

PFAS and Happy at Work

It wasn't more than a couple of years ago that the broader public in this country first gained significant access to the issue surrounding PFAS, that is, the extensive range of "forever chemicals" that have been spread into the environment globally since the 1950s.

This came to light with the case of organic beef cattle near Korsør, which had been grazing on an area contaminated with PFAS. Subsequently, a series of information emerged, and this environmental problem was mentioned as potentially the biggest one in the evening show on DR1 on January 24, 2023.

Magnus Heunicke has plenty to keep him busy; he's not bored!

He allows Danish agriculture's increased pollution with PFAS:

<https://ing.dk/artikel/sproejter-ekstra-meget-med-pfas-pesticider-landbruget-kan-aabenbart-goere-hvad-som-helst>



PFAS is potentially the biggest environmental problem, said Heunicke on DR1 on January 24, 2023, before the evening show host complimented him on the persistence with which he has stepped into the lion's den¹! He and the government allow Danish agriculture to continue pumping out thousands of tons of PFAS every year. Hypocrisy knows no bounds when it comes to accommodating narrow economic interests at the expense of

¹ Screenshot from broadcast:

https://www.dr.dk/drtv/se/aftenshowet/-markus-grigo-voksede-op-med-voldelig-far_364501

public health, nature, and our descendants, or the fact that fertility is declining due to foreign chemicals in the environment. Heunicke is just happy with his job.

However, it's not news to everyone that these substances are a problem². Research has been conducted on it, and even more research is being done now than before, although there is also resistance to clarifying the extent and seriousness of the issue.

The issue has been pushed out of the media landscape since then. There can be many reasons for this. But one of them is probably that the problem seems unsolvable. And then there's the fact that the climate crisis is knocking at the door like never before on a global scale, along with the biodiversity crisis, pollution of aquatic environments (dead inner waters around Denmark and destroyed groundwater resources), etc.

The immediate toxicity of the highly persistent PFAS substances may not be as severe as that of many other types of toxins, but the cumulative long-term effects, in interaction with other substances, remain to be described because the issue is so vast and complicated, due to the substances' widespread use and because, like other environmental problems, it intersects with commercial interests that govern at the top of modern society.

How should one approach this? (Is it about self-understanding?)

The approach to the problems is always part of the problems themselves, meaning the way they are thematized is inherently part of the challenge. And indeed, the PFAS problem arrives on top of a culmination of a general trend pressing to be defined as something significant and central to social self-understanding.

² Grandjean, Professor of Environmental Medicine at the University of Southern Denmark, has been aware of the problem since 2008, and now to such an extent that Harvard no longer wants to associate its name with his research. <https://nyheder.tv2.dk/samfund/2023-01-26-pfas-ekspert-faerdig-efter-udtalelser>

Environmental issues reveal that the success criteria pursued in modern society—economically, politically, individually, and socially—tend to promote a development that verges on turning into its own contradiction: The modern society's conditions for life are being undermined by the very pursuit of success by that society! This is collectively and, for some issues, individually revealed by environmental problems.

Thus, the very concept of "success" at both the individual and societal levels reveals itself as paradoxical, self-contradictory, and it challenges social and individual self-understanding across modern society. This is because both the individual and society as a whole are integrated into the same economic circuit.

It is the very "progress" that is the problem. PFAS, climate, overpopulation, biodiversity, fertility issues, zoonoses, potential pandemics, and the lack of life-supporting conditions due to human "success" all revolve around the fact that "progress" reveals itself as its own contradiction. And it's the specific kind of progress that is pursued, thematized, and revered as progress itself that is problematic.

Therefore, it's a bomb under self-understanding, the growth-, production-, and utility-optimizing rationality that controls the power elite's declared meaning with everything and its opposite, and which is more or less unreflectively accepted as such at all levels of society.

When the Minister of Environment proclaims the PFAS crisis as the biggest environmental problem, for example, compared to the climate crisis, biodiversity crisis, and other environmental problems, it unfolds as an attempt to operationalize and control the approach to the area that precisely deals with society's self-negating development, namely the environmental problems.

And when he prefers not to talk about the problem anymore a year later, it's because it's not really possible to operationalize either the public attention around the problem or solve it!

The broadly articulated thematization of the issue, as it unfolds from the top down via state media and other "democracy-supported" [one-way mass communication media](#), is guided by intentions to:

- Operationalize knowledge about specific environmental problems,
- Gather the population's attention and behavior around the belief in progress,
- Remove attention from the major general problems by proclaiming the minor ones as the greatest while simultaneously making them less than dangerous!

Claiming one environmental problem is greater than others to create an image of an overall and generally obligatory rational and operationalized approach to the issue is like comparing the height of a thunderclap to the height of the Round Tower on Købmagergade in Copenhagen!

There are now a number of environmental problems that all seem equally serious, urgent, undermining in relation to the narrative of "progress"!

The PFAS issue was proclaimed the biggest environmental problem. Yet, as known from niche media like Gylle.dk, ing.dk, and Økonu.dk, the Environmental Protection Agency has systematically avoided addressing, for example, agriculture's use of pesticides as an explanation for its spread, even though it was found in January 2021 that PFAS was present in 86% of the surface water samples taken across the country.

Even the biggest problem has been made small! The Environmental Protection Agency also allows agriculture to continue pumping thousands of PFAS over farmland each year, actually more than before.

Clearly, there are both conscious and unconscious intentions aimed at preventing a more fundamental spread of understanding the challenge that the whole cacophony of environmental problems (cumulatively and in line with pure chaos theories or theories about more comprehensible

dynamically self-reinforcing or self-negating feedback mechanisms) poses to modern society!

It's about how the purposefulness - that characterizes economic, political, legal thinking in all professions and organizations, or the self-understanding socially and individually, simply put - is contested by itself, i.e., by the fact that human success as a species with a victorious lifestyle tends towards smashing its life conditions in its general and individual success as a representative of a species with a victorious lifestyle!

This strikes at the very social self-understanding, the question of the meaning of it all, all the "noble" purposes that we pursue daily by going to work and contributing to the GDP.

This is where it really becomes uncomfortable.

The overarching goal for progress, the GDP

The closest the modern society comes to expressing its subjective belief in an objective measure of progress is the sacred GDP! To save the image of this measure of progress, efforts are now being made to incorporate environmental problems into the figure.

For many years, it has probably been clear that the goal of national economic turnover was an extremely unrealistic quantitative indication of value, i.e., a quantitative measure of dubious worth. But because society needs something to believe in, this measure has been upheld! Without a goal for progress, [the growth- and utility-optimizing rational economic human collapses!](#) Without purpose and goals for progress, rational orientation becomes impossible! When one does not know the utility of one's actions, one has no idea what to grasp and do! That is untenable.

The Green Accounting

The overarching goal for progress has been adjusted with the green accounting. But does it hold, is the goal for progress saved?



To create a more convincing depiction of progress, it has now been decided to include the cost of economic turnover on nature and the environment. According to the green accounting, we just need to deduct a meager 10% from the sacred GDP, so we still have a figure that signifies the meaning of it all!

By asking people how much they would pay for a bit of birdsong and a beautiful view, it has been determined that the object of faith, i.e., the GDP, should have about 10% deducted from what is otherwise arrived at using traditional calculation methods. The new green GDP is thus 250 billion less than its predecessor,

which stands for the traditionally pitch-black and environmentally hostile version of the GDP³.

Environmental economists believe they have saved the GDP as a measure of progress in this way. The price falls as something that can be managed and operationalized rationally. It fosters unity and direction, just as when one thunderclap after another turns out to be much taller than the Leaning Tower of Pisa, that is, progress as its own greatest problem.

The PFAS issue exemplifies a reality entirely different from that of economists, and it has merely emerged as the culmination of a very general trend, i.e., all that economists don't understand at all.

The environmental minister apparently wants to give it top priority on a list of environmental challenges humanity has created for itself as a consequence of the very development in question. But environmental issues interlock in ways that far from can be rationalized from isolated ministerial perspectives.

The designs by which the media articulate the prioritized list of environmental problems follow their own internal logic. The problems and the social challenge addressed by the environmental issues belong to a completely different world.

Small and large, humans and nature

The cacophony of environmental problems confronts the limitations of the narrow bandwidth of attention available to the public. It is true that there are limits to what we can cognitively handle! There are strict limits to how many problems society can address and process effectively.

It can also be operationalized. Some argue that it's important to take care of one's mental health and not to overload oneself and others with worries if these worries are a problem in themselves. Agricultural spokespersons argue that worrying

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<https://videnskab.dk/kultur-samfund/nyt-groent-bnp-giver-naturen-en-stemme-i-danmarks-oekonomi>

about the environmental problems and pesticide use in agriculture is more dangerous than the threat posed by the chemicals and environmental destruction to consumers! This fits again into the self-perception of liberal farmers, suggesting that what is good for one individual under market conditions is ultimately best for everyone else and for progress.

Knowledge and Science

Scientific knowledge is detail-oriented. This is especially true for the sciences that focus on so-called “hard facts.” The natural sciences aim at what can be measured and weighed. Methods and theories here define how science can qualify its measurements as expressions of reality, so they can be included in science’s scientifically accurate descriptions of reality. Such facts can be difficult to communicate in a universally valid and accessible manner!

The humanities or social sciences, on the other hand, especially deal with the way society describes itself and everything else. Like the natural sciences, these sciences can take a systematic approach, but since the object of description concerns self-understanding and understanding of what is outside oneself or outside society, such as nature, there are plenty of opportunities to conflict with the assumptions that make it possible to say anything, even though the initial aim was just to describe them!

The humanities deal with the way the Minister of the Environment and DR's employees thematize a problem, and this is something completely different from the hard facts of the natural sciences, for example, the results that the regions might come up with if they ever complete the work of making measurements and assessments of the 16,000 properties in Denmark that are preliminarily suspected to be contaminated with PFAS, in addition to, of course, everything else!

The Agricultural Tightrope

When one delves into the approach to the problem in Danish agriculture, i.e., its significance here and its self-understanding in relation to the PFAS problem, something is revealed that can be extrapolated to society as a whole.

It's about special interests, as they relate to economy, social position, and identity.

Specifically, we know that PFAS has been and continues to be added to agricultural soil through pesticides and sludge from the country's treatment plants. However, it is also interesting to note that much more could have been known if there had been a willingness! And that it is not economically advantageous for farmers to have too much general knowledge!

The Grand Account

The Environmental Protection Agency, public service media, ministries, and business interests are united in preventing restrictions on the economic special interests' self-expression, no matter how dysfunctionally it unfolds. They will do everything in their power to prevent the spread of doubt about the belief in GDP as an expression of DEVELOPMENT! (The grand account is still left to the employees of the national church)

But the many details are clamorous. The overarching narrative is cracking.

PFAS collides with the issue surrounding male sperm quality, the fact that it has halved globally over the last 50 years, and that human general reproductive capacity may become critical already after the next decade. This has gigantic consequences!

The Minister of Environment is not bored, for there are plenty of predictable problems to address. One should not think too

much about it. Because that's not good for development, GDP, exports of pork, labor supply, the economy of chemical producers, SVM, armament, etc. Instead, Denmark rejoices with the Minister of Environment over the courage he has when he steps onto the battleground of criticism.