

Perception is Reality:

How Values affect Sustainability in Canadian Academia



CCUEN Edmonton, 2019

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Professor and Dean



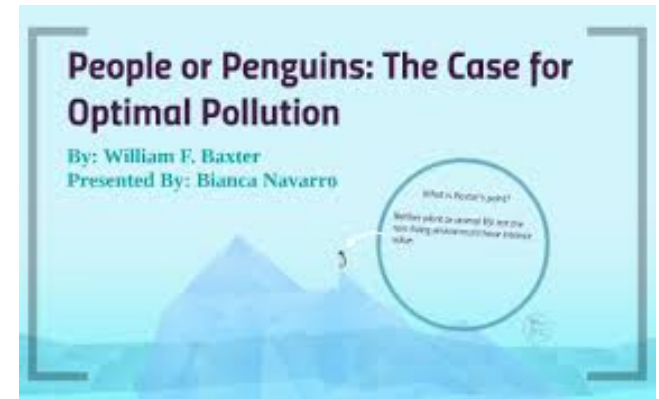
Ethics, Economics and Willingness to Pay: A Philosophy Professor



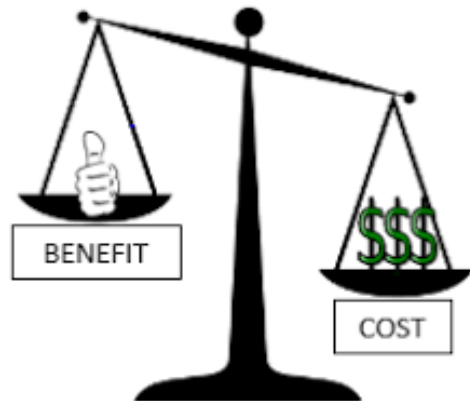
The Case for Optimal Solutions: Environmental problems are economic

*“...environmental problems are
economic problems...”*


(William Baxter)



Decision Making as Trade-offs

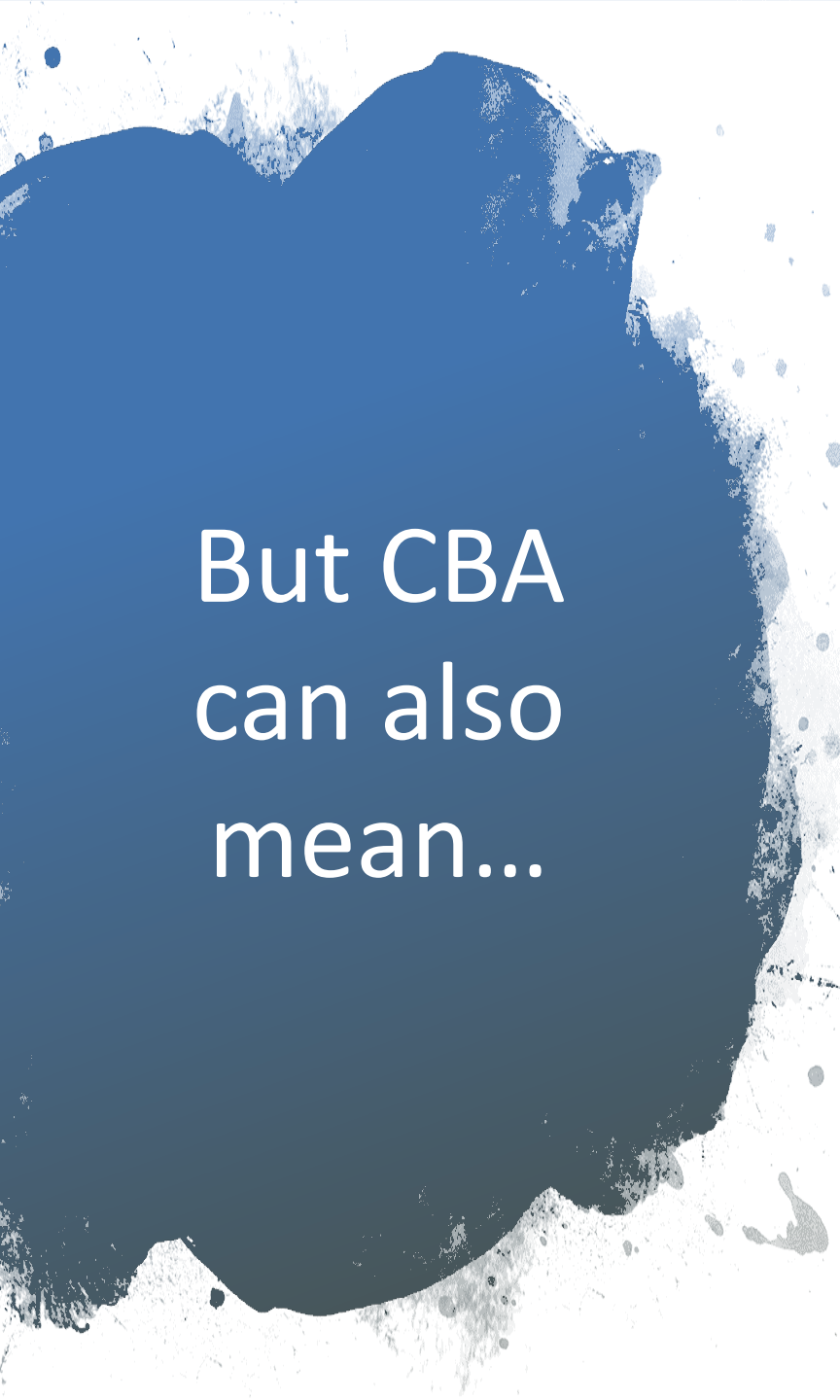


- Optimal = “just those amounts that attend a sensible organized society thoughtfully and knowledgeably pursuing the greatest possible satisfaction for its human members.”
- “Cost” = \$\$ as well as foregone opportunities
- The best tool: CBA



Cost-Benefit Analysis: On the positive side...

- permits rational decision making by converting all relevant considerations into same unit: dollar value
- seeks maximization of overall good (often understood as dollar value of all goods and services- GDP.)



But CBA
can also
mean...

- Based on monetary terms (life insurance, medical care, wages earned etc.) an average human life in a poor country is worth less than an American, European, or Japanese life.
- Discount rate places more value on the lives of people living now than on future generations.
- May deny importance of “quality of life”.



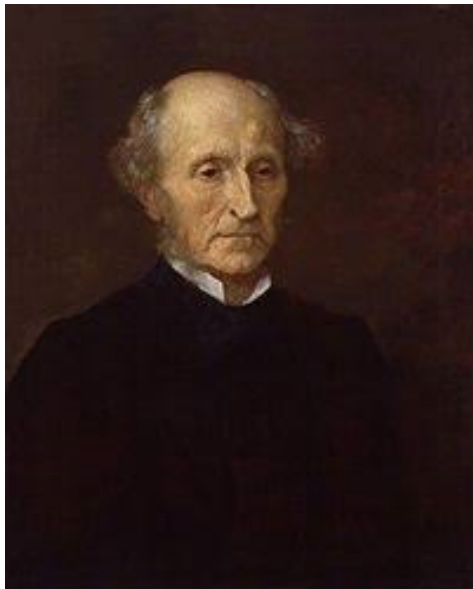
Mark Sagoff:
Willingness to pay

CONSUMERS
(wants and preferences)
vs.
CITIZENS
(values)



SOME STANDARD ETHICAL THEORIES

- UTILITARIANISM (Consequentialism)
- DEONTOLOGY
- SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY
- CASUISTRY
- VIRTUE ETHICS
- EGOISM...



Utilitarianism

- **The greatest good for the greatest number.**
- Total consequences of an action determine its rightness or wrongness. (Consequentialism.)
- Two greatest advocates:
 - Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)
 - John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

Hedonic Calculus of bottled water

Units of pleasure (+) or pain (-)

Unhealthy sweet juice substitutes avoided	(+7)
Convenience (no need to drag bottles)	(+9)
Plastics in environment	(-4)
Costs money	(-2)



Deontology (Immanuel Kant)

- I have a right to choose!
- Out of principle, you have a duty to provide me with choices
- Rights, duties, principles



Is my friend right?

Utilitarianism:

Is he calculating true costs?

Is he considering all the consequences?



Is my friend right?

Deontology:

Tom Regan: the rights of animals?

Duty to protect?

Do rights mean
unrestricted license to
do as one pleases?



Beyond utilitarianism and deontology...

From anthropocentrism to ecocentrism



Ecocentrism
is the key pathway to sustainability

~~WILL~~
**WE MUST REGENERATE OUR
GLOBAL COMMONS**

97/365

The
**Ecological
Citizen**

Indigenous ways of knowing



Shifting Paradigms and Worldviews



"Sir, the following paradigm shifts occurred while you were out."



**What is your
Worldview?**



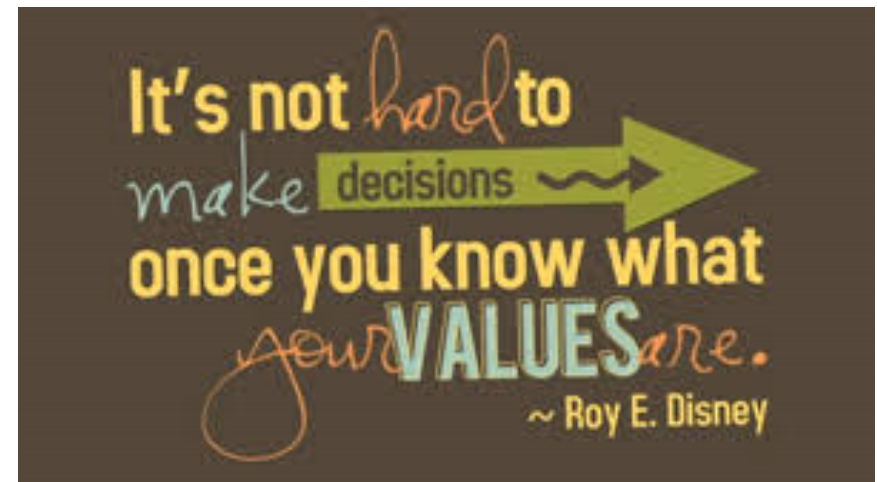
How to move forward?

1. Bring values conversation into the conversation about sustainability
2. Use critical thinking skills to expose bad arguments.



Make values explicit

- Are people assuming the validity of utilitarian values? Deontological? Other?
- Are gendered issues underlying attitudes?
- Are issues of power undermining equity?
- Are technocratic solutions implicitly privileged over “softer” approaches?
- Core vs. negotiable values?



Critically evaluate arguments



Unstated Assumptions and
Mindsets



Structural biases



Cognitive biases



Perceptual narrowing

Unstated Assumptions

Ethics is economics:
willingness-to-pay
justifies all actions

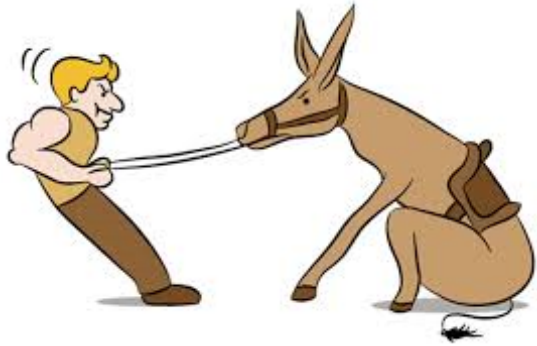


Structural biases and fallacies...

Amory Lovins: supply vs. demand

Bottled water vs. juice?





Cognitive Biases and Fallacies



Anchoring



Perceptual Narrowing: Think Outside the Box



Bring these approaches into education and curriculum

- Interdisciplinary Environmental education: from ecological sciences to gender, justice, sustainability...
- Include the Environmental humanities



Thank-you!

