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1 Revisiting the Challenge of Intentional Value Shift: Reply to Ives and Fischer

2

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5

6 Manfredo et al. (2017) had a dual purpose: to present a social-ecological systems  
7 approach to understanding social values and, given that approach, to describe the  
8 difficulty that would be faced in trying to change society's values in order to meet  
9 sustainability and conservation goals. Ives and Fischer generally agree with our systems  
10 approach. They insist, however, that efforts to change societal values are nonetheless  
11 important for achieving sustainability goals. We argue that intentional change in societal  
12 values is unrealistic.

13 To clarify, we agree that values are at the root of action. As Ives and Fischer point  
14 out, the "culture and values stemming from enlightenment, the industrial revolution, and  
15 the principles of capitalism" make it difficult to achieve sustainability in our modern  
16 global society. Indeed, beyond the realm of conservation, findings suggest that values  
17 play a critical role in determining the success of social, economic, and political  
18 development across countries (Harrison & Huntington 2000). If values could somehow  
19 be shifted, that shift might lay a foundation for effective biodiversity conservation and  
20 broader sustainability.

21           We also agree that Meadow’s concept of leverage is a useful research framework  
22 for examining ways to influence social-ecological systems and to understand socio-  
23 cultural change. Abson et al. (2016) propose six areas of possible deep leverage.  
24 However, recognizing the possibility of leverage does not demonstrate that change is  
25 achievable. Accordingly, we suggest that deep leverage routes, directed at behavior rather  
26 than values, would be more fruitful in achieving sustainable societies (e.g., rules of  
27 system, structure of information flows). There is an extensive literature on behavior  
28 change in the social sciences that could assist in driving such efforts (e.g., Osbaldiston &  
29 Schott 2012).

30           Finally, we agree that the social sciences can take the lead in helping humans  
31 adapt to the growing threats to sustainability and biodiversity conservation. Approaches  
32 such as developing a science of intentional behavioral and culture change may be an  
33 important step in that direction (Wilson et al. 2014; Wilson 2016). This approach would  
34 entail a multi-disciplinary social science effort guided by an evolutionary framework that  
35 recognizes the need for actions to match problems at different scales.

36           Although we agree with Ives and Fischer on many points, we reach different  
37 conclusions based on different views of the problem. Ives and Fisher’s disagreement with  
38 our conclusion appears to be rooted in the world’s desperate need for effective  
39 conservation and the belief that if we do not try to change values, we will not know if we  
40 can effect change or not. They express hope for a desired outcome but offer scant  
41 research no actual case studies or other guidance to support their hopes. Rather than  
42 hoping or speculating, we proposed that action to achieve social change should be guided

43 by the information science has to offer at this point. We formulated our conclusions  
44 based on a synthesis of current thinking and literature about values.

45 Our contrasting views pose important questions for conservationists such as, to  
46 what extent can humans influence the direction of culture? We take an evolutionary  
47 perspective. Although values affect intentions and expected behavior, they are backward  
48 looking, not forward looking. Value formation and adoption at the societal level occurs  
49 after changes in cultural practice and behavior. There are strong feedback loops between  
50 practice and values, but values do not arise and then spawn new behavior. Rather, new  
51 behaviors become advantageous and routine, giving rise to new values. The appearance  
52 of new values within a population is not the result of intentional deliberation and  
53 selection among societal members. Human agency may be in the process of becoming  
54 more important in the evolution of cultures, as Bandura (1989) argues. However, we  
55 agree with Wilson (2016:190), who asserts: “To a large extent, cultures work without  
56 anyone designing them or knowing how they work.”

57 Our inability to affect cultural shift as we wish is reflected in many examples  
58 throughout human history that involve forcing change upon groups of people. Such  
59 efforts have had unpredictable consequences and are fraught with human suffering. For  
60 example, missionary initiatives or military conquests often attempt to impose new norms  
61 and values upon the converted (or the vanquished) as in the case of the many  
62 unsuccessful attempts to acculturate native Americans (e.g., Tinker 1993). In other  
63 examples, political leaders such as Stalin (Hoffmann 2003) or the leaders of post-Mao  
64 China sought to change cultural thought and practice in order to accelerate modernization  
65 in their country. To illustrate, China implemented the “one child” (per couple) birth

66 policy to reduce population growth. Lauded for its pro-environmental outcomes, the  
67 primary rationale for this action was to increase the standard of living per capita GDP  
68 growth (Feng et al. 2013). Applying the Abson et al. (2016) framework, this serves as an  
69 example of deep leverage because it changed the rules of the system. In doing so, it  
70 sought to create a more modernized, economically well-off culture and shift values  
71 relating to family structure (Feng et al 2013). In this scenario, value shift was initiated by  
72 changing system rules through a policy that limited reproductive behavior. Although the  
73 policy succeeded in reducing fertility rate, it had another profound and unintended impact  
74 on family values, ultimately weakening the tradition of filial (values of respect and caring  
75 for elderly) as fewer children were present to care for elderly (Zhan & Montgomery  
76 2003; Feng et al. 2014). Likewise, this policy had the unintended effects of sex-selective  
77 abortion, population aging, and violation of basic human rights. Moreover, the fertility  
78 rate decline may have happened even without the one-child policy due to a demographic  
79 transition already under way (Feng et al. 2013). In many ways, we find truth in the quote  
80 that “All history is the history of unintended consequences” (Cohen 2013).

81 Ives and Fischer proclaim that value shift need not be dreamy or ideological. But  
82 we are clearly a long way from being able to achieve desirable value shifts or even to  
83 know if it is possible. In fact, one of the most challenging hurdles would be finding a  
84 starting point. Realistically, value differences are likely to be intractable and consensus  
85 difficult to achieve in a world as diverse as ours, with competing value hierarchies both  
86 within and across societies. Given current conditions, it seems unlikely that we will ever  
87 reach agreement regarding the values that should predominate in an ideal world. In the

88 future, as in the past, a significant task of conservation will be understanding, reconciling,  
89 and respecting diverse values relating to achieving sustainability and biological diversity.

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