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"A Beautiful Soaking Rain": Environmental Value and Water beyond Eurocentrism

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Description / Abstract

Current approaches to valuing nature within environmental and natural resource management are based on and limited by Eurocentric knowledge and experience of northern temperate nature. Methods based on separation and domination marginalise other ways of knowing nature and thinking about value. The aims of this paper are to unsettle current ways of thinking about water values; to decentre Eurocentric thinking about water management; and to present a different way of thinking about values associated with water, based on an empirical study of the Lake Eyre Basin in central Australia. The paper takes a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on multiple knowledges of Australian water, including indigenous, local settler, and scientific knowledge, and on lessons from Australian Aboriginal people and the academic discourse of Aboriginal Studies. In particular, it considers how a focus on variability—a concept emerging from the Australian landscape (rather than from northern temperate landscapes)—might foster different thinking about water and value. Variability takes as a starting point the diversity, change, and complexity of water and values, as opposed to separation and domination. This focus highlights two points currently marginalised in dominant practice of environmental valuation: that the variability of Australian water regimes is valued, and that values themselves are characterised by variability.

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