Is this OK?

An Exploration of Extremes

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This paper presents an abridged version of a fictional story titled 'Is this OK?', a story about a day in the life of an individual in a non-specific future. It was written as a teaching aid to help students critically engage with theory, as experience has taught the authors that students' engagement with conventional academic articles is problematic. There are three principal theories that inform the story, notwithstanding that the piece also alludes to other contemporary issues and a reader is likely to identify the influence of a variety of theoretical constructs. The three are natural capital, companies selling solutions rather products or services and a construct of humans as being a temporal negotiation between their genetic material and the environment they find themselves in. The first two concepts are, as the article discusses, encapsulated within but not limited to the concept of natural capitalism. The third draws on a construct of a human as being a phenotype. It should be noted that while the story can be read as polemic, this is not the intent, rather the intent is to invoke questioning and reflection to aid critical development.

- Natural capital
- Human being
- Fiction
- Metaphor

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THIS ARTICLE PRESENTS AN ABRIDGED version of 'Is this OK?', a story about an individual's day in a non-specific future. The story was written as a teaching aid to help higher education students explore the impact of theory when refracted through an extreme. The paper begins by discussing the context surrounding the writing of the story, explaining the anecdotal observations that prompted the piece, the key theories that informed the authors when writing and the process of completing the original publication. Following the context an abridged version of the story is presented, and the key themes brought forward in the abridged version are discussed. The paper finishes with an endnote on metaphors and the terminology of 'natural capital' and by extension 'natural capitalism'.

Context

The writing of 'Is this OK?' was inspired by two key factors. The first was higher education students' lack of engagement with academic material. The second, the authors' concerns regarding students' lack of critical engagement and thus their non-consideration of the implications of theories, particularly if those theories are applied to an extreme; with the extreme being a refractive device to enable learning. It has been argued that a key part of higher education is that it is a transformative learning experience (Mezirow, 1994) where key to that experience is students' developing the ability to critique. However an issue with developing these skills is ensuring students read academic articles in the first place. Anecdotally at least, many university lecturers would join a chorus of how students do not read academic articles. Thus developing students' critical skills is difficult if in the first instance they do not actually read the articles. This lack of reading of academic articles is perhaps to be expected, especially as a standard academic article is not necessarily written in plain English and to quote one student known to the authors, a standard article is presented to the reader as an impenetrable 'wall of text'. Given this situation, the authors decided to develop a fictional story, which would be informed by theories, with the hope that this would be more readily acceptable to students. The basic premise being that if the theory or theories are encapsulated within a fictional story they are more accessible to the student reader; this accessibility in turn enables the student reader to develop critical skills that might otherwise be avoided because of the impenetrability of a standard academic article.

The three key theories that informed the writing of the piece were: 1) the concept of natural capital; 2) companies selling solutions rather products or services; and 3) a construct of humans as being a temporal negotiation between their genetic material and the environment they find themselves in. The first two are encapsulated within but not limited to the concept of natural capitalism (Hawken *et al.*, 1999). The third concerns humans being phenotypes that are in a state of constant negotiation between their genotypes and the environment (Ingold, 2011).

Explaining further how each of these theories informed the piece, natural capitalism argues that it is an approach that represents ‘what capitalism might become if its largest category of capital—the natural capital of ecosystem services—were properly valued’ (Hawken *et al.*, 1999:146). The theory has within it four key tenets: to dramatically increase the productivity of natural resources; shift to biologically inspired production models; move to a solutions based model; and reinvest in natural capital. The first two of these tenets are not overtly explored within the story, while the last two are. With regard to moving to a solutions-based model, this is the notion that companies should consider the underlying need that is being solved by their product or service. For example, rather than sell cars, companies should explore selling transport services and perhaps rather than sell light bulbs a company might want to explore selling illumination services. This concept of considering the underlying need or problem that is being solved is similar to that propagated by Levitt (1960) in his seminal article ‘Marketing Myopia’. Levitt (1960) argued, for example, that the rail companies should see themselves in the transport business and oil companies in the energy business. The concept of a solutions-based model weaves its way into ‘Is this OK?’ through descriptions of, for example, the shaving company being in the business of keeping the protagonist free from facial hair as opposed to it being in the business of selling razors. As such the shaving company offers advice on how to maximise the time of being clean shaven and charges for each shave rather than selling a razor.

Inherent to the concept of *Natural Capitalism* (Hawken *et al.*, 1999) is the notion that natural capital is properly valued. Natural capital is not specifically defined by Hawken *et al.* (1999) beyond alluding to it being equivalent to ecosystem services. Elsewhere Porritt (2006) defines natural capital as ‘that part of the natural world which we humans make some use of or derive some benefit from’ (Porritt, 2006: 123). Parts of the natural world and/or an ecosystem service that we derive some benefit from are, for example, the oxygen we breathe or the aesthetic beauty and sense of well-being an individual derives from being in a place of wildlife and trees (Porritt, 2006). In an extreme the value of natural capital may be monetary. This extreme is explored within the story of ‘Is this OK?’ by the protagonist paying for the oxygen he breathes. Similarly he pays to be able to sit next to a tree on his coffee break as it offers an aesthetic value and a sense of well-being.

Building upon the concept of paying for ecosystem services and natural capital being valued, a further influence on the writing of ‘Is this OK?’ was the 1997 paper by Costanza *et al.* This paper valued the world’s ecosystem services (excluding the oceans) at \$33 trillion compared to a global gross domestic product, at that time, of \$18 trillion. When viewed purely through dollar terms, the calculations by Costanza *et al.* (1997) indicate that the monetisation of ecosystem services is a potential growth opportunity for industries, a potential revenue stream of \$33 trillion. The story of ‘Is this OK?’ takes the notion of valuing ecosystem services and conveys, through fiction, some of the potential implications of putting a monetary value to the exchanges people have with natural capital, for example, breathing and sitting next to a tree.

The third principal theory that informed the story of 'Is this OK?' was a model of humans as being phenotypes that are in a state of constant negotiation between their genotypes and the environment (Ingold, 2011). This concept argues that what makes a human human is not purely genetics, but rather a human is a negotiation of intrinsic and extrinsic attributes—a nexus of the relationship between genetics and environment. This construct indicates that humans need to be considered as an expression of a particular field of relationships between genetics and environment where they are not separable from either. This in turn drives at the core of what it means to be a human, as being human is no longer purely defined by genetic code, rather a human is a temporal mix of genetic code and relationships, none of which are separable (Ingold, 2001, 2011). The implication of this is that our understanding of what it might mean to be a human is temporal. This temporality pervades the story whereby the protagonist continually accepts the situations he finds himself in, for example the constant real time monitoring of his work performance relative to other workers across the globe. The temporal understanding is also where the story of 'Is this OK?' ends. At the end the protagonist is very accepting of the current naming convention applied to humanity relative to that of the past. He finds that the definition of a human being has changed, yet he is at ease with this realisation as the definition fits with and makes sense to him within his future world.

The temporal understanding of humanity, offering services not products and the valuing of ecosystem services are the key theories that informed the writing of the story and were, as best could be, applied to an extreme. In presenting them through fiction it is hoped that readers can reflect on present day theories and in so doing develop critical faculty to consider the potential impacts of such theories. As although theories may fit with a moment in time, 'Is this OK?' attempts to highlight how the application of current day theories could have potentially challenging (relative to current day) future implications.

Finally prior to presenting the abridged version of 'Is this OK?', it is worthwhile discussing some of the practical aspects of writing and publishing the story. The story was written via an email exchange, where one author would write a paragraph and then the other would add to it and continue the story and then send it back. After reaching a point of conclusion, the story was edited down from c. 7,000 words to c. 4,000 words. The complete, non-abridged version of the story was embellished by the addition of imagery inspired by the text. Weiler (2004) has argued that conventionally the use of imagery has been viewed as time wasting. However in the modern, image-saturated world imagery may be a necessary component in order to encourage reader engagement (Weiler, 2004; Hoover, 2012). Given this and based on the authors' own views, imagery was added. The complete version of 'Is this OK?' was self-published in January 2013. The complete version has supporting notes to aid the facilitator who may use the story as a teaching aid. It can be downloaded for no charge at www.isthisokay.com.

Is This OK? Abridged version

He awoke a little foggy headed. It had not been a bad night's sleep but something was troubling him and he wasn't sure what. He looked across at the bedside table through the slits created by his half-open eyes. It was 7.03 a.m., 28 degrees Celsius outside (in the middle of winter) and according to the rolling text along the bottom of the display, Newland, the farthest south a town had ever been built, was in for a scorcher. Unfortunately the bedside display also told him something he didn't want to know, his credit balance and net worth. He had 400 credits in his account and his net worth was less than it was yesterday. He groaned, closed his eyes and rolled over. Then a second later he kicked himself into action with the thought that 400 credits was not much, he needed to get to work and boost his balance. He hadn't been to work for the past few days due to illness and he had watched his balance decrease, a numerical reminder that reinforced the sense of worthlessness that typically came with illness. Particularly because, due to illness, he had used the bathroom more often and as such been charged extra by the utilities company for the increased usage.

He sat up, turned to get out of bed, and felt the call of nature. 'No', he thought, 'I will hold on, I have spent enough with the utility company recently, charging me and even analysing my outputs to recommend doctors, remedies and output reduction strategies. I will use the bathroom at work, I don't pay for it'. He took one more look at the bedside display, it flashed in amber that he had prepaid for oxygen up until Saturday, it was now Thursday. 'Great' he thought 'well at least they don't charge kids. They don't get charged until they are twenty one years old.' He looked at his net worth and decided to use some to pay for a chunk of oxygen. The way his net worth was decreasing he would be worth nothing to society by the time he was 65. 'What the heck', he thought, he pressed the button and his net worth decreased, his projected net worth of zero was now forecast to be 64.5 years.

Finally he got out of bed; he knew it made sense to be on the transporter before 8 a.m. when the peak fares hit. Last year he had slept past his alarm and had to pay the peak fare as well as the peak oxygen levy. He made his way into the bathroom to look at the mirror. His face was unshaven. Could he get away with it? Was he seeing anyone important today? He had thought of growing a beard but the patchy stubble made him look ridiculous. He picked up his shaver and turned on the tap. As he did so he checked the bathroom display. The estimated cost of a shave right now was 3 credits. 'Damn' he thought, it had gone up since yesterday. The display outlined how Shave Co had increased their prices but now their new connected shave blade allowed better, closer shaving and because of that the price had gone up. His mind wandered for a second; real time information, real time prices for shaving, everything monitored, everything a transaction. To encourage him to shave now a follow up message came on the display, telling him if he shaved now he wouldn't have to do it again for 36 hours based on the information they held on him. He ignored this information and continued brushing his teeth; one credit was debited by Teeth Clean Co. As he brushed advice came up on the display about his

optimal brushing technique, a new toothpaste and good local dentists. The display was about to switch to the state of his teeth; however rather than this he gestured so that information would shrink away and the news would be displayed. The chief finance minister was on discussing how Newland had kept its credit rating and the credit agency's outlook for Newland was good. Following this the news commentator brought up a graph showing how Newland had maintained its rating for the past five years. 'Now there was something to be proud of' he thought. His mind wandered to when he was a child and he had been a scout and earned stars for good deeds. The symmetry between that and Newland earning a good credit rating seemed appropriate.

After brushing his teeth he went back to the bedroom and got dressed. His wife was sitting up in bed.

'You aren't shaving?' she said.

'I will do it at work. Cheaper,' he said.

He put on his clothes; they weren't fashionable just functional. Functional was all he could afford, the fashionable clothing companies had stopped selling to him, because he didn't fit the image profile they wanted. Something to do with his likes and preferences was the excuse the fashion labels offered. He felt sure it was his credit balance that mattered, he was sure if he had more credit his likes and preferences would be overlooked by the fashion companies. He cast his mind back to the last time he had bought a shirt, the best offer he had was from DIY Co. They had been the only company that had offered him a discount on the shirt price if he agreed to use his chest as an advertising hoarding for them. As he put the shirt on and ran his thumb over the DIY logo he remembered how when buying the shirt a voluptuous young woman was buying a top at the next display. She had been offered a 75% discount on the price if she agreed to use her chest to advertise a fashion company. Of course she had taken the offer. Who wouldn't? A 75% discount is great. She bought the top, took the discount and walked out with a logo emblazoned across her. When he had been buying his top, the DIY store had offered 5%. He wondered what it would be like to be so rich that you didn't display advertising on your clothes. He briefly wandered around that whimsical thought, giggled and remembered how his grandfather had talked about when people used to pay more so they could walk around with a big brand emblazoned on their clothes. He chuckled to himself at how people were so silly in times past; paying more to have brand advertising, not less.

He went through to the kitchen and flicked the kettle on. The electricity meter counted up the increments and reminded him that payment was taken at the end of every day. He stopped the kettle halfway through and made himself a lukewarm coffee. He thought about his lunch break and the opportunity to sit by the tree. The tree in its protective cabinet standing among the buildings; it was a place he went to, to be at peace. It may cost more to sit near the tree but it was worth it, it was his one indulgence and it helped. He ate his cereal, drank his coffee and then walked out the front door.

Outside he put on his Oxygen Co respirator. He did not notice the dense, smoggy air; it was everywhere and always there so there was no reason why he should notice. The intake valve on his respirator rattled and he felt comfortable, he was off to work.

The display in the respirator flashed a warning message and he heard a clicking sound followed by a muffled voice from the earpiece of his respirator, 'Please note, the current market rate for oxygen via this mask is 1 credit per oxygenated hour'. The display then offered some instructions on how he could maximise the value he could get from his respirator followed by the share price of the Oxygen Co and a buy now indicator. He motioned with his eyes and the display turned off. He walked to the transporter station.

He got off at the transport station near his work, the credits for the fare were automatically taken and it began to rain. He took out the umbrella from his bag. As he put it up, his display brought forward a message from the umbrella company, a smiling cartoon type umbrella began to say how he was using state of the art technology to keep himself dry and that there would be a small charge of 0.25 credits for using it, because Umbrella Co was in the business of 'keeping you dry, not making umbrellas'. As he walked on his display listed another charge being taken by the city municipality for draining the water that was collecting from him from the downpour. He sighed and smiled, it had always been like this and besides he knew there was no alternative.

He continued walking but as he did his mind wandered and he wondered whether life was just a game that submitted to a master dichotomy of consumption and production, spending and earning, a game of keeping in positive credit so consumption could continue. He made it to the tower that housed his workstation; once inside he removed his respirator. He went into the lift and got out on his floor. As he reached his workstation his holocomputer began talking to him.

'Morning sir, you have 45 messages' it said.

He reviewed the messages: the first was an advert with an athlete selling running shoes. The advert informed him that if he was to wear a shirt displaying the shoes, pending approval of his suitability, he could receive 0.1 credit for everyone who saw his advert and 30 credits for each purchase that resulted. He paused for a moment as the holocomputer spoke:

'You have looked at this message for two minutes, any longer and you are being unproductive. The current fine for unproductiveness is 15 credits per unproductive hour. Would you like to know more?'

'No' he said 'show me the next message'.

Once he had got to the end of his messages the holocomputer announced 'You have ten tasks to complete today to earn 100 credits.'

The rate yesterday had been 110 credits for 10 tasks. He didn't ask why the rate had changed; he knew the answer. Competition was ever present, the market was turbulent, the company was competing on a global scale and if the company and its shareholders could not earn enough money then he would be without a job as the work would be reallocated to another location where people would work at the rate offered.

He began his first task of the day. The time that had been allocated to each task was short but he could do it, he did not allow himself to get distracted as the retina scanner and the activity monitor would know if he daydreamed too long and that would just add to the pressure of getting everything done. He got through three tasks

by 10.30 a.m. The holocomputer told him he was on target for the day and would receive an extra credit for superior performance. Further a little indicator highlighted how based on his current progress he was in the top 5% of workers for task efficiency that day relative to all the workers in the company. The holocomputer also told him he could take a break of 15 minutes or alternatively he could work on and earn an extra 2 credits. He thought for a minute about how time was money, but decided to take the break.

He caught the lift to the atrium level of the tower, got a coffee and walked to the benches near the tree. The only tree he knew and had seen, other than on a display. He loved the tree; it somehow made him feel peaceful. As he sat on the bench next to it he was charged a credit. The display told him, as it always did when he sat down near the tree, that the credit charge was for his taking advantage of the beauty of the tree and the investment by the company that owned it in keeping it healthy.

The time for his break ticked away; he drank his coffee and once finished he stood and made his way back to the lift. As he did so he motioned to put his coffee cup in the bin. Beep, beep, went the bin—he was about to use the wrong bin. He walked to the correct bin and put his coffee cup in it. He felt like dropping it on the floor, but he had done that before and been arrested, coffee cups had chip identifiers in them which meant the individual who had drunk from the cup and then discarded it was traceable. After depositing the coffee cup he made his way back to his workstation.

Back at his workstation he looked at the time; he was one minute late and the display told him he had been fined 1 credit. He did his tasks and at the end of each, a display indicated how efficient he was relative to others. He was not doing well, after a good start in the morning he was slipping down the league table. The display also told him that unless he boosted his efficiency he would not receive a bonus. He redoubled his efforts, efficiency was paramount. The nightly news was always reinforcing how people must be efficient lest the economy and companies fail to perform. A sustainable life could not be achieved without efficiency.

After finishing work he made his way home, helped put his children to bed and then found some time for himself. He decided to review some notes of his grandfathers. He opened the files and read them. They were written in a style of English that he was not entirely familiar with. There was an over reliance on letters in the spelling rather than letters and numbers, for example, w8 was spelled wait, 2day was spelt today. The notes outlined how there was a predominant view being put forward that money was the measure of value. Companies and even nations should compete with each other and should try to realise competitive advantage. There were some video links supporting the typed notes showing speeches from businessmen and politicians of the time repeating the message. His grandfather had put some annotations next to these videos. The basic premise of these was a questioning of what it means to be a human and whether everything should be measured in monetary terms.

He looked through the notes and came across an academic article which his grandfather had written notes on. The academic article talked about how firms should serve the underlying human need and not think in product terms. Another article discussed

how firms should invest in natural capital and continually seek to improve the efficiency of the resources they use. He thought about the tree and his own productivity. His grandfather's notes had wondered where this thinking would take society and what it meant to be a human.

He sat back and thought that perhaps this society, his society, was where such thinking led. Companies sold solutions and there was a price on every transaction. He looked through more of his grandfather's notes. A question was written in bold letters; it asked about purpose and the implications of what it means to be human and how we define ourselves. More notes questioned how humans understand themselves and whether that understanding is formed by our relationships with all that surrounds us. Written in red, as if to accentuate importance, was a question 'will we always be *Homo sapiens*?'

He pressed himself upon his own understandings. He wondered about continual transparency, the visibility of one's credit balance, the only real boundary between work and non-work being time and how one maximises the latter by being efficient in the former and trying to earn credits faster than spending them. He wanted to sit under the tree, the rental tree. He felt inner peace there. He stopped reviewing his grandfather's notes. Thinking about purpose was fine, but sometimes a person can think too much. He could see that the world he lived in was an extrapolation of supposedly good ideas from before, but so what? Hadn't it always been this way?

He relaxed, smiled and thought about what could be more natural than paying for oxygen, companies investing in ecosystem services and natural resources, and companies being in the game of meeting underlying needs rather than selling products. He stood up, asked his home computer for the definition of a human: the answer came in an instant—*Homo transactus economicus*—brilliant, he thought, he felt comfortable. Finally, he knew exactly who he was.

Discussion and close

Notwithstanding that a reader will likely be able to pattern different theories over the content in the abridged version of the story, the key theories that informed the writing of the piece were: the notion of companies offering solutions for an underlying need as opposed to limiting their conceptions to a product offering (Levitt, 1960; Hawken *et al.*, 1999); a monetary (credit) value being placed on natural capital; and a temporal understanding of humans (Ingold, 2011). The concept of companies selling solutions is offered via examples such as the shaving company offering information on the optimum time to shave for maximum benefit, the umbrella company being in the business of keeping an individual dry as opposed to selling umbrellas and thus charging per use, the utility company charging per use of toilet facilities with an additional service of analysing outputs and the city services charging for draining away the water that falls on the individual while he walks to work. Analogously the notion of selling services also comes through in the clothes

and advertising section of this story, wherein people are offered a discount on the clothes they wish to purchase if they advertise a brand. And conversely the wealthy can afford to buy clothes with no advertising on them. The service being sold in this case is by the individual purchaser, rather than the company, with the individual receiving a discount on the purchase price of clothes in exchange for being a walking advertising hoarding for a company. As well as being another example of selling services, this piece of the narrative is also a commentary on branded clothes, wherein currently clothes brands charge a premium for their clothes and then purchasers walk around advertising that brand on their chests. For example, a logo is emblazoned across the chest. In this current context and notwithstanding other marketing arguments with regard to clothes being an expression of purchasers' values, it appears to the authors that companies are charging a premium for individuals to buy clothes who then advertise that same brand. Thus the brand is receiving a service which it is not paying for.

With regard to the monetary value of natural capital, this is captured in the narrative most explicitly by the protagonist paying credits for oxygen and being charged to sit next to a tree. Building on the notion of a monetary value being associated with ecosystem services such as oxygen, a subtext that is not developed but only alluded to in the story is that the assignation of a monetary value has led to privatisation of these services.

The temporal understanding of humanity is offered towards the end of the story when the protagonist understands that humans are currently defined as *Homo transactus economicus*, rather than *Homo sapiens*. That the story ends at this point is purposeful. It is designed as an attempt to reinforce to the reader that a key narrative throughout the story has been the placing of a monetary value on transactions. Further, in such a world, given our sense of understanding of who we are is temporal as offered by the phenotype theory (Ingold, 2011), it is likely we would perhaps not consider ourselves as *Homo sapiens* in the future portrayed by the story. But rather would consider ourselves as economic transactors and hence *Homo transactus economicus*.

Other sub-themes within the story and the value of everything being known through a medium of money are for example offered by the protagonist making a lukewarm coffee because of the active monitoring of electricity that occurs. Similarly the continual monitoring and changing of the pay rate based on a worker's efficiency relative to global comparisons. A further sub-theme behind this monitoring of pay rates and efficiency is how labour efficiency is invariably a governing thought for many organisations (Cummings, 2005). Further influences that are in the piece but only briefly referred to are that the town, Newland, is in a polar extreme of the planet, yet it is still hot. This is a narrative nod to a warming world and rising greenhouse gas levels. Also the brief discussion of a master dichotomy of consumption and production is a nod to human purpose and the writings of Marx (Ingold, 2011 citing Marx, 1930), whereby work (production) allows earnings for consumption and an individual only lives when they are consuming. Thus there is a master

dichotomy that can also be termed work/life balance and one is only alive when consuming.

More current day understandings of technology and its capabilities and a relatively topical societal narrative are also alluded to. With regard to technology there is a visual electricity meter to enable active monitoring by the user, as opposed to it being locked away out of site. Retinal scanning for identification and items (things) being connected to the internet: this last aspect being made explicit when the protagonist tries to put his coffee cup in the wrong bin and an alarm sounds. A current societal narrative brought forward is the notion of credit rating of debt, a narrative which while being topical also reinforces how money is a key value indicator.

Having written the story, the authors have begun to share it with students and colleagues. Typically when sharing it with students exploratory questions are considered such as whether the world written about is a possibility and whether the levels of organisational control alluded to in the story are possible. Initial reaction from students has been concern that the world of 'Is this OK?' is possible and thus they raise a further question of what should be done. In this regard, the story has in the view of the authors been a relative success in developing students' critical faculty. It has enabled students to question natural capitalism and whether it is avoidable or inevitable and also what it means to be human and whether the economy impacts that understanding. Thus anecdotally at least the story appears to be realising its aim of facilitating students' critical faculty, albeit more considered and thorough research needs to be conducted on gauging the impact of the story on students' development of critical faculty. While critical and invariably negative discussion is raised about natural capitalism following students' reading of the story, a polemical aspect to the story is avoided by, at the end, having the protagonist be very accepting of the situation he finds himself in. The lack of concern is purposely written in order to reinforce how our understanding of ourselves and what is normal is temporal. The intention is that this enables the reader to give greater consideration to the future that is being created by and through current actions. Again anecdotally at least, students find this non-polemical stance of the story slightly disconcerting, a reaction that enables a discussion of temporal understandings and thus facilitates discussions of paradigms and current assumptions. Ultimately the temporality of understandings alludes to a challenge of our living on this planet, whereby as we live our effects keep adding to one another with the 'result that the situation for later subjects and their choices of action will be progressively different from that of the initial agent and ever more the fated product of what was done before' (Jonas, 1984: 7).

Endnote

As an endnote to this article it is worthwhile considering the terminology 'natural capitalism' and 'natural capital'. Metaphors populate and saturate our language (Mutch, 2006), further they facilitate the 'transfer of information from a relatively familiar domain (variously referred to as source or base domain, or vehicle) to a new and relatively unknown domain (usually referred to as target domain or topic)' (Tsoukas, 1991: 568). Thus they allow inferences to be made about those things we may know little about, on the basis of what we know about something else (Tsoukas, 1991, 1993). The use of metaphors in language has been likened to viruses 'which infect different discursive contexts and spread meanings' (Akerman, 2003: 432). In this regard it has been argued that metaphors can 'guide our perceptions and interpretations...and help us formulate our visions and goals' (Cornelissen *et al.*, 2008: 8), perhaps in the process connecting our experiences with our imaginations (Cornelissen *et al.*, 2008; Inns, 2002). Thus they are entwined in the relation between thought and meaning and the guidance of perception (Burr, 2003). This entwinement also results in metaphors being implied modes of behaviour (Tsoukas, 1991, 1993). Tsoukas (1991) argues that we engage in continual experience and conceptual segmentation, with language being below experience. Thus 'language is both descriptive and constitutive of reality' (Tsoukas, 1991: 568) and consequently metaphors are discursive devices that make social reality more 'palpable and comprehensible' (Tsoukas, 1991: 571) than it might otherwise be. Consequently metaphors both reflect and influence action (Burr, 2003; Ford and Ford, 1995; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Tsoukas, 1991, 1993). As such while metaphors can be a short hand towards guiding actions, at the same time they can hide, obscure or realise ideological distortions (for example see; Akerman, 2003; Audebrand, 2010; Mutch, 2006; Oswick *et al.*, 2002; Tinker, 1986; Tsoukas, 1991, 1993) in the movement and application of principles from the base domain to target domain.

Akerman (2003) argues that the term 'natural capital', and by extension 'natural capitalism', is one such distortion. Akerman (2003) highlights how the introduction of the concept of natural capital is a success particularly because of the properties of the term as a metaphor; in as much as the terminology invites 'the audience to approach the relationship between nature and economy in a new way with familiar economic terms' (Akerman, 2003: 436), the *modus operandi* of metaphors. Further Akerman (2003) highlights that the term natural capital moves nature from being considered as a passive store towards something that is actively managed, as nature is now an asset not just a store. This movement from store to asset, it is argued, facilitates the monetisation of nature and its consideration in ahistorical, decontextual and economic terms only (Akerman, 2003). Referring back to the story, Akerman's (2003) argument is brought forward wherein the consideration of natural capital in economic terms becomes an accepted norm. Thus a monetary charge is taken for breathing oxygen and

sitting near a tree. Consequently, a partial aim of the story is to highlight that while a concept such as natural capitalism might be acceptable within the current context, the bridge of current acceptability for the concept facilitated by the metaphor of natural capitalism has within it the seeds of future consequences that are challenging when viewed from our current context.

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