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## A RESPECTFUL VIEW OF NATURE

Everyone wants to speed up growth. Very few take into consideration the fact that this will not work in the long term. It is simple logic that exponential growth cannot continue indefinitely. With a modest 2.1 % annual growth in GDP, which was the Danish average for a period of several years, production and consumption would multiply eight-fold over the period of a century (and already be 1.5 times what it is now in 20 years time – in 500 years, 32.574 times)!

That is precisely why growth must be made sustainable, some may say. But this comes with a price tag. Globally, we are using 1/3 more of the planet than is sustainable. If this is to be reduced with a continued growth of 2.1%, then the environmental burden of production and consumption in 100 years must only be 8% of what it would otherwise be (in 20 years 44% and in 500 years 0.002%)! Sustainability must – viewed in the perspective of a century – be disconnected from the notion of continued macroeconomic exponential growth. My suggestion is: Let's talk about the transition to sustainable development instead! This, in contrast, cannot be given too much attention or go too quickly.

But are we ready? Ready to adapt? Not at all. One very important thing prevents this: The view of nature that created our modern development! It reads: Nature is here for the sake of mankind, and we are allowed to use it in whatever way we can get away with. It is our property. And it is all about getting it under our control. This underlies pretty much everything that societies and individuals undertake, even though very few people are conscious of it. It is accepted wisdom. Even fewer can see that this is actually brutal. Just one example: Species extermination is currently happening between 100 to 1000 times as quickly as “natural species extinction”!

Prior to industrialization, the man-nature relationship was hugely in nature's favor, and man's brutality had only limited, local adverse effects. But this has changed suddenly. We have become so powerful that we can disrupt the basic elements – the biosphere, the climate and species diversity. This is something that we have only just realized and we have not yet drawn any conclusions from it – including the need to adjust our view of nature.

Yes, but is sustainable development not precisely this kind of adjustment? No, not according to the way that sustainability has been defined up until now. Certainly, it does imply a consideration for what nature can bear, but only because humans will suffer otherwise. The motive is species-selfish. It is a bit like the wise slave-owner. He does not whip the slave because it will make him unable to work for two days, but he still regards him as his property. With regard to nature, we are still only thinking in terms of mastery when we discuss sustainability. We must establish a respect for nature for its own sake within the concept of sustainability.

Why? Because this pure self-interest, this pure species-selfishness, is not motivation enough to adapt sufficiently. Otherwise we would have done this a long time ago because we are, after all, busy digging our own graves. But egotism and self-interest can only encourage conquest and the exercise of power. And somewhere deep inside each of us we know that if there is nothing more to life than that, then it is empty, so why bother?

More is needed – feelings. Feelings have their own particular objectivity. Only feelings, not reason, are able to grasp the preciousness and irreplaceability of the species. They possess a uniqueness of their own. Or the rain forests! Or the biosphere around “the blue planet”, unique amongst billions. “An almighty series of tangible miracles is the world, a fountain of joy” – according to Danish poet Johannes V. Jensen. Aesthetic perception contains it. Our religious tradition used the term “the work of creation”.

The conquest of nature must be balanced by a sense of the vulnerable and fragile – of the shameful irreversible destruction, which our little handful of arrogant generations has inflicted on life forms that have taken billions of years to develop.

Only feelings will motivate gentleness, compassion, shame in life – respect. We must rediscover a respectful view of nature, in our way of life and in ethics, and we must invent an economy which includes this kind of respect. Otherwise the battle will be lost in 100 years.