



8 September 2025

**To:** University of Pardubice, Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, Studentská 95,  
532 10 Pardubice, Czech Republic  
**From:** Olli Lagerspetz, Senior Lecturer, Åbo Akademi University, Philosophy,  
Fabriksgatan 2, 20500 Åbo, Finland  
**Re:** Referee's statement: David Rozen, doctoral dissertation

Dear Colleagues,

David Rozen has submitted the doctoral dissertation manuscript, *Clarifying Nature Protection: The Role of Attitudes toward Nature in Shaping its Forms*.

Honoured with the task of external examiner, I extend my thanks to the Faculty and propose the following.

The manuscript is definitely fit for defence for a PhD degree. My preliminary impression (pending the *Viva Voce* examination) is that the dissertation is of high quality and that it has the potential of making a difference to the topic internationally. I would recommend that the author should work it into a book and publish it internationally.

The author's philosophical thesis is that the present discourse on nature protection is stuck in locked positions, the reason lying in fundamental confusion and ambiguity about the concept of nature. There is no agreement about (a) *what* should be protected, (b) *against* what and (c) for the *purpose* of what (i.e., what is the ideal state of affairs that needs to be achieved, either through protection or through restoration).

It might seem natural now to call for the parties to agree on one definition of 'nature' to make continued discussion possible. However, the author's claim is that an agreed-upon definition would not fix things. This is because the disagreements are not accidental or superficial. At issue is the underlying web of fundamental, conflicting and ambiguous attitudes, which needs spelling out. These are not just attitudes towards 'nature' (whatever that is) but to life. In the final Chapter 5, the author considers some recent debate, which seems to indicate the possibility of a more adequate attitude (the world as 'homes').

The dissertation consists of three parts and five chapters. (Personally, I found the use of two competing numbering systems – parts vs. chapters – confusing.)

Chapters 1 and 2 describe the two currently dominant paradigms of nature protection: nature as non-human and nature as natural capital. The paradigm example of ‘nature as non-human’ would be wilderness, completely untouched by human hand. In practice, *completely* ‘untouched’ milieus are rare, if they exist at all. Hence, in practice, the ambition has been to arrest an already changing milieu at its present stage of development or to restore it to an earlier stage. The preservationist must choose a certain point in time as the supposed turning point, after which the presence of humans turned pernicious. The preservationist’s choice will depend on contingent factors like the availability of historical information about earlier flora and fauna, and aesthetic considerations, such as the presence of an iconic species (lions, bears, etc.). Alleged objective criteria for ‘sound’ natural states are arbitrary and, sometimes, mutually inconsistent (e.g., diversity may be opposed to stability). What is more serious, the creation of hermetically enclosed natural preserves may be impossible in the time of climate change. Even worse, the creation of natural parks and preserves is, in any case, not a solution to large-scale environmental problems.

The idea of nature as capital (or resources) is typically expressed in the idea of sustainability or *sustainable growth*. However, also the criteria of what is sustainable are ambiguous and arbitrary. For instance, lithium mining is essential for manufacturing electric cars, thus contributing to the transformation from the combustion engine towards renewable energy. It represents sustainable growth *given* that the underlying way of life, based on the widespread use of motorcars, is itself accepted as sustainable. That is of course quite questionable.

The author’s conclusion is not that these various environmental efforts are meaningless or confused *per se*, but he maintains that the ideas that inspire them do not add up to a coherent conception of *what* is to be protected, from whom or what, and for the sake of what. The debate on nature protection is stuck, not merely because of a semantic disagreement about the word ‘nature’, but because different conceptions of nature represent different underlying attitudes.

Chapter 3 connects the issue with Wittgenstein’s concept of attitude.<sup>1</sup> Attitude, as Wittgenstein conceived of it, has an internal relation to its object. As in

---

<sup>1</sup> For no good reason as far as I can see, the author does not follow the standard referencing practice of citing Wittgenstein with just paragraph numbers where possible.

Wittgenstein's famous example: if my attitude towards human behaviour is an attitude towards the<sup>2</sup> soul, then an explication of my attitude is, at the same time, an explication of what 'soul' means in this connection. 'Attitude', in this connection, is a broader conception than 'opinion', because it implies a complete orientation (*'Einstellung'*) of my perception and interest. For instance, I see their facial movements as expressions of moods and of thinking, not in terms of physiological processes in the face muscles. This is a form of my life or of my way of life.

The Candidate includes a short overview of the use of Wittgenstein's concept of attitude in Wittgensteinian ethics.<sup>3</sup> Different 'attitudes towards nature' are incommensurable, because the objects of the attitude are different. What is at stake is orientation in life or way of life.

Chapters 4 and 5 propose to characterise the attitudes or ways of life that are at issue when various forms of nature protection are promoted. Chapter 5, specifically, sketches a way forward with the idea of 'the world as homes' – homes, that is, for me, other humans and other living beings.

As far as I can judge, the Candidate has a good grasp of the specific debate he is analysing (on nature protection), and certainly of the surrounding philosophical issues. He retains his focus on the essentials and does not stray off the topic, which is an important virtue in a dissertation (as in philosophical writing generally). The language is very good and the writing style is engaging.

In reading the manuscript, I have found a number of questions that I hope will be addressed at the oral examination.

- *Forms of Life*. The author proposes a translation of Wittgenstein's *Lebensformen* into "ways of life" (not the usual "forms of life"). As a linguistic choice, this may be counterproductive, because 'forms of life' is now already an established term in the relevant literature. But it also risks assimilating *Lebensformen* with the quotidian concept of ways of life. For instance (see p. 137), the widespread use of motor cars is surely a way of life, but it is a form of life in the Wittgensteinian sense? For instance, is it something comparable with such basic human attitudes as the attitude towards the soul (thus, our tendency to approach human behaviour as

---

<sup>2</sup> "Eine Einstellung zur Seele",

<sup>3</sup> He omits Lars Hertzberg's important essay "On the Attitude of Trust", *Inquiry*, 1988, reprinted in Hertzberg, *The Limits of Experience*, 113–130, Helsinki: *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, Vol. 156, 1994.

soulful rather than physiologically determined)? The latter could be an example of a form of life in the Wittgensteinian sense (see p. 67).

Wittgenstein also described the human natural tendency to look for the causes of events as a form of life. Such a tendency is, at the same time, more universal and, in a different way, more situation-specific than the use of motor cars. – Where does our relation with the natural environment stand within this continuum of cases (see p. 163–164)?

- *Reactions and responses.* My attitude towards the soul is connected with certain “basal reactions”<sup>4</sup> towards a person. For instance, I recognise that she is in pain and I react with pity (pp. 77–78). On the other hand, this seems to be a case of rather ‘loose fit’, because I will not invariably react with pity to pain. Moreover, in many cases, my responses do not manifest themselves in any kind of activity. For example: I *recognise* that someone is laughing on the street outside. This would be an example of an attitude towards the soul, because it means that I understand laughter as the expression of someone’s mood or state of mind. My understanding can be called a response, in a very minimal sense, but perhaps not a reaction. The question is then: What is the implication of the fact that, apparently, the response cannot be described apart from the ‘thing’ to which it is a response? Can we then plausibly say that our concepts are ‘based on’ reactions (as the response also seems, conversely, to be ‘based on’ the concept)? I.e., is there a problem about the fact that we apparently cannot describe the ‘reactions’ independently of the ‘attitudes’ (or beliefs?) that are supposedly *based on* them?
- *Perception.* We perceive phenomena “under particular descriptions” (p. 88, see also p. 101). If that is true, what is the Candidate’s response to the suggestion that ‘perceiving under a description’ presupposes language? In that case, will that place the perception of adult human beings in a completely different category from perception by animals and infants? Furthermore, how would we verify the claim that perception is always under some particular description? – Does this entail that language *blocks us* from perceiving ‘pure facts’ (see p. 101)?
- *Abortion.* The author highlights the concept of attitude through a discussion of the debate on abortion (pp. 102 ff, 121). Characteristically, the debate between ‘pro-life’ and ‘pro-choice’ advocates is polarised and

---

<sup>4</sup> In literature, the usual word is “*primitive* reactions”.

fruitless.<sup>5</sup> What is at issue is not simply one policy question (abortion law) but different views on life. The author characterises the difference as follows. ‘Pro-life’ and ‘pro-choice’ do not see the same fact and respond to it with opposed attitudes. Rather, their respective attitudes are towards two different things – the attitude towards a baby and towards an embryo, respectively (102). Where the one group sees the killing of a (future) baby the other group sees the removal of an embryo. “[I]t would deform the complexity of the issue to say that both sides simply differently evaluate the same objective fact. Which fact would it be?” (p. 103)

My objection is the following. While it always, by definition, involves simplification to say that something is ‘simply’ this or that, surely it *is* plausible to say that there is one objective fact that both sides in this debate agree on. That is: unless the abortion is performed, the pregnant woman will (in most cases) have a child. Indeed, if it *were not* so, there would hardly be many abortions, and surely there would not be huge social movements for and against legal abortion. The next question is: *why* may it be a problem for a woman to have a child? Why is it a problem for others if she does not? In the majority of cases, the reasons are ethical and social. These are, in various ways, connected with ideas of responsibility, related to the fact that a new-born is unable to fend for itself. – Thus, quite disagreeing with the Candidate, I would argue that the disagreement between ‘pro-life’ and ‘pro-choice’ advocates *presupposes* that both camps see the embryo as a potential future child. The conclusion is that the abortion debate is in some ways more analogous to the debate on nature protection than the Candidate recognises. An underlying issue also in the abortion debate is the human vs. nature relationship in a very general sense.

- *Attitudes as an analytical tool.* As I already pointed out, a central idea in the dissertation is that different views on nature protection issue from different attitudes at large, whereby their advocates perceive differently the ‘object’ to be protected. The Candidate has presented examples of the two first attitudes (nature as non-human and nature as resources). I would ask him in concrete terms what it is like to perceive nature as ‘homes’ –

---

<sup>5</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre has presented the incommensurability view in an early and influential description included in his book *After Virtue*. The Candidate should consider perusing it.

what will be the things to protect and not to protect?<sup>6</sup> How will it connect with other aspects of one's life?<sup>7</sup>

- *World-view*. There seems to be a difference between attitudes that are more or less instinctive ('attitude towards the soul') and attitudes that seem to allow for conscious adjustment. Somewhere in-between, perhaps there are the things called world-views. My impression is that the Candidate pays insufficient attention to differences between these cases. Some work by Peter Winch might be useful here.<sup>8</sup> In a different way, regarding world-views, Spengler's *Decline of the West* might be interesting to look at, not least because of its influence on Wittgenstein.<sup>9</sup>

These are the main themes I would like to address at the *Viva Voce* examination. Depending on the course that the discussion takes, there may be other, minor questions to take up.

To conclude, this dissertation manuscript is very interesting, and I look forward to the oral examination.

I remain yours sincerely, Åbo, 8 September 2025,

Olli Lagerspetz

olagersp@abo.fi

---

<sup>6</sup> The Candidate has read Jakob Meløe, and he might make more use of his essay in a possible further book version. The Candidate should also acquaint himself with the work of Tim Ingold.

<sup>7</sup> I have some interest in this also because the subtitle of the original Swedish version of my book *A Philosophy of Dirt* was "A book about the world, our home".

<sup>8</sup> See P. Winch, "Ceasing to Exist", in *Trying to Make Sense* (1987); "Asking too many Questions" (1995) – concerning practices and physical world-views; *Simone Weil: The Just Balance* (1989) – concerning attitudes, seeing and 'reading'.

<sup>9</sup> See especially Spengler's utilisation of the Goethean idea of prototype as the guiding principle of a cultural life form.