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Narrative Ethics, Media and the Morality of the Ecological Modern: The Case of Sweden

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by Dominic M. Hinde



Abstract

*The Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre in his groundbreaking analysis of contemporary ethics, *After Virtue: A Study of Moral Theory*, asserted that modernity was devoid of a unified moral system. This observation has been noted by, among others, the ecophilosopher Arran Gare as a means of dealing with approaches to contemporary crisis. By characterizing debates about the future as reflexively constructed articulations of modernity, this paper briefly considers how such a perspective is useful when attempting to communicate questions of development under contemporary conditions. Using qualitative examples from modern Sweden taken from a larger corpus of research to speculate on the potential for normative conceptual change, it uses the self-styled enlightened polity as a case study to discuss how environmental knowledge is instrumentalized in self-consciously modern contexts. MacIntyre's insight thus provides a view into the relationship between discourse and practice which recognizes the situated nature of environmental argumentation over uniform green epistemologies.*

Keywords: modernity, Sweden, ecophilosophy, rhetoric, Alasdair MacIntyre, ecomodernism



About the Author

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A Crisis of the Present

The notion of environmental consciousness is a key problematique within the humanities and social sciences, based in a seeming desire to develop a canonical and functional social understanding of environmental crisis and to locate cultural perspectives on the environment—be they indigenous, post-modern, or pre-modern—as a way out of the bind of extractive modernity. Whilst modernity is enchanted by its own future, it is troubled by the return of the environmental “bads” that it has spawned. This seeming inability to reconcile the pressing need for sustainability with the dominant structures of late modernity manifests perhaps most visibly in the epistemological dissonance faced by developed countries in the global north, but also more generally in the negative externalities of global development.

Some self-proclaimed eco-philosophers such as Arne Naess (1973) have sought to develop a new deep ecological rationalism as a way out of this impasse that requires new values. Others, such as Andreas Malm (2016) and Ian Angus (2016), have attempted to come to terms with its implications and focused on broader rationally justified political approaches through the adaption of existing political and philosophical theory, with a crossover with other political traditions that can lead to a neglect of environmentalism as an end in itself (Rootes 2005). Reacting to these trends, Johnathan Symons and Rasmus Karlsson (2015) have meanwhile questioned the general efficacy of both ecologism and green political theory in dealing with both the present and future, acknowledging the need to reach beyond environmental movements to achieve material returns. Ultimately, all these projects share a more general interest in future-building akin to what Joel Wainwright and Geoff Mann have described as “a present that realizes a certain future, one worth living” (2015, 319). Within this, there lies a basic and often unanswered question—in this age of crisis, what is to be done? It is a moral problem that underpins much of the contemporary disagreement on global issues from climate to

development and poverty. The solutions offered present a range of future imaginaries: from a return to a universal morality of ecological wisdom to enlightened techno-paternalism, from marketized environmental goods to resource-wary planned economies, all of them attempting to remake modernity in their own image.

Making Sense of Green Modernity

This paper¹ explores the relationship between articulations of the environmental modern and the engineering of the future as a process of meaning making, positing that any solution to the problems outlined above must come to terms with the temporally located nature of contemporary concerns themselves, and that the morality of such an argument is highly subjective. This exploration also inevitably takes place in the shadow of both the material and intellectual heft of the Anthropocene, which is intimately linked to reflexive thinking about modernity's deep-rooted material problems (Steffen et al. 2011). As Libby Robin (2013) notes, the Anthropocene as geological epoch is contested, though Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer identify the advent of the steam engine and the European industrial revolution in 1784 as an arbitrary marker of the beginning of global atmospheric change (2000, 17–18). Such labels remain debatable, but they also tie the Anthropocene to modernity as both an intellectual and material process, and as such allow the Anthropocene and its effects to be viewed within the framework of the reflexive state of contemporary modernity outlined by Ulrich Beck, Wolfgang Bons, and Christoph Lau (2003). Such a view means that the Anthropocene and its material characteristics become a reflexive lived concept and are as such integrated with wider conceptions of modernity and its effects, which is also where potential solutions might be found.

Alf Hornborg and Andreas Malm have discussed how the Anthropocene as a concept has enjoyed a meteoric rise since it was first popularized by Crutzen and Stoermer at the turn of the century in which “the story goes, we must reconceptualize not only relations between the natural and social sciences but also history, modernity and the very idea of the human” (2014, 62). Fundamentally, it situates the Anthropocene as a material process that should be approached through an unpacking of modernity's self-understanding and its storytelling about itself. When making sense of this Anthropocene modernity, and potentially seeking to develop it towards an eco-modernity, attempts to re-engineer or change self-understanding must then rely on material practice and not on abstract philosophy or singular epistemologies in a medial context. The latter would, as Arran Gare notes when echoing Ulrich Beck's comments on how resisting modernity through abstract morality is futile, be “like a bicycle brake on an intercontinental jet [because] Its focus on individuals in abstraction from their engagement in society prevents the

relationship between individuals and major problems confronting humanity from ever being understood” (1998, 4).

This reflexivity, and the fluid medial landscape that it exposes, pose problems, not least in reaching consensus about what is both a local and a global issue, but also about the need to persuade diverse groups and actors to pursue a common path. In light of this, the critique of modernity developed by the Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre is particularly useful, and his assertion that “the project of finding a rational vindication of morality [in modernity] has decisively failed” opens up new perspectives on contemporary crisis (MacIntyre 1987, 56). If the modernity that the European enlightenment supposedly gave birth to is, in fact, not the rational world that we try to justify courses of action in, but a complex and often paradoxical place, then understanding the apparent contradictions of the needs and circumstances of the present becomes simpler. This also contrasts what Manuel Arias-Maldonado has identified as the need to “adopt an understanding of sustainability as a general, pluralistic, open principle that allows for many different solutions to be democratically discussed and acted upon” (2013, 430). As Michael Bruner and Max Oelschlaeger have pointed out, MacIntyre’s emphasis on the pluralistic nature of philosophies in narrative terms provides a better route to efficacy than a blanket imposition of either anthropocentric environmental rationalism or of a deeper environmental consciousness (1994, 213), whilst Gare has also concluded that “MacIntyre’s approach to societal ethical narratives solve the problem of relativism resulting from the acknowledgment of the perspectival nature of knowledge” (1998, 4).

As the rhetorician Jim A. Kuypers (1996) notes, there is an inherent friction between the notion of *episteme* and the idea of agents, and by extension within moral argument without structures. A better understanding of the moral dimensions of reflexive modernity can, however, be achieved through the use of a *doxological* approach—from the Greek *doxa* meaning opinion or glory—by dealing not with knowledge but with the perceived worth of given opinions. This addresses the nominal values of debates in terms of normative traditions, similar to Alasdair MacIntyre’s (1987) own concept of dramatic traditions of “virtue” (quoted in Hannan 2012). The advantages of such an approach have also been dealt with by Ruth Amossy (2002) and Mats Rosengren (2008) as a means of coming to terms with the changing temporal positionality of contemporary modernity, but also of the highly contextual and reflexive nature of discussion.² Echoing Gare’s comments on the internal contradictions of environmentalism, one of the implications of such a perspective is that the search for a green epistemology to propagate becomes less important. It is instead replaced by a shifting and constantly

contested present that pragmatically utilizes doxological strands in new and differing contexts.

If then, as seems desirable, green modernity is to have a morality beyond “inauthentic ecopolitics” (Symons and Karlsson 2015, 188), it must also have a moral basis beyond ecologism that is neither pre- nor post-modern. It is for this reason that Sweden makes for a particularly interesting example of the potential for green articulations of the modern. Using media examples from the reflexively-narrated modernity of Sweden with regard to the environment taken from a large scale study (Hinde 2015), I discuss how the relationship between environment and modernity in Sweden is more complex than popular conceptions of enlightened rational thinking might first assume, arguing that the appearance of an enlightened polity is actually a manifestation of a constantly reformulated modernity, in which sustainability is instrumentalized in relation to broader temporal narratives.

Sweden as The Ecological Modern

As noted by Allan Pred (1995) and Martin Wiklund (2006) among others, Sweden is a self-consciously perfect example of European modernity, combining narratives of the modern with ideas of identity and nationhood. Similarly, Robyn Eckersley has identified Sweden as a prime example of the greening of the developed industrial nation state (2004, 74). In presentational terms, this is a strategy adopted by the Swedish Government (Government of Sweden 2013), a strategy that extends to their participation in global climate negotiations as part of a “Nordic Way” (Nordic Council 2018). These claims and the identities that support them present Sweden as having solved the apparent conflict between economic growth, environmental degradation, and a developed welfare society. This is summarized by Rolf Lidskog and Ingemar Elander in their observation that “because of its relatively promising preconditions for moving towards a sustainable society, Sweden appears to be an exemplary illustration both of the potential and limits experienced by developed welfare countries seeking to balance environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability” (2012, 422).

In a similar vein, in 2009 the Swedish presidency of the European Union marked the usage of an “official rhetoric during the presidency [that] refers to a vision of leadership for the future, not least in the environmental field. Yet the distinctiveness of that vision remains to be articulated” (Wittrock 2012, 109). It is thus also possible to talk of a situation in which “this notion of Scandinavian progressiveness is informed by an idea of a certain moral quality, a uniqueness of being” (Andersson 2009, 231). Such moral properties underpin the idea of both Swedish exceptionalism and the particular nuance of environmental modernity that has developed in the country, yet how

epistemologically consistent this morality is remains to be proven. Nevertheless, Sweden provides a laboratory for study of the green modern.

Although Sweden is by no means a complete example of the kind of green state envisioned by Eckersley, it has achieved a relatively widespread level of environmental awareness within public and political discourse, even where this does not always lead directly into material environmental action or express itself in ideologically coherent forms. This has occurred in part through processes of ecological modernization, particularly in the 1990s, where traditional narratives of the values of Swedish political projects were subject to rearticulation in terms of “the green people’s home” (Hermansson 2002) and sustainability (Wheeler 2014, 8; Fudge and Rowe 2001) which masked an underlying shift towards more individualized neoliberal approaches to governance and life. Such modernization has, however, led to the creation of a present in which there have been attempts to internalize the “bads” of modernity within discussions of the future. This present is not, however, merely the result of a passive evolution of discourse but has required rhetorical engineering by stakeholders in both politics and the environmental movement, mediated through journalism and popular media. Two specific examples that illustrate this contested modernity are presented in the following sections, discussing the portrayal of and choices about the future in terms of distinctly temporal factors.

Swedish Nuclear Politics and National Futures

The Swedish referendum on nuclear energy, held in the spring of 1980, is a prime example of eco-modernity as both contested and pluralistic.³ Offering the medium-term continuation of nuclear energy (the so-called Line 1, backed by the conservative Moderate party), a commitment to build no further nuclear reactors (Line 2, backed by the Social Democrats and Liberals), or an immediate decommissioning of nuclear capability (Line 3, backed by Christian Democratic, Communist, and agrarian Centre parties), the referendum offered nominal democratic control of an energy policy by the people. Normatively seen as an environmental conflict, dealing with opposition to an environmental issue (the impact of nuclear energy) and with a campaign led by senior figures identifying and identified as “environmentalists,” it can also be regarded, as described by the sociologist Gunnar Myrdal “as a controversy as much over the distribution of power over technological choice in general as over a particular technology” (1980, ix).

As such, it brought together two narrative constants of twentieth-century Sweden, namely a contested but consensual approach to democracy in tandem with the nation state and the need to create new narratives of the modern and attached values, whether that be a national *framstegsberättelse* (narrative of progress) or alternative critiques of

civilization (Wiklund 2006). This also reflects Ylva Uggla's analysis of Sweden's nuclear discourse in her assertion that "[t]he endeavor to meet the political requirements for safe, final disposal takes place in a society with a contested modernity," whereby the notions of what is and is not modern, or what will become modern, are subject to rival processes of narrative building around a central, inherently modern, and visionary ethos (2002, 39).

In the nuclear debate in particular, the power of the *framstegsberättelse* is evident in the language of both the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the anti-nuclear movement. An article authored by Social Democratic leader Olof Palme at the time is illustrative of the conflict between different contested modernities:

Most importantly of all: We Social Democrats wish to continue building society in many other areas: Childcare, healthcare, elderly care, the fight against social exclusion, a six hour working day, improvements for low paid workers and much, much more. This much we know: if we are to tackle the huge foreign debts and budget deficits we have been saddled with by the bourgeoisie parties in the 1980s and decommission nuclear energy quickly there will be great hardships. That would mean that many dreams would be extinguished in the building of a Swedish society. (Palme 1980)⁴

Rather than placing the environment in the center and delegitimizing purely environmentalist standpoints, the forum for discussion is a more general social narrative and the values at stake are the structures of social democracy, which provide a *telos* for the instrumental aspects of the debate. These narratives of progress overcoming challenge and of the negation of risk are similar, in narrative terms, to the risk society of late modernity identified by Ulrich Beck and that which is addressed as self-narrative with a "calculative attitude" by Anthony Giddens (1991, 28). A significant part of the Social Democratic project also corresponds to what Giddens describes as a reflexivity in which "the future does not just consist of the expectation of events yet to come. 'Futures' are organized reflexively in the present" (1991, 29). Such exclusion of environmental narrative from the discussion of normatively environmental issues does not, though, preclude the achievement of either public environmental goods or of the evolution and rearticulation of extant narratives to form more productive futures.

The narrative strategies of the anti-nuclear voices in the Swedish referendum did not, however, try and construct entirely divergent futures, instead offering a greener and more productive articulation of extant modernity in much of its rhetoric. For example, an official campaign advert from 1980 contains the argument:

Such an investment in industry requires energy. With line 3 industry's electricity usage will increase faster during the eighties than was the case in the previous decade. We can do this with the aid of combined heat and power, wind power and more efficient energy usage.

Which 1980s will we get with lines 1 and 2? They want to plough at least 15 billion kronor into two large nuclear power stations. Forsmark 3 (reactor 11) is hardly even begun. Where Oskarshamn 3 (reactor 12) is planned there is nothing more than a grove of trees.

The continued expansion of nuclear energy slows down the transition to alternative energy sources and hinders the growth of new and viable industries.⁵ (Folkkampanjen nej till Kärnkraft 1980)

Through an instrumental focus on a single issue, the anti-nuclear voice subscribes to several of the extant features of Sweden's national modernity and rejects any of the more classically environmental identities that might be expected from lay activists. By using instrumental strategies that emerged from the *doxa* of industrial modernity, however, the anti-nuclear campaign was able to push forward discussions about appropriate technology, and particularly about the agency of the individual in relation to technological change. This still yielded new types of practice despite defeat at an electoral level. As mentioned in the discussion of doxological reflexivity, it is thus possible to re-read the nuclear debate in Sweden not as an epistemological process of rival knowledges and rationalisms over the nature of technology but of competing instrumental narratives constructed in a specific present where the debate's "rhetoric creates truth that is useful for the moment out of *doxa*" (Herrick 2001, 62).

In the case of Sweden's nuclear referendum, there remain tangible outcomes above and beyond the simple vote on the immediate future of nuclear energy, because although the truths and arguments of the debate might only be temporary, they do in themselves lead to the potential for new kinds of practice. This can be seen in the contrast between the Social Democrats' restrictive approach to the environment in the nuclear referendum relative to the ecological modernisation period of the 1990s, but also in the post-referendum establishment of the Swedish Green Party and its own eco-modernistic project, itself a form of practice. Such a change marks a progression from a division of nature and society toward a synthesis of political vision and the abandonment of environmental morality in favour of a morality of the environmental modern. This environmental modern is also evident in a more recent debate on the construction of a motorway project in Stockholm, discussed in the next section.

A Local Community of Contested Modernity: The Stockholm Bypass

In the 2010 Swedish general and municipal elections, one of the main issues on the ballot was the future of a proposed road project to bypass metropolitan Stockholm. The discussion surrounding it represented a clash between existing articulations of ecological modernity from mainstream Social Democratic and Conservative parties and a new modern ecologism produced by the Swedish Green Party. Rather than merely opposing the project, Green voices sought to articulate a modern vision for the Stockholm region that involved a political project using self-consciously modern values as part of a temporal community.

This took the form of a new kind of urbanism with the associated values attached to the city and its narratives wherein they sought to make roadbuilding appear anachronistic. An opinion article by Green politician Åsa Romson temporally situated the debate thusly:

Cities around the world are basing their plans on an obvious truth—building motorways to remove congestions does not work. More motorways mean more people taking the car . . . but here in Stockholm the debate on the bypass is dominated by naive assumptions and decades-old prestige.⁶ (Romson, Blombäck, and Hagberg 2011)

The temporal strategies of Green politics thus create contested space not just in terms of the physical landscape as it exists but also in the imagined narrative landscapes of past and future. By contrasting the future city with the prestige politics of the older and larger parties, a choice is created between a transition to a new stage in development or the perpetuation of old ideas.

This also manifests itself as future vision in the articulation of sustainable futures. By creating unified narratives of past experience, contemporary choice, and future possibility, as MacIntyre suggests, it is possible to construct argumentative strategies which re-write certain truths. An article by two leading Green politicians on sustainable infrastructure, for example, attempts to transform skepticism about the future into a discussion of the merits of daring to change and the temporal appropriateness of technology:

At times of technical transition it is always hard to prove the worth of investments in advance. Stockholm's underground could never have broken even using today's cost-benefit analysis for infrastructure. There was doubt around expanding broadband and some said that the internet was just a passing fad. We are convinced that modern rail traffic is key to future travel and transport.⁷ (Eriksson and Svensson Smith 2010)

This situates the present as an instance of “times of technical transition,” and although the aims of environmentalism and its associated goods (in this case sustainable transport) are contained within the argument in terms of outcomes, the value which is instrumentalized is the idea of being modern, constructing an identity in which the modern also entails another set of specific values. This was embodied in the main election slogan used by the Green Party before the 2010 vote: “Modernize Sweden” (*Modernisera Sverige*) (Melén 2010).

These issues of change and reflexive relationships to the past can be summarized using the stages of argumentation outlined by Ylva Uggla in her description of Stockholm’s developmental storytelling. She asserts,

The narrative of Stockholm calls for change; what is needed is not only a change of planning direction, but also of views and perspectives. The plot of the narrative comprises four elements: (1) great expectations for future Stockholm, (2) planning history and its shortcomings and contemporary challenges, (3) planning as an effective tool with which to meet these challenges and remedy the shortcomings and (4) the need for a changed planning direction. (2012, 79)

Modern Values, Different Visions

The values of the Swedish Green Party’s modernistic project correspond to several of the doxological expectations of their context, yet seek to develop different practices from those promised by both the ecological modernization of the Social Democrats and the instrumentalized environmentalism of others. This can be contrasted with the environmental program of the Moderate Party. The Moderate Party has also tried to articulate a post-social democratic Swedish modernity that still utilizes several of the extant doxa of political progress, including the idea of environmental leadership developed through ecological modernization in its environmental rhetoric. The Moderates meanwhile are notable for their invocation of the national community as a global leader. Their online environmental presentation contained for example the headline “Sweden should be a world leader [*föregångsland*] in environment and climate action” and a promise to “[c]ontinue to drive the agenda internationally,” collocating greenness with Swedishness and Swedish values (Moderaterna 2014). This is similar to what Björn Wittrock (2012) has identified in Sweden’s Moderate-led EU presidency and the instrumental use of environment as an international political tool.

This kind of harnessing of notions of national community in environmental questions differs fundamentally from blood and soil environmentalism in that the nation and community are used instrumentally instead of being ends in themselves. Rather than asserting a national environment as sacred or inherently good, it attaches an

instrumental set of values to being environmentalist in twenty-first-century discourses of European and global environmentalism.

This transformation of environmentalism into a means of identification itself—of being modern—has complex implications for the future of the environmental movement. As outlined in discussions of the (now under construction) Stockholm Bypass, proponents of the road were just as likely to stress the environmental credentials of the project as its opponents were its drawbacks, it being promoted as “paying attention to Stockholm’s unique environmental assets,” particularly with regard to the preservation of the integrity of central Stockholm as a picture-book landscape (Swedish Government 2009). Similarly, as William Nordhaus notes, the introduction of new discourses of climate change in the nuclear question have created further contested interpretations of environmentalism, not least the contemporary decision of the Swedish Centre party to endorse nuclear energy (1997). It is thus possible to view the changed narrative capital of environmentalism as concept, if not as effect, as being part of what Carl Bråkenhielm pictures as a new civil religion and a certain moral doxology in a post-religious Swedish society (2013). Moreover, as Martin Bennulf concludes, in a situation where the politics of environment are seen more and more within a left-right model, green parties risk losing their distinctiveness and may struggle to make themselves relevant (1994, 271). Environmentally concerned citizens can thus vote for a party of their political leaning rather than prioritizing green issues. This creates a paradox whereby green narratives are dominant, but environmentalists seeking efficacy must transcend environmentalism to author more persuasive and enduring narrative models. The Swedish case emerges less as a model to follow, but more as an instructive example of the irrational practice of environmentalisms.

This has resulted in a practiced environmentalism, one often without ideological or theoretical bases as noted in Anders Sandberg’s description of environment as a component of middle class lifestyle gentrification stripped of transformative potential (2014), and Jon Burchell’s and Mark Williams’ discussion of the evolution of Swedish Green politics in co-productive terms (1996), but also in light of how the environment has been rhetorically solved through processes of institutionalization in which the environment no longer presents an existential challenge (Lidskog and Erlander 2011).

Such appropriation of environment as value by politicians and its integration into their wider visions for electoral gain, particularly from more conservative groups who have historically not been seen as supporters of the environmental agenda, thus shows a normalization of practice. This can be contrasted with the reverse-narratives of the Swedish Green Party and their attempts to move beyond environment as a singular defining characteristic within the general frame of modernity. This also mirrors Jonas Anshelm’s analysis of environmental modernity as a moral constant in contemporary

Swedish political discourse and his assertion that “representatives of the environmental movement [in Sweden] began to argue that Sweden had favourable conditions and a moral responsibility to assume a leading role in global transition which would lead to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions” (2012, 38). This shows the interweaving of ideas of Swedish progress and leadership with discussions of global environmental challenge.

Authoring New Eco-Modernities

Swedish eco-modernity necessarily looks and feels different from articulations elsewhere, but it provides an insight into the potential for the rhetorical linkage of sustainability and social change outside of classically environmental epistemologies. As Eckersley notes, rather than transcending the nation state and abandoning its extant communities, green states would seek to transform “rather than to reject or circumvent them” (2004, 3). Sweden offers an incomplete but potentially fruitful exemplification of this.

Such a perspective necessarily entails an understanding of the narrative preconditions in individual states, and even communities of discourse within states, a developing of complementary but pluralistic narratives of eco-modernity. If the achievement of a truly sustainable society and a corresponding set of moral values and practices is the aim, in terms of the efficacy of action it is preferable “instead of looking for an eternal, universal and absolutely valid principle, we should instead depart from a particular standpoint and successively strive towards a more developed and generally applicable standpoint” (Wiklund 2006, 395). For this very reason, environmental communication and its associated moral arguments must look necessarily different in their different conceptual contexts and be brought about in different ways. Through the establishment of practice, a series of normative yet diverse parallel modernities might then be constructed.

In many cases this means that the general concepts and values required to engineer new discourses and practices of sustainability already exist, with the validity of concepts such as freedom, security, social solidarity, and cosmopolitanism providing a basis for such evolution. The challenge, then, is for would-be environmentalists to consider some of the orthodoxies of their own moral framework and critically assess the context in which they find themselves as they try to construct a new green modernity. This is a space in which outcomes “are constructed around problems with different coalitions of public and private actors. Those networks are governed by local narratives and rules instead of universal meta-languages and rules. We have to acknowledge that “any consensus on the rules defining a game and the ‘moves’ playable within it must be local, in other words agreed on by its present players and subject to eventual cancellation” (Leroy and Van Tatenhove 2000, 192).

Such a view of modernity as situated in narrative contexts is thus reminiscent of MacIntyre's analysis of morality in modern life, requiring a response to MacIntyre's maxim that asking what should be done requires first answering the question: of what story or stories do we find ourselves part (1987, 218)? This communicative approach also demands an increased understanding of the authors of eco-modernistic narratives, not least because the engineering of such narratives is dependent on the changing nature of public communication within late medial modernity.

To return to Lidskog's and Erlander's definition of Sweden's promising preconditions for moving towards a sustainable society, it is thus also possible to talk of its promising narrative preconditions for doing so. In international comparison, Sweden provides an example of the articulation of a green modern, illustrating the manifestation of green values systems in contemporary life worlds, but also of how instrumental discussion of social progress can be articulated in sustainable terms to birth new forms of material praxis. Such an appreciation of both modernity and its ethical landscape as narrative process thus opens up the potential for discussions of a sustainable future that critically embrace modernity as a framework of understanding without merely accepting its consequences.

Notes

¹ All Swedish text quoted has been translated by the author.

²James Herrick (2001) states that *doxa* are a means of generating situationally useful truths dependent on context. Rosengren meanwhile asserts that rational *episteme* "is nothing more than an illusion, created within a *doxa* that did not want to make do with the nature of doxological change. *Episteme* has therefore never been and can never be more original, genuine or real than the *doxa* from which it has arisen" (2011, 98). This casts *doxa* as an anti-rational approach to argumentation, arguing that all knowledges are situated in the present. This means that an emphasis is instead placed on practice and largely abandons ideas of universal standards.

³ The referendum had three options for maintaining, scaling down, or abolishing nuclear energy. The eventual winner was the middle way of planning no new reactors, but the result was non-binding.

⁴ Olof Palme's words in the original Swedish are as follows. The translation that appears in the body of the article is my own. "Viktigast av allt: Vi socialdemokrater vill fortsätta vårt samhällsbygge på många andra områden: barnomsorgen, vården av de äldre, kampen mot den sociala utslagningen, sextimmarsdag, förbättringar i den lågavlönades ställning och mycket mycket annat. Så mycket vet vi: skall vi under 80-talet reda upp de väldiga skulder till utlandet och underskott i statsbudgeten som de borgerliga dragit på oss och dessutom snabbavveckla kärnkraften blir det väldiga påfrestningar. Då kommer många drömmar att slockna i det svenska samhällsbyggandet."

⁵ The campaign advert in the original Swedish reads as follows. The translation that appears in the body of the article is my own. "En sådan industrisatsning kräver energi. Med linje 3 ökar industrins elanvändning snabbare under 80-talet än vad som var fallet under 70-talet. Det klarar vi med hjälp av kraftvärmeverk, vindkraftsverk och effektivare elanvändning. Vilket 80-tal får vi med linje 1 och linje 2? De vill satsa ytterligare minst 15 miljardar på att bygga två stora

kärnkraftverk. Forsmark 3 (reaktor nr 11) är knappast mer än påbörjad. Där Oskarshamn 3 (reaktor nr 12) planeras, finns idag bara en skogsdunge. Den fortsatta utbyggnaden av kärnkraften bromsar en övergång till alternativa energikällor och förhindrar därmed uppkomsten av nya och livskraftiga industrier.”

⁶ Åsa Romson’s words in the original Swedish are as follows. The translation that appears in the body of the article is my own. “Städer runt om i världen agerar utifrån det uppenbara – det fungerar inte att bygga motorvägar för att få bort trängsel. Fler motorvägar leder till att fler tar bilen, vilket leder till ännu mer köer. De dagliga köerna på Södra länken är ett tydligt exempel på detta. För varje ny motorväg som byggs skapas behovet av ytterligare en motorväg. Idén att massbilismens problem kan lösas med ytterligare en motorväg är i stort sett dödförklarad. Men här i Stockholm domineras debatten om Förbifarten fortfarande av naiva föreställningar och decennielång politisk prestige.”

⁷ Eriksson’s and Smith’s words in the original Swedish are as follows. The translation that appears in the body of the article is my own. “Vid teknikskiften är det alltid svårt att i förväg bevisa en investerings lönsamhet. Stockholms tunnelbana hade inte kunnat räknas hem med dagens kalkylmetoder för infrastruktur. Det fanns tveksamhet till utbyggnad av bredband och somliga yttrade att internet förmodligen var en övergående fluga. Vi är övertygade om att modern spårtrafik äravgörande för kommande res och transportmöjligheter.”

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