a donkey. It walked behind Bobi. . . . It was a creature, half beast, half tree. They could see gleam of large eyes, gentle but male.
>
> "What is it?" asked Jourdan.
>
> "A stag," said Bobi.
>
> He had broad antlers.
>
> "Only," said Bobi, "I was obliged to look for one that was almost human in order to make a proper mixture, you understand. (95–96)

Reversing the privileging of humanity over animal, Bobi foxes the inhabitants of the plateau into cross-species encounters that perplex their sense of identity and prompt the recollection of forgotten (or repressed) kinds of "animal knowledge" (121). Deer that cast and regrow antlers conventionally symbolize renewal, and many hunting-based cultures have used them in shamanistic rituals (Fletcher 2013, 117–25). Like Bobi himself, Antoine

functions as ambassador, translator, go-between, or psychopomp, reintroducing the human and non-human world to each other. A totem animal both wild and tame, he can guide people who are themselves "a sort of mixture," having "lost the joy of the seasons and innocent gentleness" (Giono 1980, 97), towards a recollection of their stifled animality.

As a consequence of Bobi's "experiment," "happiness" ("bonheur")—or what Giono more commonly labels "joy" ("joie")—returns to the plateau. At Bobi's behest, the "dreary" (1980, 15) landscape takes on life, color, and variety, as monoculturally exploited farmlands begin to change into complex and diverse plant and animal communities. Trees long eliminated in favor of cash crops make their reappearance, and carefully manicured plots with wheat, oats, and lucerne give way to "big hectares of grass left standing with seeds, stems, leaves" (315). Entire fields are sown with fragrant and beautiful but "useless" flowers: daisies, periwinkles, and especially narcissi, which become "the favourite flower of the plateau" (335).

With Bobi's arrival on the plateau, human characters come to their senses, awakening to the "things which, by their taste or by their colour, when one has them on one's tongue or in one's eye, give joy" (1980, 38). No doubt the high point of the novel occurs with the sumptuous barbecue with which the Grémonois celebrate the coming of spring. In this elaborate piece of literary gastronomy, which stretches over three chapters and 80 pages, the locals distill the best of rural Provencal cuisine—chicken fricassee, bread, sausage, rabbit, spinach, vegetables, red wine, and brandy—into a spectacular open-air feast. The main course of the meal is a roasted lamb kid spiced with "fresh garden and mountain herbs" (166) and spit-roasted over an open fire:

> The roasts were heavy and juicy, and at the first stab of the knife they broke open. The gravy was like bronze with golden reflections, and each time that it was stirred with the spoon, the larding or the greenish sediment of the stuffing or bits of still pink young bacon would come to the surface. The meat of the kid broke open and appeared milky inside, smoking in its clear juices. The skin crackled and at first it was dry to the teeth, but as the morsel was bitten into, all the tender flesh melted out trickled a salt and creamy animal oil that could not be swallowed at a gulp, it gave so much pleasure, and it oozed a little from the corners of one's lips. One had to wipe one's mouth. (165)

Jointly prepared and consumed *au naturel*, the epicurean potluck "celebration" (133) in *Joy of Man's Desiring* temporarily effaces discord, renews friendships, and gives new life to the faltering community spirit. Amidst sadness and isolation, it marks a moment charged

with utopian promise, when "everything seemed to harmonize" (169), and when it suddenly seems possible that "[w]e are going to have happiness" (229).

Conclusions

Since the Enlightenment, economists, politicians, advertisers, and pop stars alike have sold us on consumerist notions of happiness, but unprecedented material growth in large parts of the world has left us still wondering about the roots and meanings of happiness.[6] Currently, our ideas of what constitutes and causes human well-being seem to be undergoing a sea change, however, and the environmental humanities can contribute this important paradigm shift. The rich repertoire of eudaimonic literature and culture more generally can help us ponder different and hopefully more constructive answers to the perpetual riddles of human happiness. Echoing biophilia and Gross National Happiness, but voicing a wisdom of its own, Giono's novel lends credence to the claim that human happiness should be linked closely—more closely than has so far generally been the case—with non-human nature. Thus, different discourses with unlike national, cultural, and institutional groundings converge to suggest that the well-being of humans depends not only on the goods that they consume, the balance of their intrapsychic systems, or their immediate family environments, but also on their interactions with the larger ecology of which they are just one interdependent element.

Such a way of thinking has potentially far-reaching implications for environmentalism and the way in which environmentalists frame the case for sustainability. According to the Belgian biologist Eric Lambin,

> [t]he rhetoric of fear, which warns of a collapse of our civilization unless we abandon our current way of life, engenders denial among skeptics, cynicism among nihilists, despair among pessimists, and rejection by optimists. . . . I am convinced that an argument that promotes the advantages of a protected natural environment for our happiness, health, and security is likely to convince the greatest number of people, and will encourage attitudes of constructive involvement. It is essential to motivate people to adopt appropriate individual behaviors and to contribute to collective decisions that respond to the challenges of the twenty-first century. To bring about this change in attitude, we must appeal to a personal source of positive motivation. And what is more important to us than our happiness? Who doesn't wish to improve his or her well-being, health, and feeling of security, and the general satisfaction that he or she derives out of life? (2012, 7)

Lambin's argument here is reminiscent of claims made by other eco-theorists including the British philosopher Kate Soper (2008), who maintains that guilt and anxiety alone are not enough to persuade modern people to modify their consumption habits, and who calls for a positive environmentalist vision of human well-being and "alternative hedonism." Considering the severity of such issues as anthropogenic climate change, ocean acidification, and species extinction through biodiversity loss, such a focus on positive affect might seem a Pollyannaish diversion from the work that needs to be done.[7] In my estimation, however, traditional forms of environmentalism have largely failed to connect with people's desire for happiness. In fact, the often alleged crisis, failure, demise, or even "death" (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 2005) of environmentalism may be partly because environmentalist ideas have been perceived to be primarily about placing restrictions on people's behavior and thus about reducing happiness and quality of life. Wittingly or unwittingly, fairly or unfairly, environmentalists often figure as killjoys, willing to countenance any limitation of human freedom or happiness in pursuit of our aims, and offering the prospect of what Paul Hawken calls a "lifelong celery diet" (Webster 2004, 51) as the best possible outcome.

The focus on happiness as an incentive to environmental action moves us beyond dominant environmentalist appeal forms including the jeremiad, melodrama, tragedy, and tropes of catastrophe or apocalypse. The notoriously fuzzy, fluffy, and flaky concept of happiness, and the debates that swirl around it, afford conceptual tools and empirical evidence for anyone who believes that the environment matters to human beings. Although this is currently not widely realized by the green movement around the world, accentuating the intertwinement of nature and happiness provides a possible alternative to environmentalist doom-and-gloom messages, which so far have not succeeded in shifting society's unsustainable trajectory. Were we to put happiness high on the agenda, tapping into eudaimonic desires and imaginaries, we could perhaps make environmental protection and sustainable development less about limitation, deprivation, and abstention and more about promoting quality of life in holistic ways.

Notes

[1] This was first discussed by the economist Richard Easterlin in a 1974 article and is therefore known as the "Easterlin paradox."

[2] The Greek word "eudaimonia" is usually translated as "happiness" but also sometimes as "human flourishing." In their introduction to *The Eudaimonic Turn: Well-Being in Literary Studies* (2013), James O. Pawelski and D. J Moores set out to define "eudaimonic" literary criticism.

[3] Among other things, the government of Bhutan has been severely criticized for its treatment of its ethnically Nepalese minority population.

[4] For the relationship between Buddhism and environmental consciousness, which has been debated by environmental humanists since the 1960s, see Kaza and Kraft 2000.

[5] For Giono's familiarity with Thoreau, see Gonnaud and Flak 1971, 36–37.

[6] While researching and writing this essay, I was haunted by Pharrell Williams's then ubiquitous song "Happy," which is not only the most popular tune of 2014 and the most downloaded track of all time, but which has been widely used in TV commercials for Fiat cars and Dr. Dre Beats headphones.

[7] Advocating "dark ecology," for example, Timothy Morton explicitly derides the discourse of what he calls "happy-happy-joy-joy eco-sincerity" (2010, 105).

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