

Absolute zapovednost' as an ethical model

Riccardo Guarino

University of Palermo, Dept. STEBICEF, E-mail: guarinotro@hotmail.com

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Abstract: *There is a substantial difference between protected areas and wildlife sanctuaries. The former are a rational answer to the current decline of biodiversity and, as such, they are widely accepted in our society; the latter respond to an ethical need, which is not very common so far. This is the reason why administrators and public opinion are reluctant to accept the non-usability of areas that, to be preserved, require maintenance, patrolling and monitoring costs. The challenge of increasing the consensus around wildlife sanctuaries goes far beyond the establishment of protected areas. It lies in making desirable a sober lifestyle, with general awareness of the environmental consequences of all our actions. It lies in making people realise how perverse it is to hoard without limits; how illusory it is to claim pre-emption over what, in reality, belongs to everyone; how vain it is to spend time just to satisfy needless needs, believing that this is the right way to escape from a status that looks like "poverty" to our blinded eyes.*

Keywords: conservation; ethic; protected area; sanctuary

Foreword

I have read with pleasure the forum article on the concept of "absolute zapovednost'" (Boreiko et al. 2013), so I would like to share some additional thoughts on the substantial difference between protected areas and wildlife sanctuaries.

The 3P syndrome

The ever increasing importance given to nature conservation in recent decades has led to the foundation of protected areas around the globe at an unprecedented pace. In most cases, what is under protection is not primordial nature, of which very few traces remain, but the still surviving elements of a traditional cultural landscape, rich in patches of natural habitats, of which the establishment of protected areas endeavours to salvage the most significant relicts.

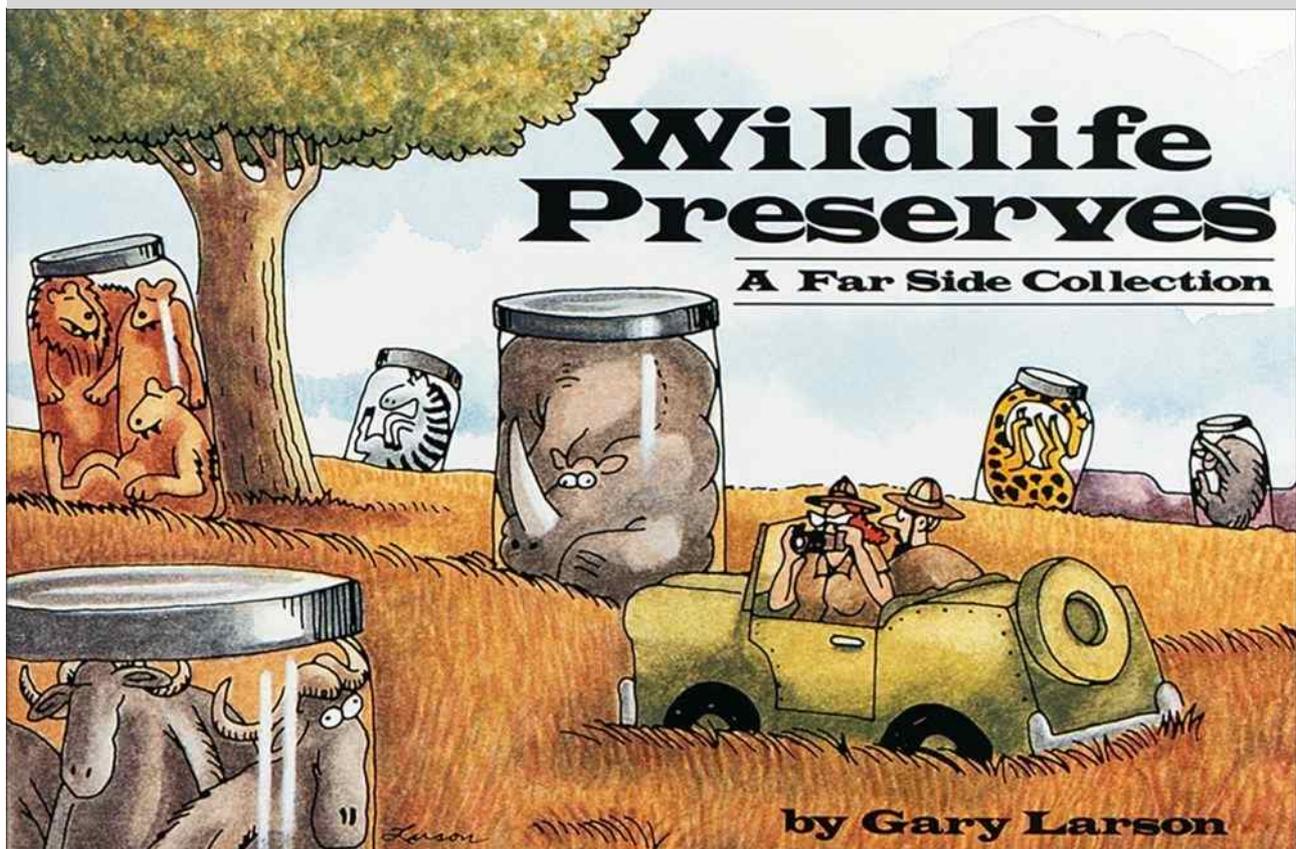
Modern environmental policies consider natural areas as a resource to be managed through measures and initiatives aimed not only at preserving biodiversity, but also to meet the demands of local people, in order to ensure the best compromise between ecosystem integrity and socio-economic development (Petermann & Ssymank 2007). The new managerial paradigm, including that of the European network "Natura 2000", is therefore remarkably anthropocentric, being the result of priorities set up by a variety of stakeholders. People denote this new managerial paradigm as "sustainable", i.e. respectful of the natural dynamic processes ensuring the homeostasis of ecosystems and the perpetuation of biodiversity.

Unable to cope with the many environmental problems caused by post-industrial civilization, we tend to idealize a "pre-industrial", "traditional" way of living as the precursor of the much-coveted "sustainable development". From this standpoint, the ever-increasing number of protected areas is a symptom of our inability to veer towards post-modernity: it is an unconditional surrender to the aggressive logic prevailing in today's society, oriented by the profit at any cost and fuelled by

the consumer dream of territorial marketing, which accounts for the natural preserves in terms of benefits, commodity outputs and ecosystem services (Guarino & Pignatti 2011).

Beyond the inevitable specificities related to individual contexts, the many kinds of protected areas established in Europe suffer a common syndrome, produced by the interaction of three main etiologies. The first problem is the remarkable 'parcelization' of management rules and restrictions, often inconsistent and handled by different institutions. The second etiologic agent is that of the 'processes in place', resulting from the fast socio-economic and land-use changes in our societies. The third etiologic agent is that of the 'people involved', due to the disparity of views between the many stakeholders who propose, use and manage protected areas. As is often the case when you have to make an agreement, it is necessary to prioritize. A common risk in the management of protected areas is to invest money to protect and perpetuate that which we like most, sometimes in contrast with natural dynamics, such as shrub encroachment, which would tend to modify the abundance and frequency of some species, such as the wild orchids, most dear to man (Guarino et al. 2011).

Protection that is not mediated by a dispassionate and thorough knowledge of the ecosystem dynamics can be detrimental, because it can easily end up making mistakes or indulging in particular the will of those who look on nature protection primarily in an economic and productive capacity. In this way, protected areas, whether they are natural parks, historical centres or quaint villages, are pushed (unknowingly?) towards a "productive" function: the object to be protected becomes a valuable frame within which to develop employment and investment, tourism and property marketing. In this context, visitors become users/consumers: they usually reserve to the frame a rather superficial aesthetic/contemplative evaluation and they assess their experience mainly according to the quality of services offered by the administrators (Guarino et al. in press).



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The wildlife sanctuaries (“absolute zapovednost”) are an exception to this general trend and, as a wild context protected *erga omnes*, should be considered a positive example, although elitist and expensive, because they require intensive management (control of herbivores, biodiversity monitoring, etc.), which often clashes with the reluctance of administrators and public opinion to accept the non-usability of areas that, to retain their value, require costly maintenance and monitoring regimes (Sessions 1995).

A new concept of welfare

Beauty and harmony of nature, together with its efficiency, have inspired most speculative thinking and art forms that have marked human history. In the past, even human welfare was associated with a balanced and durable state of satisfaction, inspired by the ecological concept of alternative stable states. The *Αταραξία* of the Greeks, the *otium* of the Latins are expressions of a pleasure to be enjoyed noting wisely the satisfaction not of one’s own greed, but of one’s need.

Modern man has redefined the perception of welfare and simplified its semantic breadth: all parameters are set on the purchasing power of goods, products and services, that in many cases are necessary just because they are depicted as such by the new global socio-economic order. A paradigm for this change is the gradual shift from the theorization of a balanced welfare, inspired by the universal tendency of ecosystems to reach a steady state (Marsh 1864, Simberloff 1982), towards an incremental and bulimic welfare, no longer inspired by nature, but

fuelled by its devastation. In doing so, the speculative power of analytical thinking has been equally simplified and increasingly bound to the binary logic of cost/benefit analyses (Menegoni et al. 2011).

Cheap and pervasive information services broadcast this new concept of welfare, emphasizing in the popular imagination the gap between the “polluted” places of our everyday life and the “intact” places of protected areas. From this perspective, the wildlife sanctuary takes on a new meaning. It does not only matter for the rarity or the particular aspect of species and vegetation layers, but also for its value as an ethical model: a physical space where an efficient and optimal balance is established between the external factors (climate and soil) and the local communities (bacteria, plants, animals). This constitutes a living example of self-organized order, able to maintain and preserve in a steady state all the ecosystem functions which are needed also by the human species. The theorization of a balanced welfare, inspired by the universal tendency of ecosystems to reach a steady state, has to go along with the deflection from any economic greed.

About three centuries ago, natural philosophy and the natural sciences became separated and during the last century this gap inexorably divides ethics and science (Ellis 2002). Although affected by many problems, national parks and natural preserves are a rational answer to the current decline of biodiversity and as such they are widely accepted in our society. But the idea of “absolute zapovednost” is primarily an ethical need. It roots in many contribution to the ethical-philosophical debate,

within which, in addition to those mentioned by Boreiko et al. (2013), also Naess' principles of deep ecology and Schweitzer's reverence for life (*Erfurcht vor dem Leben*) are worthy of mention (Naess 1989; Schweitzer 1923).

The challenge of increasing the consensus around the "absolute *zapovednost*" goes far beyond the institution of protected areas: it lies in making desirable a sober lifestyle, aware of the environmental consequences of all our actions; it lies in making people able to see how gross it is to hoard without limits; how illusory it is to claim pre-emption over what, in reality, belongs to everyone; how vain it is to spend time just to satisfy needless needs, believing that this is the right way to escape from a status that looks like "poverty" to our blinded eyes.

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